

Jane Eyre

CHAPTER XXXVII Chinese

THE manor-house of Ferndean was a building of considerable antiquity, moderate size, and no architectural pretensions, deep buried in a wood. I had heard of it before. Mr. Rochester often spoke of it, and sometimes went there. His father had purchased the estate for the sake of the game covers. He would have let the house, but could find no tenant, in consequence of its ineligible and insalubrious site. Ferndean then remained uninhabited and unfurnished, with the exception of some two or three rooms fitted up for the accommodation of the squire when he went there in the season to shoot.

To this house I came just ere dark on an evening marked by the characteristics of sad sky, cold gale, and continued small penetrating rain. The last mile I performed on foot, having dismissed the chaise and driver with the double remuneration I had promised. Even when within a very short distance of the manor-house, you could see nothing of it, so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy wood about it. Iron gates between granite pillars showed me where to enter, and passing through them, I found myself at once in the twilight of close-ranked trees. There was a grass-grown track descending the forest aisle between hoar and knotty shafts and under branched arches.

I followed it, expecting soon to reach the dwelling; but it stretched on and on, it wound far and farther: no sign of habitation or grounds was visible.

I thought I had taken a wrong direction and lost my way. The darkness of natural as well as of sylvan dusk gathered over me. I looked round in search of another road. There was none: all was interwoven stem, columnar trunk, dense summer foliage- no opening anywhere.

I proceeded: at last my way opened, the trees thinned a little; presently I beheld a railing, then the house- scarce, by this dim light, distinguishable from the trees, so dank and green were its decaying walls. Entering a portal, fastened only by a latch, I stood amidst a space of enclosed ground, from which the wood swept away in a semicircle. There were no flowers, no garden-beds; only a broad gravel-walk girdling a grass-plat, and this set in the heavy frame of the forest. The house presented two pointed gables in its front; the windows were latticed and narrow: the front door was narrow too, one step led up to it. The whole looked, as the host of the Rochester Arms had said, 'quite a desolate spot.' It was as still as a church on a week-day: the pattering rain on the forest leaves was the only sound audible in its vicinage.

'Can there be life here?' I asked.

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Yes, life of some kind there was; for I heard a movement- that narrow front-door was unclosing, and some shape was about to issue from the grange.

It opened slowly: a figure came out into the twilight and stood on the step; a man without a hat: he stretched forth his hand as if to feel whether it rained. Dusk as it was, I had recognised him- it was my master, Edward Fairfax Rochester, and no other.

I stayed my step, almost my breath, and stood to watch him- to examine him, myself unseen, and alas! to him invisible. It was a sudden meeting, and one in which rapture was kept well in check by pain. I had no difficulty in restraining my voice from exclamation, my step from hasty advance.

His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour as ever: his port was still erect, his hair was still raven black; nor were his features altered or sunk: not in one year's space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled or his vigorous prime blighted.

But in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding- that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson.

And, reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity?- if you do, you little know me. A soft hope blent with my sorrow that soon I should dare to drop a kiss on that brow of rock, and on those lips so sternly sealed beneath it: but not yet. I would not accost him yet.

He descended the one step, and advanced slowly and gropingly towards the grass-plot. Where was his daring stride now? Then he paused, as if he knew not which way to turn. He lifted his hand and opened his eyelids; gazed blank, and with a straining effort, on the sky, and toward the amphitheatre of trees: one saw that all to him was void darkness. He stretched his right hand (the left arm, the mutilated one, he kept hidden in his bosom); he seemed to wish by touch to gain an idea of what lay around him: he met but vacancy still; for the trees were some yards off where he stood. He relinquished the endeavour, folded his arms, and stood quiet and mute in the rain, now falling fast on his uncovered head. At this moment John approached him from some quarter.

'Will you take my arm, sir?' he said; 'there is a heavy shower coming on: had you not better go in?'

'Let me alone,' was the answer.

John withdrew without having observed me. Mr. Rochester now tried to walk about: vainly,- all was too uncertain. He groped his way back to the house, and, re-entering it, closed the door.

I now drew near and knocked: John's wife opened for me. 'Mary,' I said, 'how are you?'

She started as if she had seen a ghost: I calmed her. To her hurried 'Is it really you, miss, come at this late hour to this lonely place?' I answered by taking her hand; and then I followed her into the kitchen, where John now sat by a good fire. I explained to them, in a few words, that I had heard

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all which had happened since I left Thornfield, and that I was come to see Mr. Rochester. I asked John to go down to the turnpike-house, where I had dismissed the chaise, and bring my trunk, which I had left there: and then, while I removed my bonnet and shawl, I questioned Mary as to whether I could be accommodated at the Manor House for the night; and finding that arrangements to that effect, though difficult, would not be impossible, I informed her I should stay. just at this moment the parlour-bell rang.

'When you go in,' said I, 'tell your master that a person wishes to speak to him, but do not give my name.'

'I don't think he will see you,' she answered; 'he refuses everybody.'

When she returned, I inquired what he had said.

'You are to send in your name and your business,' she replied.

She then proceeded to fill a glass with water, and place it on a tray, together with candles.

'Is that what he rang for?' I asked.

'Yes: he always has candles brought in at dark, though he is blind.'

'Give the tray to me; I will carry it in.'

I took it from her hand: she pointed me out the parlour door. The tray shook as I held it; the water spilt from the glass; my heart struck my ribs loud and fast. Mary opened the door for me, and shut it behind me.

This parlour looked gloomy: a neglected handful of fire burnt low in the grate; and, leaning over it, with his head supported against the high, old-fashioned mantelpiece, appeared the blind tenant of the room. His old dog, Pilot, lay on one side, removed out of the way, and coiled up as if afraid of being inadvertently trodden upon.

Pilot pricked up his ears when I came in: then he jumped up with a yelp and a whine, and bounded towards me: he almost knocked the tray from my hands. I set it on the table; then patted him, and said softly, 'Lie down!' Mr. Rochester turned mechanically to see what the commotion was: but as he saw nothing, he returned and sighed.

'Give me the water, Mary,' he said.

I approached him with the now only half-filled glass; Pilot followed me, still excited.

'What is the matter?' he inquired.

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'Down, Pilot!' I again said. He checked the water on its way to his lips, and seemed to listen: he drank, and put the glass down. 'This is you, Mary, is it not?'

'Mary is in the kitchen,' I answered.

He put out his hand with a quick gesture, but not seeing where I stood, he did not touch me. 'Who is this? Who is this?' he demanded, trying, as it seemed, to see with those sightless eyes- unavailing and distressing attempt! 'Answer me- speak again!' he ordered, imperiously and aloud.

'Will you have a little more water, sir? I spilt half of what was in the glass,' I said.

'Who is it? What is it? Who speaks?'

'Pilot knows me, and John and Mary know I am here. I came only this evening,' I answered.

'Great God!- what delusion has come over me? What sweet madness has seized me?'

'No delusion- no madness: your mind, sir, is too strong for delusion, your health too sound for frenzy.'

'And where is the speaker? Is it only a voice? Oh! I cannot see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever- whoever you are- be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!'

He groped; I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine.

'Her very fingers!' he cried; 'her small, slight fingers! If so there must be more of her.'

The muscular hand broke from my custody; my arm was seized, my shoulder- neck- waist- I was entwined and gathered to him.

'Is it Jane? What is it? This is her shape- this is her size-'

'And this her voice,' I added. 'She is all here: her heart, too.'

God bless you, sir! I am glad to be so near you again.'

'Jane Eyre!- Jane Eyre,' was all he said.

'My dear master,' I answered, 'I am Jane Eyre: I have found you out- I am come back to you.'

'In truth?- in the flesh? My living Jane?'

'You touch me, sir,- you hold me, and fast enough: I am not cold like a corpse, nor vacant like air, am I?'

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'My living darling! These are certainly her limbs, and these her features; but I cannot be so blest, after all my misery. It is a dream; such dreams as I have had at night when I have clasped her once more to my heart, as I do now; and kissed her, as thus- and felt that she loved me, and trusted that she would not leave me.'

'Which I never will, sir, from this day.'

'Never will, says the vision? But I always woke and found it an empty mockery; and I was desolate and abandoned- my life dark, lonely, hopeless- my soul athirst and forbidden to drink- my heart famished and never to be fed. Gentle, soft dream, nestling in my arms now, you will fly, too, as your sisters have all fled before you: but kiss me before you go- embrace me, Jane.'

'There, sir- and there!'

I pressed my lips to his once brilliant and now rayless eyes- I swept his hair from his brow, and kissed that too. He suddenly seemed to arouse himself: the conviction of the reality of all this seized him.

'It is you- is it, Jane? You are come back to me then?'

'I am.'

'And you do not lie dead in some ditch under some stream? And you are not a pining outcast amongst strangers?'

'No, sir! I am an independent woman now.'

'Independent! What do you mean, Jane?'

'My uncle in Madeira is dead, and he left me five thousand pounds.'

'Ah! this is practical- this is real!' he cried: 'I should never dream that. Besides, there is that peculiar voice of hers, so animating and piquant, as well as soft: it cheers my withered heart; it puts life into it.- What, Janet! Are you an independent woman? A rich woman?'

'Quite rich, sir. If you won't let me live with you, I can build a house of my own close up to your door, and you may come and sit in my parlour when you want company of an evening.'

'But as you are rich, Jane, you have now, no doubt, friends who will look after you, and not suffer you to devote yourself to a blind lameter like me?'

'I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress.'

'And you will stay with me?'

'Certainly- unless you object. I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion- to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.'

He replied not: he seemed serious- abstracted; he sighed; he half-opened his lips as if to speak: he closed them again. I felt a little embarrassed. Perhaps I had too rashly overleaped conventionalities; and he, like St. John, saw impropriety in my inconsiderateness. I had indeed made my proposal from the idea that he wished and would ask me to be his wife: an expectation, not the less certain because unexpressed, had buoyed me up, that he would claim me at once as his own. But no hint to that effect escaping him and his countenance becoming more overcast, I suddenly remembered that I might have been all wrong, and was perhaps playing the fool unwittingly; and I began gently to withdraw myself from his arms- but he eagerly snatched me closer.

'No- no- Jane; you must not go. No- I have touched you, heard you, felt the comfort of your presence- the sweetness of your consolation: I cannot give up these joys. I have little left in myself- I must have you. The world may laugh- may call me absurd, selfish- but it does not signify. My very soul demands you: it will be satisfied, or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame.'

'Well, sir, I will stay with you: I have said so.'

'Yes- but you understand one thing by staying with me; and I understand another. You, perhaps, could make up your mind to be about my hand and chair- to wait on me as a kind little nurse (for you have an affectionate heart and a generous spirit, which prompt you to make sacrifices for those you pity), and that ought to suffice for me no doubt. I suppose I should now entertain none but fatherly feelings for you: do you think so? Come- tell me.'

'I will think what you like, sir: I am content to be only your nurse, if you think it better.'

'But you cannot always be my nurse, Janet: you are young- you must marry one day.'

'I don't care about being married.'

'You should care, Janet: if I were what I once was, I would try to make you care- but- a sightless block!'

He relapsed again into gloom. I, on the contrary, became more cheerful, and took fresh courage: these last words gave me an insight as to where the difficulty lay; and as it was no difficulty with me, I felt quite relieved from my previous embarrassment. I resumed a livelier vein of conversation.

'It is time some one undertook to rehumanise you,' said I, parting his thick and long uncut locks; 'for I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion, or something of that sort. You have a "faux air" of

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Nebuchadnezzar in the fields about you, that is certain: your hair reminds me of eagles' feathers; whether your nails are grown like birds' claws or not, I have not yet noticed.'

'On this arm, I have neither hand nor nails,' he said, drawing the mutilated limb from his breast, and showing it to me. 'It is a mere stump- a ghastly sight! Don't you think so, Jane?'

'It is a pity to see it; and a pity to see your eyes- and the scar of fire on your forehead: and the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this; and making too much of you.'

'I thought you would be revolted, Jane, when you saw my arm, and my cicatrised visage.'

'Did you? Don't tell me so- lest I should say something disparaging to your judgment. Now, let me leave you an instant, to make a better fire, and have the hearth swept up. Can you tell when there is a good fire?'

'Yes; with the right eye I see a glow- a ruddy haze.'

'And you see the candles?'

'Very dimly- each is a luminous cloud.'

'Can you see me?'

'No, my fairy: but I am only too thankful to hear and feel you.'

'When do you take supper?'

'I never take supper.'

'But you shall have some to-night. I am hungry: so are you, I daresay, only you forget.'

Summoning Mary, I soon had the room in more cheerful order: I prepared him, likewise, a comfortable repast. My spirits were excited, and with pleasure and ease I talked to him during supper, and for a long time after. There was no harassing restraint, no repressing of glee and vivacity with him; for with him I was at perfect ease, because I knew I suited him; all I said or did seemed either to console or revive him. Delightful consciousness! It brought to life and light my whole nature: in his presence I thoroughly lived; and he lived in mine. Blind as he was, smiles played over his face, joy dawned on his forehead: his lineaments softened and warmed.

After supper, he began to ask me many questions, of where I had been, what I had been doing, how I had found him out; but I gave him only very partial replies: it was too late to enter into particulars that night. Besides, I wished to touch no deep-thrilling chord- to open no fresh well of emotion in his heart: my sole present aim was to cheer him. Cheered, as I have said, he was: and yet but by fits. If a moment's silence broke the conversation, he would turn restless, touch me, then say, 'Jane.'

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'You are altogether a human being, Janet? You are certain of that?'

'I conscientiously believe so, Mr. Rochester.'

'Yet how, on this dark and doleful evening, could you so suddenly rise on my lone hearth? I stretched my hand to take a glass of water from a hireling, and it was given me by you: I asked a question, expecting John's wife to answer me, and your voice spoke at my ear.'

'Because I had come in, in Mary's stead, with the tray.'

'And there is enchantment in the very hour I am now spending with you. Who can tell what a dark, dreary, hopeless life I have dragged on for months past? Doing nothing, expecting nothing; merging night in day; feeling but the sensation of cold when I let the fire go out, of hunger when I forgot to eat: and then a ceaseless sorrow, and, at times, a very delirium of desire to behold my Jane again. Yes: for her restoration I longed, far more than for that of my lost sight. How can it be that Jane is with me, and says she loves me? Will she not depart as suddenly as she came? To-morrow, I fear I shall find her no more.'

A commonplace, practical reply, out of the train of his own disturbed ideas, was, I was sure, the best and most reassuring for him in this frame of mind. I passed my finger over his eyebrows, and remarked that they were scorched, and that I would apply something which would make them grow as broad and black as ever.

'Where is the use of doing me good in any way, beneficent spirit, when, at some fatal moment, you will again desert me- passing like a shadow, whither and how to me unknown, and for me remaining afterwards undiscoverable?'

'Have you a pocket-comb about you, sir?'

'What for, Jane?'

'Just to comb out this shaggy black mane. I find you rather alarming, when I examine you close at hand: you talk of my being a fairy, but I am sure, you are more like a brownie.'

'Am I hideous, Jane?'

'Very, sir: you always were, you know.'

'Humph! The wickedness has not been taken out of you, wherever you have sojourned.'

'Yet I have been with good people; far better than you: a hundred times better people; possessed of ideas and views you never entertained in your life: quite more refined and exalted.'

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'Who the deuce have you been with?'

'If you twist in that way you will make me pull the hair out of your head; and then I think you will cease to entertain doubts of my substantiality.'

'Who have you been with, Jane?'

'You shall not get it out of me to-night, sir; you must wait till to-morrow; to leave my tale half told, will, you know, be a sort of security that I shall appear at your breakfast table to finish it.'

By the bye, I must mind not to rise on your hearth with only a glass of water then: I must bring an egg at the least, to say nothing of fried ham.'

'You mocking changeling- fairy-born and human-bred! You make me feel as I have not felt these twelve months. If Saul could have had you for his David, the evil spirit would have been exorcised without the aid of the harp.'

'There, sir, you are redd up and made decent. Now I'll leave you: I have been travelling these last three days, and I believe I am tired. Good night.'

'Just one word, Jane: were there only ladies in the house where you have been?'

I laughed and made my escape, still laughing as I ran upstairs.

'A good idea!' I thought with glee. 'I see I have the means of fretting him out of his melancholy for some time to come.'

Very early the next morning I heard him up and astir, wandering from one room to another. As soon as Mary came down I heard the question: 'Is Miss Eyre here?' Then: 'Which room did you put her into?'

Was it dry? Is she up? Go and ask if she wants anything; and when she will come down.'

I came down as soon as I thought there was a prospect of breakfast.

Entering the room very softly, I had a view of him before he discovered my presence. It was mournful, indeed, to witness the subjugation of that vigorous spirit to a corporeal infirmity. He sat in his chair- still, but not at rest: expectant evidently; the lines of now habitual sadness marking his strong features. His countenance reminded one of a lamp quenched, waiting to be re-lit- and alas! it was not himself that could now kindle the lustre of animated expression: he was dependent on another for that office! I had meant to be gay and careless, but the powerlessness of the strong man touched my heart to the quick: still I accosted him with what vivacity I could.

'It is a bright, sunny morning, sir,' I said. 'The rain is over and gone, and there is a tender shining

after it: you shall have a walk soon.'

I had wakened the glow: his features beamed.

'Oh, you are indeed there, my skylark! Come to me. You are not gone: not vanished? I heard one of your kind an hour ago, singing high over the wood: but its song had no music for me, any more than the rising sun had rays. All the melody on earth is concentrated in my Jane's tongue to my ear (I am glad it is not naturally a silent one): all the sunshine I can feel is in her presence.'

The water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence; just as if a royal eagle, chained to a perch, should be forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor. But I would not be lachrymose: I dashed off the salt drops, and busied myself with preparing breakfast.

Most of the morning was spent in the open air. I led him out of the wet and wild wood into some cheerful fields: I described to him how brilliantly green they were; how the flowers and hedges looked refreshed; how sparkingly blue was the sky. I sought a seat for him in a hidden and lovely spot, a dry stump of a tree; nor did I refuse to let him, when seated, place me on his knee. Why should I, when both he and I were happier near than apart? Pilot lay beside us: all was quiet. He broke out suddenly while clasping me in his arms-

'Cruel, cruel deserter! Oh, Jane, what did I feel when I discovered you had fled from Thornfield, and when I could nowhere find you; and, after examining your apartment, ascertained that you had taken no money, nor anything which could serve as an equivalent! A pearl necklace I had given you lay untouched in its little casket; your trunks were left corded and locked as they had been prepared for the bridal tour. What could my darling do, I asked, left destitute and penniless? And what did she do? Let me hear now.'

Thus urged, I began the narrative of my experience for the last year. I softened considerably what related to the three days of wandering and starvation, because to have told him all would have been to inflict unnecessary pain: the little I did say lacerated his faithful heart deeper than I wished.

I should not have left him thus, he said, without any means of making my way: I should have told him my intention. I should have confided in him: he would never have forced me to be his mistress.

Violent as he had seemed in his despair, he, in truth, loved me far too well and too tenderly to constitute himself my tyrant: he would have given me half his fortune, without demanding so much as a kiss in return, rather than I should have flung myself friendless on the wide world. I had endured, he was certain, more than I had confessed to him.

'Well, whatever my sufferings had been, they were very short,' I answered: and then I proceeded to tell him how I had been received at Moor House; how I had obtained the office of schoolmistress, etc.

The accession of fortune, the discovery of my relations, followed in due order. Of course, St. John

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Rivers' name came in frequently in the progress of my tale. When I had done, that name was immediately taken up.

'This St. John, then, is your cousin?'

'Yes.'

'You have spoken of him often: do you like him?'

'He was a very good man, sir; I could not help liking him.'

'A good man. Does that mean a respectable well-conducted man of fifty? Or what does it mean?'

'St. John was only twenty-nine, sir.'

''Jeune encore," as the French say. Is he a person of low stature, phlegmatic, and plain? A person whose goodness consists rather in his guiltlessness of vice, than in his prowess in virtue?'

'He is untiringly active. Great and exalted deeds are what he lives to perform.'

'But his brain? That is probably rather soft? He means well: but you shrug your shoulders to hear him talk?'

'He talks little, sir: what he does say is ever to the point. His brain is first-rate, I should think not impressible, but vigorous.'

'Is he an able man, then?'

'Truly able.'

'A thoroughly educated man?'

'St. John is an accomplished and profound scholar.'

'His manners, I think, you said are not to your taste?- priggish and parsonic?'

'I never mentioned his manners; but, unless I had a very bad taste, they must suit it; they are polished, calm, and gentlemanlike.'

'His appearance,- I forget what description you gave of his appearance;- a sort of raw curate, half strangled with his white neckcloth, and stilted up on his thick-soled high-lows, eh?'

'St. John dresses well. He is a handsome man: tall, fair, with blue eyes, and a Grecian profile.'

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(Aside.) 'Damn him!' - (To me.) 'Did you like him, Jane?'

'Yes, Mr. Rochester, I liked him: but you asked me that before.'

I perceived, of course, the drift of my interlocutor. Jealousy had got hold of him: she stung him; but the sting was salutary: it gave him respite from the gnawing fang of melancholy. I would not, therefore, immediately charm the snake.

'Perhaps you would rather not sit any longer on my knee, Miss Eyre?' was the next somewhat unexpected observation.

'Why not, Mr. Rochester?'

'The picture you have just drawn is suggestive of a rather too overwhelming contrast. Your words have delineated very prettily a graceful Apollo: he is present to your imagination, - tall, fair, blue-eyed, and with a Grecian profile. Your eyes dwell on a Vulcan, - a real blacksmith, brown, broad-shouldered: and blind and lame into the bargain.'

'I never thought of it, before; but you certainly are rather like Vulcan, sir.'

Well, you can leave me, ma'am: but before you go' (and he retained me by a firmer grasp than ever), 'you will be pleased just to answer me a question or two.' He paused.

'What questions, Mr. Rochester?'

Then followed this cross-examination.

'St. John made you schoolmistress of Morton before he knew you were his cousin?'

'Yes.'

'You would often see him? He would visit the school sometimes?'

'Daily.'

'He would approve of your plans, Jane? I know they would be clever, for you are a talented creature!'

'He approved of them- yes.'

'He would discover many things in you he could not have expected to find? Some of your accomplishments are not ordinary.'

'I don't know about that.'

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'You had a little cottage near the school, you say: did he ever come there to see you?'

'Now and then.'

'Of an evening?'

'Once or twice.'

A pause.

'How long did you reside with him and his sisters after the cousinship was discovered?'

'Five months.'

'Did Rivers spend much time with the ladies of his family?'

'Yes; the back parlour was both his study and ours: he sat near the window, and we by the table.'

'Did he study much?'

'A good deal.'

'What?'

'Hindustanee.'

'And what did you do meantime?'

'I learnt German, at first.'

'Did he teach you?'

'He did not understand German.'

'Did he teach you nothing?'

'A little Hindostanee.'

'Rivers taught you Hindostanee?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And his sisters also?'

'No.'

'Only you?'

'Only me.'

'Did you ask to learn?'

'No.'

'He wished to teach you?'

'Yes.'

A second pause.

'Why did he wish it? Of what use could Hindostanee be to you?'

'He intended me to go with him to India.'

'Ah! here I reach the root of the matter. He wanted you to marry him?'

'He asked me to marry him.'

'That is a fiction- an impudent invention to vex me.'

'I beg your pardon, it is the literal truth: he asked me more than once, and was as stiff about urging his point as ever you could be.'

'Miss Eyre, I repeat it, you can leave me. How often am I to say the same thing? Why do you remain pertinaciously perched on my knee, when I have given you notice to quit?'

'Because I am comfortable there.'

'No, Jane, you are not comfortable there, because your heart is not with me: it is with this cousin- this St. John. Oh, till this moment, I thought my little Jane was all mine! I had a belief she loved me even when she left me: that was an atom of sweet in much bitter. Long as we have been parted, hot tears as I have wept over our separation, I never thought that while I was mourning her, she was loving another! But it is useless grieving. Jane, leave me: go and marry Rivers.'

'Shake me off, then, sir,- push me away, for I'll not leave you of my own accord.'

'Jane, I ever like your tone of voice: it still renews hope, it sounds so truthful. When I hear it, it

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carries me back a year. I forget that you have formed a new tie. But I am not a fool-

'Where must I go, sir?'

'Your own way- with the husband you have chosen.'

'Who is that?'

'You know- this St. John Rivers.'

'He is not my husband, nor ever will be. He does not love me: I do not love him. He loves (as he can love, and that is not as you love) a beautiful young lady called Rosamond. He wanted to marry me only because he thought I should make a suitable missionary's wife, which she would not have done. He is good and great, but severe; and, for me, cold as an iceberg. He is not like you, sir: I am not happy at his side, nor near him, nor with him. He has no indulgence for me- no fondness. He sees nothing attractive in me; not even youth- only a few useful mental points- Then I must leave you, sir, to go to him?'

I shuddered involuntarily, and clung instinctively closer to my blind but beloved master. He smiled.

'What, Jane! Is this true? Is such really the state of matters between you and Rivers?'

'Absolutely, sir! Oh, you need not be jealous! I wanted to tease you a little to make you less sad: I thought anger would be better than grief. But if you wish me to love you, could you but see how much I do love you, you would be proud and content. All my heart is yours, sir: it belongs to you; and with you it would remain, were fate to exile the rest of me from your presence for ever.'

Again, as he kissed me, painful thoughts darkened his aspect.

'My seared vision! My crippled strength!' he murmured regretfully.

I caressed, in order to soothe him. I knew of what he was thinking, and wanted to speak for him, but dared not. As he turned aside his face a minute, I saw a tear slide from under the sealed eyelid, and trickle down the manly cheek. My heart swelled.

'I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard,' he remarked ere long. 'And what right would that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?'

'You are no ruin, sir- no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots, whether you ask them or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow; and as they grow they will lean towards you, and wind round you, because your strength offers them so safe a prop.'

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Again he smiled: I gave him comfort.

'You speak of friends, Jane?' he asked.

'Yes, of friends,' I answered rather hesitatingly: for I knew I meant more than friends, but could not tell what other word to employ.

He helped me.

'Ah! Jane. But I want a wife.'

'Do you, sir?'

'Yes: is it news to you?'

'Of course: you said nothing about it before.'

'Is it unwelcome news?'

'That depends on circumstances, sir- on your choice.'

'Which you shall make for me, Jane. I will abide by your decision.'

'Choose then, sir- her who loves you best.'

'I will at least choose- her I love best. Jane, will you marry me?'

'Yes, sir.'

'A poor blind man, whom you will have to lead about by the hand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'A crippled man, twenty years older than you, whom you will have to wait on?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Truly, Jane?'

'Most truly, sir.'

'Oh! my darling! God bless you and reward you!'

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'Mr. Rochester, if ever I did a good deed in my life- if ever I thought a good thought- if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer- if ever I wished a righteous wish,- I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth.'

'Because you delight in sacrifice.'

'Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food, expectation for content. To be privileged to put my arms round what I value- to press my lips to what I love- to repose on what I trust: is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice.'

'And to bear with my infirmities, Jane: to overlook my deficiencies.'

'Which are none, sir, to me. I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector.'

'Hitherto I have hated to be helped- to be led: henceforth, I feel I shall hate it no more. I did not like to put my hand into a hireling's, but it is pleasant to feel it circled by Jane's little fingers. I preferred utter loneliness to the constant attendance of servants; but Jane's soft ministry will be a perpetual joy. Jane suits me: do I suit her?'

'To the finest fibre of my nature, sir.'

'The case being so, we have nothing in the world to wait for: we must be married instantly.'

He looked and spoke with eagerness: his old impetuosity was rising.

'We must become one flesh without any delay, Jane: there is but the licence to get- then we marry.'

'Mr. Rochester, I have just discovered the sun is far declined from its meridian, and Pilot is actually gone home to his dinner. Let me look at your watch.'

'Fasten it into your girdle, Janet, and keep it henceforward: I have no use for it.'

'It is nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, sir. Don't you feel hungry?'

'The third day from this must be our wedding-day, Jane. Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip.'

'The sun has dried up all the rain-drops, sir. The breeze is still: it is quite hot.'

'Do you know, Jane, I have your little pearl necklace at this moment fastened round my bronze scrag under my cravat? I have worn it since the day I lost my only treasure, as a memento of her.'

'We will go home through the wood: that will be the shadiest way.'

He pursued his own thoughts without heeding me.

'Jane! you think me, I daresay, an irreligious dog: but my heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent God of this earth just now. He sees not as man sees, but far clearer: judges not as man judges, but far more wisely. I did wrong: I would have sullied my innocent flower-breathed guilt on its purity: the Omnipotent snatched it from me. I, in my stiff-necked rebellion, almost cursed the dispensation: instead of bending to the decree, I defied it. Divine justice pursued its course; disasters came thick on me: I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty; and one smote me which has humbled me for ever. You know I was proud of my strength: but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance, as a child does its weakness? Of late, Jane- only- only of late- I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconciliation to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere.

'Some days since: nay, I can number them- four; it was last Monday night, a singular mood came over me: one in which grief replaced frenzy- sorrow, sullenness. I had long had the impression that since I could nowhere find you, you must be dead. Late that night- perhaps it might be between eleven and twelve o'clock- ere I retired to my dreary rest, I supplicated God, that, if it seemed good to Him, I might soon be taken from this life, and admitted to that world to come, where there was still hope of rejoining Jane.

'I was in my own room, and sitting by the window, which was open: it soothed me to feel the balmy night-air; though I could see no stars, and only by a vague, luminous haze, knew the presence of a moon. I longed for thee, Janet! Oh, I longed for thee both with soul and flesh! I asked of God, at once in anguish and humility, if I had not been long enough desolate, afflicted, tormented; and might not soon taste bliss and peace once more. That I merited all I endured, I acknowledged- that I could scarcely endure more, I pleaded; and the alpha and omega of my heart's wishes broke involuntarily from my lips in the words- "Jane! Jane! Jane!"

'Did you speak these words aloud?'

'I did, Jane. If any listener had heard me, he would have thought me mad: I pronounced them with such frantic energy.'

'And it was last Monday night, somewhere near midnight?'

'Yes; but the time is of no consequence: what followed is the strange point. You will think me superstitious- some superstition I have in my blood, and always had: nevertheless, this is true- true at least it is that I heard what I now relate.

'As I exclaimed "Jane! Jane! Jane!" a voice- I cannot tell whence the voice came, but I know whose

voice it was- replied, "I am coming: wait for me;" and a moment after, went whispering on the wind the words- "Where are you?"

'I'll tell you, if I can, the idea, the picture these words opened to my mind: yet it is difficult to express what I want to express. Ferndean is buried, as you see, in a heavy wood, where sound falls dull, and dies unreverberating. "Where are you?" seemed spoken amongst mountains; for I heard a hill-sent echo repeat the words. Cooler and fresher at the moment the gale seemed to visit my brow: I could have deemed that in some wild, lone scene, I and Jane were meeting. In spirit, I believe we must have met. You no doubt were, at that hour, in unconscious sleep, Jane: perhaps your soul wandered from its cell to comfort mine; for those were your accents-as certain as I live- they were yours!'

Reader, it was on Monday night- near midnight- that I too had received the mysterious summons: those were the very words by which I replied to it. I listened to Mr. Rochester's narrative, but made no disclosure in return. The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed. If I told anything, my tale would be such as must necessarily make a profound impression on the mind of my hearer: and that mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart.

'You cannot now wonder,' continued my master, 'that when you rose upon me so unexpectedly last night, I had difficulty in believing you any other than a mere voice and vision, something that would melt to silence and annihilation, as the midnight whisper and mountain echo had melted before. Now, I thank God! I know it to be otherwise.

Yes, I thank God!'

He put me off his knee, rose, and reverently lifting his hat from his brow, and bending his sightless eyes to the earth, he stood in mute devotion. Only the last words of the worship were audible.

'I thank my Maker, that, in the midst of judgment, he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto!'

Then he stretched his hand out to be led. I took that dear hand, held it a moment to my lips, then let it pass round my shoulder: being so much lower of stature than he, I served both for his prop and guide. We entered the wood, and wended homeward.

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NextChapter

简爱

第三十七章

英文

芬丁庄园掩藏在林木之中，是一幢相当古老的大楼，面积中等，建筑朴实，我早有所闻。罗切斯特先生常常谈起它，有时还上那儿去。他的父亲为了狩猎购下了这份产业。他本想把它租出去，却因为地点不好，环境欠佳，而找不到租户。结果除了两三间房子装修了一下，供这位乡绅狩猎季节住宿用，整个庄园空关着，也没有布置。

天黑之前，我来到了这座花园。那是个阴霾满天，冷风呼呼，细雨霏霏的黄昏。我守信付了双倍的价钱，打发走了马车和马车夫，步行了最后一英里路。庄园周围的树林枝繁叶茂，郁郁葱葱，即使走得很近，也不见庄园的踪影。两根花岗石柱之间的铁门，才使我明白该从什么地方进去。进门之后，我便立即置身于密林的晦暗之中了。有一条杂草丛生的野径，沿着林荫小道而下，两旁是灰白多节的树干，顶上是枝桠交叉的拱门。我顺着这条路走去，以为很快就会到达住宅。谁知它不断往前延伸，逶迤盘桓，看不见住宅或庭园的痕迹。

我想自己搞错了方向，迷了路。夜色和密林的灰暗同时笼罩着我，我环顾左右，想另找出路。但没有找到，这里只有纵横交织的树枝、园柱形的树干和夏季浓密的树叶——没有哪儿有出口。

我继续往前走。这条路终于有了出口，树林也稀疏些了。我立刻看到了一排栏杆。随后是房子——在暗洞洞的光线中，依稀能把它与树木分开。颓败的墙壁阴湿碧绿。我进了一扇不过上了栓；你的身体十分强壮，不会发狂。”

“这位说话人在哪儿？难道只是个声音？呵！我看不见，不过我得摸一摸，不然我的心会停止跳动，我的脑袋要炸裂了。不管是什么——不管你是谁——要让我摸得着，不然我活不下去了！”

他摸了起来。我抓住了他那只摸来摸去的手，双手紧紧握住它。

“就是她的手指！”他叫道，“她纤细的手指！要是这样，一定还有其他部份。”

这只强壮的手从我握着的手里挣脱了。我的胳膊被抓住，还有—雇钝鸮芳脚按 蛻硇萁蜎

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囊笆藁蚰窠啾 谀张 纯喃 保 吃 呛芪O 盍摹R 恢涣 械挠 徊 铤岬 馗钊 𠄎 私鹈
乃 邾 瓷先 𠄎 残砭拖裾 饕皇 鞞牟 喻铄

读者呀，你们认为，他那么又瞎又凶，我会怕他吗？——要是你认为我怕，那你太不了解我了。伴随着哀痛，我心头浮起了温存的希望，那就是很快就要胆大包天，吻一吻他岩石般的额头和额头下冷峻地封闭的眼睑。但时机未到，我还不想招呼他呢。

他下了那一级台阶，一路摸索着慢慢地朝那块草地走去。他原先大步流星的样子如今哪儿去了？随后他停了下来，仿佛不知道该走哪条路。他抬起头来，张开了眼睑，吃力地、空空地凝视着天空和树荫。你看得出来，对他来说一切都是黑洞洞的虚空。他伸出了右手（截了肢的左臂藏在胸前），似乎想通过触摸知道周围的东西。但他碰到的依然是虚空，因为树木离他站着的地方有几码远。他歇手了，抱着胳膊，静默地站在雨中，这会儿下大了的雨打在他无遮无盖的头上。正在这时，约翰不知从哪里出来，走近了他。

“拉住我的胳膊好吗，先生？”他说，“一阵大雨就要下来了，进屋好吗？”

“别打搅我，”他回答。

约翰走开了，没有瞧见我。这时罗切斯特先生试着想走动走动，却徒劳无功——对周围的一切太没有把握了。他摸回自己的屋子，进去后关了门。

这会儿我走上前去，敲起门来。约翰的妻子开了门。“玛丽，”我说，“你好！”

她吓了一跳，仿佛见了一个鬼似的。我让她镇静了下来。她急忙问道：“当真是你吗，小姐，这么晚了还到这么偏僻的地方来？”我握着她的手回答了她。随后跟着她走进了厨房，这会儿约翰正坐在熊熊的炉火边。我三言二语向他们作了解释，告诉他们，我离开桑菲尔德后所发生的一切我都已经听说了。这回是来看望罗切斯特先生的。还请约翰到我打发了马车的大路上去一趟，把留在那儿的箱子去取回来。随后我一面脱去帽子和披肩，一面问玛丽能不能在庄园里过夜。后来我知道虽然不容易安排，但还能办到，便告诉她我打算留宿。正在这时客厅的门铃响了。

“你进去的时候，”我说，“告诉你主人，有人想同他谈谈。不过别提我的名字。”

“我想他不会见你，”她回答，“他谁都拒绝。”

她回来时，我问他说了什么。

“你得通报姓名，说明来意，”她回答。接着去倒了一杯水，拿了几根蜡烛，都放进托盘。

“他就为这个按铃？”我问。

“是的，虽然他眼睛看不见，但天黑后总是让人把蜡烛拿进去。”

“把托盘给我吧，我来拿进去。”

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我从她手里接过托盘，她向我指了指客厅门。我手中的盘子抖动了一下，水从杯子里溢了出来，我的心砰砰撞击着肋骨。玛丽替我开了门，并随手关上。

客厅显得很阴暗。一小堆乏人照看的火在炉中微微燃着。房间里的瞎眼主人，头靠高高的老式壁炉架，俯身向着火炉。他的那条老狗派洛特躺在一边，离得远远的，卷曲着身子，仿佛担心被人不经意踩着似的。我一进门，派洛特便竖起了耳朵，随后汪汪汪，呜呜呜叫了一通，跳将起来，窜向了我，差一点掀翻我手中的托盘。我把盘子放在桌上，拍了拍它，柔声地说：“躺下！”罗切斯特先生机械地转过身来，想看看那骚动是怎么回事，但他什么也没看见，于是便回过头去，叹了口气。

“把水给我，玛丽，”他说。

我端着现在只剩了半杯的水，走近他，派洛特跟着我，依然兴奋不已。

“怎么回事？”他问。

“躺下，派洛特！”我又说。他没有把水端到嘴边就停了下来，似乎在细听。他喝了水，放下杯子。

“是你吗，玛丽？是不是？”

“玛丽在厨房里，”我回答。

他伸出手，很快挥动了一下，可是看不见我站在那儿，没有碰到我。“谁呀？谁呀？”他问，似乎要用那双失明的眼睛来看——无效而痛苦的尝试！“回答我——再说一遍？”他专横地大声命令道。

“你再要喝一点吗，先生？杯子里的水让我泼掉了一半，”我说。

“谁？什么？谁在说话？”

“派洛特认得我，约翰和玛丽知道我在这里，我今天晚上才来，”我回答。

“天哪！——我是在痴心梦想吗？什么甜蜜的疯狂迷住了我？”

“不是痴心梦想——不是疯狂。先生，你的头脑非常健康，不会陷入痴心梦想；你的身体十分强壮，不会发狂。”

“这位说话人在哪儿？难道只是个声音？呵！我看不见，不过我得摸一摸，不然我的心会停止跳动，我的脑袋要炸裂了。不管是什么——不管你是谁——要让我摸得着，不然我活不下去了！”

他摸了起来。我抓住了他那只摸来摸去的手，双手紧紧握住它。

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“就是她的手指！”他叫道，“她纤细的手指！要是这样，一定还有其他部份。”

这只强壮的手从我握着的手里挣脱了。我的胳膊被抓住，还有我的肩膀——脖子——腰——我被搂住了，紧贴着他。

“是简吗？这是什么？她的体形——她的个子——”

“还有她的声音，”我补充说。“她整个儿在这里了，还有她的心。上帝祝福你，先生！我很高兴离你又那么近了。”

“简·爱！简·爱！”他光这么叫着。

“我亲爱的主人，”我回答，“我是简·爱。我找到了你——我回到你身边来了。”

“真的？是她本人？我鲜龙活跳的简·爱？”

“你碰着我，先生——你搂着我，搂得紧紧的。我并不是像尸体一样冷，像空气一般空，是不是？”

“我鲜龙活跳的宝贝！当然这些是她的四肢，那些是她的五官了。不过那番痛苦之后我可没有这福份了。这是一个梦。我夜里常常梦见我又象现在这样，再一次贴心按着她，吻她——觉得她爱我，相信她不会离开我。”

“从今天起，先生，我永远不会离开你了。”

“永远不会，这个影子是这么说的吗？可我一醒来，总发觉原来是白受嘲弄一场空。我凄凉孤独——我的生活黑暗、寂寞，无望——我的灵魂干渴，却不许喝水；我的心儿挨饿，却不给喂食，温存轻柔的梦呀，这会儿你偎依在我的怀里，但你也会飞走的，像早已逃之夭夭的姐妹们一样。可是，吻一下我再走吧——拥抱我一下吧，简。”

“那儿，先生——还有那儿呢！”

我把嘴唇紧贴着当初目光炯炯如今已黯然无光的眼睛上——我拨开了他额上的头发，也吻了一下。他似乎突然醒悟，顿时相信这一切都是事实了。

“是你——是简吗，那么你回到我这儿来啦？”

“是的。”

“你没有死在沟里，淹死在溪水底下吗？你没有憔悴不堪，流落在异乡人中间吗？”“没有，先生。我现在完全独立了。”

“独立！这话怎么讲，简？”

“我马德拉的叔叔去世了，留给了我五千英镑。”

“呵，这可是实在的——是真的！”他喊道：“我决不会做这样的梦。而且，还是她独特的嗓子，那么活泼、调皮，又那么温柔，复活了那颗枯竭的心，给了它生命。什么，简，你成了独立的女人了？有钱的女人了？”

“很有钱了，先生。要是你不让我同你一起生活，我可以紧靠你的门建造一幢房子，晚上你要人作伴的时候，你可以过来，坐在我的客厅里。”

“可是你有钱了，简，不用说，如今你有朋友会照顾你，不会容许你忠实于一个像我这样的瞎眼瘸子？”

“我同你说过我独立了，先生，而且很有钱、我自己可以作主。”

“那你愿意同我呆在一起？”

“当然——除非你反对。我愿当你的邻居，你的护士，你的管家。我发觉你很孤独，我愿陪伴你——读书给你听，同你一起散步，同你坐在一起，侍候你，成为你的眼睛和双手。别再那么郁郁寡欢了，我的亲爱的主人，只要我还活着，你就不会孤寂了。”

他没有回答，似乎很严肃——散神了。他叹了口气，半张开嘴，仿佛想说话，但又闭上了。我觉得有点儿窘。也许我提议陪伴他，帮助他是自作多情；也许我太轻率了、超越了习俗。而他像圣·约翰一样。从我的粗疏中看到了我说话不得体。其实，我的建议是从这样的思想出发的，就是他希望，也会求我做他的妻子。一种虽然并没有说出口，却十分肯定的期待支持着我，认为他会立刻要求我成为他的人。但是他并没有吐出这一类暗示、他的面部表情越来越阴沉了。我猛地想到，也许自己全搞错了，或许无意中充当了傻瓜。我开始轻轻地从他的怀抱中抽出身来——但是他焦急地把我抓得更紧了。

“不——不——简。你一定不能走。不——我已触摸到你，听你说活，感受到了你在场对我的安慰——你甜蜜的抚慰。我不能放弃这些快乐，因为我身上已所剩无多——我得拥有你。世人会笑话我——会说我荒唐，自私——但这无伤大雅。我的心灵企求你，希望得到满足，不然它会对躯体进行致命的报复。”

“好吧，先生，我愿意与你呆在一起、我已经这么说了。”

“不错——不过，你理解的同我呆在一起是一回事，我理解的是另一回事。也许你可以下决心呆在我身边和椅子旁——像一个好心的小护士那样侍候我（你有一颗热诚的心，慷慨大度的灵魂，让你能为那些你所怜悯的人作出牺牲），对我来说，无疑那应当已经够了。我想我现在只能对你怀着父亲般的感情了，你是这么想的吗？来——告诉我吧。”

“你愿意我怎么想就怎么想吧，先生。我愿意只做你的护士，如果你认为这样更好的话。”

“可你不能老是做我的护士，珍妮特。你还年轻——将来你得结婚。”

“我不在乎结婚不结婚。”

“你应当在乎，珍妮特。如果我还是过去那个样子的话，我会努力使你在乎——可是——一个失去视力的赘物！”

他又沉下脸来一声不吭了。相反，我倒是更高兴了，一下子来了勇气。最后几个字使我窥见了内中的难处，因为困难不在我这边，所以我完全摆脱了刚才的窘态，更加活跃地同他攀谈了起来。

“现在该是有人让你重新变成人的时候了，”我说着，扒开了他又粗又长没有理过的头发；“因为我知道你正蜕变成一头狮子，或是狮子一类的东西。你“fauxair”田野中的尼布甲尼撒。肯定是这样。你的头发使我想起了鹰的羽毛，不过你的手指甲是不是长得象鸟爪了，我可还没有注意到。”

“这只胳膊，既没有手也没有指甲，”他说着，从自己的胸前抽回截了肢的手，伸给我看。“只有那么一截了——看上去真可怕！你说是不是，简？”

“见了这真为你惋惜，见了你的眼睛也一样——还有额上火烫的伤疤。最糟糕的是，就因为这些，便有让人爱抚过份，照料过头把你惯坏的危险。”

“我想你看到我的胳膊和疤痕累累的面孔时会觉得厌恶的。”

“你这样想的吗？别同我说这话——不然我会对你的判断说出不恭的话来。好吧，让我走开一会儿，把火生得旺些，把壁炉清扫一下。火旺的时候，你能辨得出来吗？”

“能，右眼能看到红光——一阵红红的烟雾。”

“你看得见蜡烛光吗？”

“非常模糊——每根蜡烛只是一团发亮的雾。”

“你能看见我吗？”

“不行，我的天使。能够听见你，摸到你已经是够幸运了。”

“你什么时候吃晚饭？”

“我从来不吃晚饭。”

“不过今晚你得吃一点。我饿了，我想你也一样，不过是忘了罢了。”

我把玛丽叫了进来，让她很快把房间收拾得更加令人振奋，同时也为他准备了一顿舒心的晚宴。我的心情也激动起来，晚餐时及晚餐后同他愉快而自在地谈了很久。跟他在一起，不存在那种折磨人的自我克制，不需要把欢快活跃的情绪压下去。同他相处，我无拘无束，因为

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我知道自己与他很相称。我的一切言行似乎都抚慰着他，给他以新的生命。多么愉快的感觉呀！它唤醒了我全部天性，使它灼灼生辉。在他面前我才尽情地生活着，同样，在我面前，他才尽情地生活着。尽管他瞎了，他脸上还是浮起了笑容，额头映出了欢快，面部表情温柔而激动。

晚饭后他开始问我很多问题，我上哪儿去了呀，在干些什么呀，怎么找到他的呀。不过我回答得很简略，那夜已经太晚，无法细谈了。此外，我不想去拨动那剧烈震颤的心弦——不想在他的心田开掘情感的新泉。我眼下的唯一目的是使他高兴。而如我所说他已很高兴，但反复无常。要是说话间沉默了一会儿，他会坐立不安，碰碰我，随后说，“简。”

“你是十足的人吗，简？你肯定是这样的吗？”

“我诚恳地相信是这样。罗切斯特先生。”

“可是，在这样一个悲哀的黑夜，你怎么会突然出现在我冷落的炉边呢？我伸手从一个佣工那儿取一杯水，结果却是你端上来的。我问了个问题，期待着约翰的妻子回答我，我的耳边却响起了你的声音。”

“因为我替玛丽端着盘子进来了。”

“我现在与你一起度过的时刻，让人心驰神迷。谁能料到几个月来我挨过了黑暗、凄凉、无望的生活？什么也不干，什么也不盼，白天和黑夜不分。炉火熄了便感到冷；忘记吃饭便觉得饿。随后是无穷无尽的哀伤，有时就痴心妄想，希望再见见我的简。不错，我渴望再得到她，远胜过渴望恢复失去的视力。简跟我呆着，还说爱我，这怎么可能呢？她会不会突然地来，突然地走呢？我担心明天我再也看不到她了。”

在他这样的心境中，给他一个普普通通、实实在在的回答，同他烦乱的思绪毫无联系，是再好不过了，也最能让他放下心来。我用手指摸了摸他的眉毛，并说眉毛已被烧焦了，我可以敷上点什么，使它长得跟以往的一样粗、一样黑。

“随你怎么做好事对我有什么用处呢，慈善的精灵？反正在关键时刻，你又会抛弃我——像影子一般消失，上哪儿去而又怎么去，我一无所知，而且从此之后，我就再也找不到你了。”

“你身边有小梳子吗，先生？”

“干嘛，简？”

“把乱蓬蓬的黑色鬃毛梳理一下。我凑近你细细打量时，发现你有些可怕。你说我是个精灵，而我相信，你更像一个棕仙。”

“我可怕吗，简？”

“很可怕，先生。你知道，你向来如此。”

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“哼！不管你上哪儿呆过一阵子，你还是改不掉那淘气的样子。”

“可是我同很好的人呆过，比你好得多，要好一百倍。这些人的想法和见解，你平生从来没有过。他们比你更文雅，更高尚。”

“你究竟跟谁呆过？”

“要是你那么扭动的話，你会弄得我把你的头发拔下来，那样我想你再也不会怀疑我是实实在在的人了吧。”

“你跟谁呆过一阵子？”

“今天晚上别想从我嘴里把话掏出来了，先生。你得等到明天。你知道，我把故事只讲一半，会保证我出现在你的早餐桌旁把其余的讲完。）顺便说一句，我得留意别只端一杯水来到你火炉边，至少得端进一个蛋，不用讲油煎火腿了。”

“你这个爱嘲弄人的丑仙童——算你是仙女生，凡人养的！你让我尝到了一年来从未有过的滋味。要是扫罗能让你当他的大卫，那就不需要弹琴就能把恶魔赶走了。”

“瞧，先生，可把你收拾得整整齐齐，象象样样了。这会儿我得离开你了。最近三天我一直在旅途奔波，想来也够累的。晚安！”

“就说一句话，简，你前一阵子呆的地方光有女士吗？”

我大笑着抽身走掉了，跑上楼梯还笑个不停。“好主意！”我快活地想道。“我看以后的日子我有办法让他急得忘掉忧郁了。”

第二天一早，我听见他起来走动了，从一个房间摸到另一个房间。玛丽一下楼，我就听见他问：“爱小姐在这儿吗？”接着又问：“你把她安排在哪一间？里面干燥吗？她起来了吗？去问问是不是需要什么，什么时候下来？”

我一想到还有一顿早餐，便下楼去了。我轻手轻脚进了房间，他还没有发现我，我就已瞧见他。说实在目睹那么生龙活虎的人沦为一个恹恹的弱者，真让人心酸。他坐在椅子上——虽然一动不动，却并不安分，显然在企盼着。如今，习惯性的愁容，已镌刻在他富有特色的脸庞上。他的面容令人想起一盏熄灭了的灯，等待着再度点亮——唉！现在他自己已无力恢复生气勃勃、光彩照人的表情了，不得不依赖他人来完成。我本想显得高高兴兴、无忧无虑，但是这个强者那么无能为力的样子，使我心碎了。不过我还是尽可能轻松地跟他打了招呼：

“是个明亮晴朗的早晨呢，先生，”我说。“雨过天晴，你很快可以去走走了。”

我已唤醒了那道亮光，他顿时容光焕发了。

“呵，你真的还在，我的云雀！上我这儿来。你没有走，没有飞得无影无踪呀？一小时之前，

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我听见你的一个同类在高高的树林里歌唱，可是对我来说，它的歌声没有音乐，就像初升的太阳没有光芒。凡我能听到的世间美妙的音乐，都集中在简的舌头上，凡我能感开到的阳光，都全聚在她身上。”

听完他表示对别人的依赖，我不禁热泪盈眶。他仿佛是被链条锁在栖木上的一头巨鹰，竟不得不企求一只麻雀为它觅食。不过，我不喜欢哭哭啼啼，抹掉带咸味的眼泪，便忙着去准备早餐了。

大半个早上是在户外度过的。我领着他走出潮湿荒凉的林子，到了令人心旷神怡的田野。我向他描绘田野多么苍翠耀眼，花朵和树篱多么生气盎然，天空又多么湛蓝闪亮。我在一个隐蔽可爱的地方，替他找了个座位，那是一个干枯的树桩。坐定以后，我没有拒绝他把我放到他膝头上。既然他和我都觉得紧挨着比分开更愉快，那我又何必要拒绝呢？派洛特躺在我们旁边，四周一片寂静。他正把我紧紧地搂在怀里时突然嚷道：

“狠心呀，狠心的逃跑者！呵，简，我发现你出走桑菲尔德，而又到处找不着你，细看了你的房间，断定你没有带钱，或者当钱派用处的东西，我心里是多么难受呀！我送你的一根珍珠项链，原封不动地留在小盒子里。你的箱子捆好了上了锁，像原先准备结婚旅行时一样。我自问，我的宝贝成了穷光蛋，身边一个子儿也没有，她该怎么办呢？她干了些什么呀？现在讲给我听听吧。”

于是在他的敦促之下，我开始叙述去年的经历了。我大大淡化了三天的流浪和挨饿的情景，因为把什么都告诉他，只会增加他不必要的痛苦。但是我确实告诉他的一丁点儿，也撕碎了他那颗忠实的心，其严重程度超出了我的预料。

他说，我不应该两手空空地离开他，我应该把我的想法跟他说说。我应当同他推心置腹，他决不会强迫我做他的情妇。尽管他绝望时性情暴烈，但事实上，他爱我至深至亲，绝不会变成我的暴君。与其让我把自己举目无亲地抛向茫茫人世，他宁愿送我一半财产，而连吻一下作为回报的要求都不提。他确信，我所忍受的比我说给他听的要严重得多。

“嗯，我受的苦再多，时间都不长。”我回答。随后我告诉他如何被接纳进沼泽居；如何得到教师的职位，以及获得财产，发现亲戚等，按时间顺序，——叙述。当然随着故事的进展，圣.约翰.里弗斯的名字频频出现。我一讲完自己的经历，这个名字便立即提出来了。

“那么，这位圣.约翰是你的表兄了？”

“是的，”

“你常常提到他，你喜欢他吗？”

“他是个大好人，先生，我不能不喜欢他。”

“一个好人？那意思是不是一个体面而品行好的五十岁男人？不然那是什么意思？”

“圣.约翰只有二十九岁，先生。”

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“Jeune encore,” 就像法国人说的。“他是个矮小、冷淡、平庸的人吗？是不是那种长处在于没有过错，而不是德行出众的人？”

“他十分活跃，不知疲倦，他活着就是要成就伟大崇高的事业。”

“但他的头脑呢？大概比较软弱吧？他本意很好，但听他谈话你会耸肩。”

“他说话不多，先生。但一开口总是一语中的。我想他的头脑是一流的，不易打动，却十分活跃。”

“那么他很能干了？”

“确实很能干。”

“一个受过良好教育的人？”

“圣.约翰是一个造诣很深、学识渊博的学者。”

“他的风度，我想你说过，不合你的口味？”“——一正经，一付牧师腔调。”

“我从来没有提起过他的风度。但除非我的口味很差，不然是很合意的。他的风度优雅、沉着，一付绅士派头，”

“他的外表——我忘了你是怎么样描述他的外表的了——那种没有经验的副牧师，扎着白领巾，弄得气都透不过来；穿着厚底高帮靴，顶得像踏高跷似的，是吧？”

“圣.约翰衣冠楚楚，是个漂亮的男子，高个子，白皮肤，蓝眼睛，鼻梁笔挺。”

（旁白）“见他的鬼！——（转向我）“你喜欢他吗，简？”

“是的，罗切斯特先生，我喜欢他。不过你以前问过我了。”

当然，我觉察出了说话人的用意。妒嫉已经攫住了他，刺痛着他。这是有益于身心的，让他暂时免受忧郁的咬啮。因此我不想立刻降服嫉妒这条毒蛇。

“也许你不愿意在我膝头上坐下去了，爱小姐？”接着便是这有些出乎意料的话。

“为什么不愿意呢，罗切斯特先生，”

“你刚才所描绘的图画，暗视了一种过份强烈的对比。你的话已经巧妙地勾勒出了一个漂亮的阿波罗。他出现在你的想象之中，——‘高个子，白皮肤，蓝眼睛，笔挺的鼻梁。’而你眼下看到的是一个火神——一个道地的铁匠，褐色的皮肤，宽阔的肩膀，瞎了眼睛，又瘸了腿。”

“我以前可从来没有想到过这点，不过你确实象个火神，先生？”

“好吧——你可以离开我了，小姐。但你走之前（他把我搂得更紧了），请你回答我一两个问题，”他顿了一下。

“什么问题，罗切斯特先生？”

接踵而来的便是这番盘问：

“圣.约翰还不知道你是他表妹，就让你做莫尔顿学校的教师？”

“是的。”

“你常常见到他吗？他有时候来学校看看吗？”

“每天如此。”

“他赞同你的计划吗，简？——我知道这些计划很巧妙、因为你是一个有才干的家伙。”

“是的，——他赞同了。”

“他会在你身上发现很多预料不到的东西，是吗？你身上的某些才艺不同寻常。”

“这我不知道。”

“你说你的小屋靠近学校，他来看你过吗？”

“不时来。”

“晚上来吗？”

“来过一两次。”

他停顿了一下。

“你们彼此的表兄妹关系发现后，你同他和他妹妹们又住了多久？”

“五个月。”

“里弗斯同家里的女士们在一起的时候很多吗？”

“是的，后客厅既是他的书房，也是我们的书房。他坐在窗边，我们坐在桌旁。”

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“他书读得很多吗？”

“很多。”

“读什么？”

“印度斯坦语。”

“那时候你干什么呢？”

“起初学德语。”

“他教你吗？”

“他不懂德语。”

“他什么也没有教你吗？”

“教了一点儿印度斯坦语。”

“里弗斯教你印度斯坦语？”

“是的，先生。”

“也教他妹妹们吗？”

“没有。”

“光教你？”

“光教我。”

“是你要求他教的吗？”

“没有。”

“他希望教你？”

“是的。”

他又停顿了一下。

“他为什么希望教你？印度斯坦语对你会有什么用处？”

“他要我同他一起去印度。”

“呵！这下我触到要害了。他要你嫁给他吗？”

“他求我嫁给他。”

“那是虚构的——胡编乱造来气气我。”

“请你原谅，这是千真万确的事实。他不止一次地求过我！”

“罗切斯特先生，我刚发现，日色西斜，太阳早过了子午线。派洛特实际上已经回家去吃饭了，让我看看你的手表。”

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“我们穿过林子回家吧，这条路最荫凉。”

他顺着自己的思路去想，E? 剿 阙只氏搅艘荒曛 啊N彝 四憬嘤读诵碌墓叵怠 2 还也皇巧倒稀 貳伞 ! ?br>

“我得上哪儿去呢，先生。”

“随你自己便吧——上你看中的丈夫那儿去。”

“谁呀？”

“你知道——这个圣·约翰·里弗斯。”

“他不是我丈夫，也永远不会是，他不爱我，我也不爱他。他爱（他可以爱，跟你的爱不同）一个名叫罗莎蒙德的年轻漂亮小姐。他要娶我只是由于以为我配当一个传教士的妻子，其实我是不行的。他不错，也很了不起，但十分冷峻，对我来说同冰山一般冷。他跟你不一样，先生。在他身边，接近他，或者同他在一起，我都不会愉快。他没有迷恋我——没有溺爱我。在我身上，他看不到吸引人的地方，连青春都看不到——他所看到的只不过心里上的几个有用之处罢了。那么，先生，我得离开你上他那儿去了？”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

我不由自主地哆嗦了一下，本能地把我亲爱的瞎眼主人搂得更紧了。他微微一笑。

“什么，简！这是真的吗？这真是你与里弗斯之间的情况吗？”

“绝对如此，先生。呵，你不必嫉妒！我想逗你一下让你少伤心些。我认为愤怒比忧伤要好。不过要是你希望我爱你，你就只要瞧一瞧我确实多么爱你，你就会自豪和满足了。我的整个心儿是你的，先生，它属于你，即使命运让我身体的其余部份永远同你分离，我的心也会依然跟你在一起。”

他吻我的时候，痛苦的想法使他的脸又变得阴沉了。

“我烧毁了视力！我伤残了的体力！”他遗憾地咕哝着。

我抚摸着他给他以安慰。我知道他心里想些什么，并想替他说出来，但我不敢。他的脸转开的一刹那，我看到一滴眼泪从封闭着的眼睑滑下来，流到了富有男子气的脸颊上。我的心膨胀起来了。

“我并不比桑菲尔德果园那棵遭雷击的老栗子树好多少，”没有过多久他说。“那些残枝，有什么权利吩咐一棵爆出新芽的忍冬花以自己的鲜艳来掩盖它的腐朽呢？”

“你不是残枝，先生——不是遭雷击的树。你碧绿而茁壮。不管你求不求，花草会在你根子周围长出来，因为它们乐于躲在你慷慨的树荫下。长大了它们会偎依着你，缠绕着你，因为你的力量给了它们可靠的支撑。”

他再次笑了起来，我又给了他安慰。

“你说的是朋友吗，简？”他问。

“是的，是朋友，”我迟迟疑疑地面答。我知道我的意思超出了朋友，但无法判断要用什么字。他帮了我忙。

“呵？简。可是我需要一个妻子。”

“是吗，先生？”

“是的，对你来说是桩新闻吗？”

“当然，先前你对此什么也没说。”

“是一桩不受欢迎的新闻？”

“那就要看情况了，先生——要看你的选择。”

“你替我选择吧，简。我会遵从你的决定。”

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“先生，那就挑选最爱你的人。”

“我至少会选择我最爱的人，简。你肯嫁给我吗？”

“肯的，先生。”

“一个可怜的瞎子，你得牵着手领他走的人。”

“是的，先生。”

“一个比你大二十岁的瘸子，你得侍候他的人。”

“是的，先生。”

“当真，简？”

“完全当真，先生。”

“呵，我的宝贝？愿上帝祝福你，报答你！”

“罗切斯特先生，如果我平生做过一件好事——如果我有过一个好的想法——如果我做过一个真诚而没有过错的祷告——如果我曾有过一个正当的心愿——那么现在我得到了酬报。对我来说，做你的妻子是世上最愉快的事了。”

“因为你乐意作出牺牲。”

“牺牲！我牺牲了什么啦？牺牲饥饿而得到食品，牺牲期待而得到满足。享受特权搂抱我珍重的人——亲吻我热爱的人——寄希望于我信赖的人。那能叫牺牲吗？如果说这是牺牲，那当然乐于作出牺牲了。”

“还要忍受我的体弱，简，无视我的缺陷。”

“我毫不在乎，先生。现在我确实对你有所帮助了，所以比起当初你能自豪地独立自主，除了施主与保护人，把什么都不放在眼里时，要更爱你了。”

“我向来讨厌要人帮助——要人领着，但从今起我觉得我不再讨厌了。我不喜欢把手放在雇工的手里，但让简的小小的指头挽着，却很愉快。我不喜欢佣人不停地服侍我，而喜欢绝对孤独。但是简温柔体贴的照应却永远是一种享受。简适合我，而我适合她吗？”

“你与我的天性丝丝入扣。”

“既然如此，就根本没有什么好等的了，我们得马上结婚。”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

他的神态和说话都很急切，他焦躁的老脾气又发作了。

“我们必须毫不迟疑地化为一体了，简。只剩下把证书拿到手——随后我们就结婚——”

“罗切斯特先生，我刚发现，日色西斜，太阳早过了子午线。派洛特实际上已经回家去吃饭了，让我看看你的手表。”

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“我们穿过林子回家吧，这条路最荫凉。”

他顺着自己的思路去想，没有理会我。

“简！我想，你以为我是一条不敬神的狗吧，可是这会儿我对世间仁慈的上帝满怀感激之情。他看事物跟人不一样，要清楚得多；他判断事物跟人不一样，而要明智得多。我做错了，我会玷污清白的花朵——把罪孽带给无辜，要不是上帝把它从我这儿抢走的话。我倔强地对抗，险些儿咒骂这种处置方式，我不是俯首听命，而是全不放在眼里。神的审判照旧进行，大祸频频临头。我被迫走过死荫的幽谷，”他的惩罚十分严厉，其中一次惩罚是使我永远甘于谦卑。你知道我曾对自己的力量非常自傲，但如今它算得了什么呢？我不得不依靠他人的指引，就像孩子的孱弱一样。最近，简——只不过是最近——我在厄运中开始看到并承认上帝之手。我开始自责和忏悔，情愿听从造物主。有时我开始祈祷了，祷告很短，但很诚恳。

“已经有几天了，不，我能说出数字来——四天。那是上星期一晚上——我产生了一种奇怪的心情：忧伤，也就是悲哀和阴沉代替了狂乱。我早就想，既然到处找不着你，那你一定已经死了。那天深夜——也许在十一、二点之间——我闷闷不乐地去就寝之前，祈求上帝，要是他觉得这么做妥当的话，可以立刻把我从现世收去，准许我踏进未来的世界，那儿仍有希望与简相聚。”

“我在自己的房间，坐在敞开着窗的窗边，清香的夜风沁人心脾。尽管我看不见星星，只是凭着一团模糊发亮的雾气，才知道有月亮。我盼着你，珍妮特！呵，无论是肉体还是灵魂，我都盼着你。我既痛苦而又谦卑地问上帝，我那么凄凉、痛苦、备受折磨，是不是已经够久了，会不会很快就再能尝到幸福与平静。我承认我所忍受的一切是应该的——我恳求，我实在不堪忍受了。我内心的全部愿望不由自主地崩出了我的嘴巴，化作这样几个字——

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“筒！筒！筒！”

“你大声说了这几个字吗？”

“我说了，筒。谁要是听见了，一定会以为我在发疯，我疯也似地使劲叫着那几个字。”

“而那是星期一晚上，半夜时分！”

“不错，时间倒并不重要，随后发生的事儿才怪呢。你会认为我相信迷信吧——从气质来看，我是有些迷信，而且一直如此。不过，这回倒是真的——我现在说的都是我听到的，至少这一点是真的。”

“我大叫着‘筒！筒！筒！’的时候，不知道哪儿传来了一个声音，但听得出是谁的，这个声音回答道，‘我来了，请等一等我！’过了一会儿，清风送来了悄声细语——‘你在哪儿呀？’

“要是我能够，我会告诉你这些话在我的心灵中所展示的思想和画面，不过要表达自己的想法并不容易。你知道，芬丁庄园深藏在密林里，这儿的声​​音很沉闷，没有回荡便会消失。‘你在哪儿呀？’这声音似乎来自于大山中间，因为我听到了山林的回声重复着这几个字。这时空气凉爽清新，风似乎也朝我额头吹来。我会认为我与筒在荒僻的野景中相会。我相信，在精神上我们一定已经相会了。毫无疑问，当时你睡得很熟，说不定你的灵魂脱离了它的躯壳来抚慰我的灵魂。因为那正是你的口音——千真万确——是你的！”

读者呀，正是星期一晚上——将近午夜——我也接到了神秘的召唤，而那些也正是我回答的活。我倾听着罗切斯特先生的叙述，却并没有向他吐露什么，我觉得这种巧合太令人畏惧，令人费解了，因而既难以言传，也无法议论。要是我说出什么来，我的经历也必定会在聆听者的心灵中留下深刻的印象，而这饱受痛苦的心灵上容易忧伤了，不需要再笼罩更深沉的超自然阴影了。于是我把这些纵情留在心里，反复思量。

“这会儿你不会奇怪了吧，”我主人继续说，“那天晚上你出乎意外地在我当前冒出来时。我难以相信你不仅是一个声音和幻象，不只是某种会销声匿迹的东西，就像以前已经消失的夜半耳语和山间回声那样。现在我感谢上帝，我知道这回可不同了。是的，我感谢上帝！”

他把我从膝头上放下来。虔敬地从额头摘下帽子，向大地低下了没有视力的眼睛，虔诚地默默站着，只有最后几句表示崇拜的话隐约可闻。

“我感谢造物主，在审判时还记着慈悲。我谦恭地恳求我的救世主赐予我力量，让我从今以后过一种比以往更纯洁的生活！”

随后他伸出手让我领着，我握住了那只亲爱的手，在我的嘴唇上放了一会儿，随后让它挽住我肩膀，我个子比他矮得多，所以既做立支撑，又当了向导。我们进了树林，朝家里走去。

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

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