This is the track list for the accompanying recording. Each track is marked in the text.

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There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We’d been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of the question. I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group; saying she regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation, that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were – she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children.

‘What does Bessie say I have done?’ I asked.

‘Jane, I don’t like cavillers or questioners; besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent.’

A small breakfast-room adjoined the drawing room, I slipped in there. It contained a bookcase: I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk. I was then happy: happy at least in my
way, I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon. The breakfast-room door opened.

‘Huh! Madam Mope!’ cried the voice of John Reed; then he paused: he found the room apparently empty.

‘Where the dickens is she?’ he continued. ‘Lizzy! Georgy! (calling to his sisters) Joan is not here: tell mama she’s run out into the rain—a bad animal!’

It is well I drew the curtain, thought I; and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding-place: nor would John Reed have found it out himself; he was not quick either of vision or conception; but Eliza just put her head in at the door, and said at once—‘She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack.’

And I came out immediately, for I trembled at the idea of being dragged forth by the said Jack.

‘What do you want?’ I asked, with awkward diffidence.

‘Say, “What do you want, Master Reed?”’ was the answer. ‘I want you to come here;’ and seating himself in an armchair, he intimated by a gesture that I was to approach and stand before him. Habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair: he spent some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at me as far as he could without damaging the roots: I knew he would soon strike, and while dreading the blow, I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it. I wonder if he read that notion in my face; for, all at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly. I tottered, and on regaining my equilibrium retired back a step or two from his chair.

‘That is for your impudence in answering mama awhile since,’ said he, ‘and for your sneaking way of getting behind curtains, and for the look you had in your eyes two minutes since, you rat!’

Accustomed to John Reed’s abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult.

‘What were you doing behind the curtain?’ he asked.

‘I was reading.’

‘Show the book.’

I returned to the window and fetched it thence.

‘You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense. Now, I’ll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows.’

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded.

‘Wicked and cruel boy!’ I said. ‘You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!’

‘What! What!’ he cried. ‘Did she say that to me? Did you hear her, Eliza, Georgiana? Won’t I tell mama? but first—’

He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don’t very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me ‘Rat! Rat!’ and bellowed out aloud. Aid was near him: Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs Reed, who was gone upstairs: she now came upon the scene, followed by Bessie and her maid Abbot. We were parted: I heard the words—‘Dear! Dear! What a fury to fly at Master John! Did ever anybody see such a picture of passion!’

Then Mrs Reed subjoined—‘Take her away to the red-room, and lock her in there.’

Four hands were immediately laid upon me, and I was borne upstairs.

I was conveyed upstairs by two servants, Bessie and Miss Abbot.

‘What we tell you is for your good,’ said Bessie, in no harsh voice; ‘you should try to be useful and pleasant, then, perhaps, you would have a home here; but if you become passionate and rude, Missis will send you away, I am sure.’

‘Besides,’ said Miss Abbot, ‘God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums, and then where would she go? Come, Bessie, we will leave her: I wouldn’t have
her heart for anything. Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; for if you don’t repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away.’

They went, shutting the door, and locking it behind them. The red-room was a square chamber, very seldom slept in, I might say never, indeed, unless when a chance influx of visitors at Gateshead Hall rendered it necessary to turn to account all the accommodation it contained: yet it was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre; the two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; the walls were a soft fawn colour with a blush of pink in it; the wardrobe, the toilet-table, the chairs were of darkly polished old mahogany. Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed, spread with a snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it; and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne.

Mr Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber he breathed his last; here he lay in state; hence his coffin was borne by the undertaker’s men; and, since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion.

Superstition was with me at that moment; but it was not yet her hour for complete victory: my blood was still warm; the mood of the revolted slave was still bracing me with its bitter vigour; I had to stem a rapid rush of retrospective thought before I quailed to the dismal present. My head still ached and bled with the blow and fall I had received: no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert further irrational violence, I was loaded with general opprobrium. ‘Unjust! – Unjust!’ said my reason, forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power: and Resolve, equally wrougt up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression – as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die. What a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! How all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart in insurrection! Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought! I could not answer the ceaseless inward question – why I thus suffered; now, at the distance of – I will not say how many years, I see it clearly.

The next thing I remember is, waking up with a feeling as if I had had a frightful nightmare, and seeing before me a terrible red glare, crossed with thick black bars. I heard voices, too, speaking with a hollow sound, and as if muffled by a rush of wind or water: agitation, uncertainty, and an all-predominating sense of terror confused my faculties. Ere long, I became aware that some one was handling me; lifting me up and supporting me in a sitting posture, and that more tenderly than I had ever been raised or upheld before. I rested my head against a pillow or an arm, and felt easy. I felt an inexpressible relief, a soothing conviction of protection and security, when I knew that there was a stranger in the room, an individual not belonging to Gateshead, and not related to Mrs Reed.

Turning from Bessie (though her presence was far less obnoxious to me than that of Abbot, for instance, would have been), I scrutinised the face of the gentleman: I knew him; it was Mr Lloyd, an apothecary, sometimes called in by Mrs Reed when the servants were ailing: for herself and the children she employed a physician.

‘Well, who am I?’ he asked. I pronounced his name, offering him at the same time my hand: he took it, smiling and saying, ‘We shall do very well by and by.’ Then he laid me down, and addressing Bessie, charged her to be very careful that I was not disturbed during the night. Having given some further directions, and intimated that he should call again the next day, he departed; to my grief. I felt so sheltered and befriended while he sat in the chair near my pillow; and as he closed the door after him, all the room darkened and my heart again sank: inexpressible sadness weighed it down.

Next day, by noon, I was up and dressed, and sat wrapped in a shawl by the nursery hearth. I felt physically weak and broken down: but my worse ailment was an unutterable wretchedness of mind: a wretchedness which kept drawing from me silent tears; no sooner had I wiped one salt drop from my cheek than another followed. Yet, I thought, I ought to have been happy,
for none of the Reeds were there, they were all gone out in the carriage with their mama.

In the course of the morning Mr Lloyd came again.

‘What, already up!’ said he, as he entered the nursery. ‘Well, nurse, how is she?’

Bessie answered that I was doing very well.

‘Then she ought to look more cheerful. Come here, Miss Jane: your name is Jane, is it not?’

‘Yes, sir, Jane Eyre.’

‘Well, you have been crying, Miss Jane Eyre; can you tell me what about? Have you any pain?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Oh! I daresay she’s crying because she could not go out with Missis in the carriage,’ interposed Bessie.

‘Surely not! Why, she is too old for such pettishness.’ I thought so too; and my self-esteem being wounded by the false charge, I answered promptly, ‘I never cried for any such thing in my life: I hate going out in the carriage. I cry because I’m miserable.’

‘Oh fie, Miss!’ said Bessie. The good apothecary appeared a little puzzled. I was standing before him; his eyes fixed on me very steadily: his eyes were small and grey; not very bright, but I daresay I should think them shrewd now: he had a hard-featured yet good-natured looking face. Having considered me at leisure, he said, ‘What made you ill yesterday?’

‘She had a fall,’ said Bessie, again putting in her word.

‘Fall! Why, that is like a baby again! Can’t she manage to walk at her age? She must be eight or nine years old.’

‘I was knocked down,’ was the blunt explanation, jerked out of me by another pang of mortified pride; ‘but that did not make me ill,’ I added; while Mr Lloyd helped himself to a pinch of snuff. As he was returning the box to his waistcoat pocket, a loud bell rang for the servants’ dinner; he knew what it was.

‘That’s for you, nurse,’ said he; ‘you can go down; I’ll give Miss Jane a lecture till you come back.’

‘The fall did not make you ill; what did, then?’ pursued Mr Lloyd when Bessie was gone.

‘I was shut up in a room where there is a ghost till after dark.’

I saw Mr Lloyd smile and frown at the same time.

‘Ghost! What, you are a baby after all! You are afraid of ghosts?’

‘Of Mr Reed’s ghost I am: he died in that room, and was laid out there. Neither Bessie nor any one else will go into it at night, if they can help it; and it was cruel to shut me up alone without a candle, — so cruel that I think I shall never forget it.’

‘Nonsense! And is it that makes you so miserable? Are you afraid now in daylight?’

‘No: but night will come again before long: and besides, — I’m unhappy, — very unhappy, for other things.’

‘What other things? Can you tell me some of them?’

‘For one thing, I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters.’

‘You have a kind aunt and cousins.’

Again I paused; then bunglingly announced, ‘But John Reed knocked me down, and my aunt shut me up in the red-room.’

Mr Lloyd a second time produced his snuff-box.

‘Don’t you think Gateshead Hall a very beautiful house?’ asked he. ‘Are you not very thankful to have such a fine place to live at?’

‘It is not my house, sir; and Abbot says I’ve less right to be here than a servant.’

‘Pooh! You can’t be silly enough to wish to leave such a splendid place?’

‘If I had anywhere else to go, I should be glad to leave it; but I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman.’

‘Would you like to go to school?’

‘I should indeed like to go to school,’ I replied.

‘Well, well! Who knows what may happen?’ said Mr Lloyd, as he got up. ‘The child ought to have a change of air and scene,’ he added, speaking to himself; ‘nerves not in a good state.’

Bessie now returned; at the same moment the carriage was heard rolling up the gravel walk.

‘Is that your mistress, nurse?’ asked Mr Lloyd. ‘I should like to speak to her before I go.’

November, December, and half of January passed away. Christmas and the New Year had been celebrated at Gateshead with the usual festive cheer; presents had been interchanged, dinners and evening parties given. From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded.

It was the fifteenth of January, about nine o’clock in the morning: Georgiana sat on a high stool, dressing her hair at the glass, and interweaving her curls with artificial flowers and
faded feathers, of which she had found a store in a drawer in the attic. I was making my bed, having received strict orders from Bessie to get it arranged before she returned, (for Bessie now frequently employed me as a sort of under-nurserymaid, to tidy the room, dust the chairs, etc.). Having spread the quilt and folded my night-dress, I went to the window-seat to put in order some picture-books and doll’s house furniture scattered there; an abrupt command from Georgiana to let her playthings alone (for the tiny chairs and mirrors, the fairy plates and cups, were her property) stopped my proceedings; and then, for lack of other occupation, I fell to breathing on the frost-flowers with which the window was fretted, and thus clearing a space in the glass through which I might look out on the grounds, where all was still and petrified under the influence of a hard frost.

From this window were visible the porter’s lodge and the carriage-road, and just as I had dissolved so much of the silver-white foliage veiling the panes as left room to look out, I saw the gates thrown open and a carriage roll through. I watched it ascending the drive with indifference; carriages often came to Gateshead, but none ever brought visitors in whom I was interested; it stopped in front of the house, the door-bell rang loudly, the new-comer was admitted. All this being nothing to me, my vacant attention soon found livelier attraction in the spectacle of a little hungry robin, which came and chirruped on the twigs of the leafless cherry-tree nailed against the wall near the casement. The remains of my breakfast of bread and milk stood on the table, and having crumbled a morsel of roll, I was tugging at the sash to put out the crumbs on the window-sill, when Bessie came running upstairs into the nursery.

‘Miss Jane, take off your pinafore; what are you doing there? Have you washed your hands and face this morning?’

I gave another tug before I answered, for I wanted the bird to be secure of its bread: the sash yielded; I scattered the crumbs, some on the stone sill, some on the cherry-tree bough, then, closing the window, I replied –

‘No, Bessie; I’ve only just finished dusting.’

‘Troublesome, careless child! And what are you doing now? You look quite red, as if you have been about some mischief: what were you opening the window for?’

I was spared the trouble of answering, for Bessie seemed to be in too great a hurry to listen to explanations; she hauled me to the washstand, inflicted a merciless, but happily brief scrub on my face and hands with soap, water, and a coarse towel; disciplined my head with a bristly brush, denuded me of my pinafore, and then hurrying me to the top of the stairs, bid me go down directly, as I was wanted in the breakfast-room.

I now stood in the empty hall; before me was the breakfast-room door, and I stopped, intimidated and trembling. What a miserable little poltroon had fear, engendered of unjust punishment, made of me in those days! I feared to return to the nursery, and feared to go forward to the parlour; ten minutes I stood in agitated hesitation; the vehement ringing of the breakfast-room bell decided me; I must enter.

‘Who could want me?’ I asked inwardly, as with both hands I turned the stiff door-handle, which, for a second or two, resisted my efforts. ‘What should I see beside Aunt Reed in the apartment? – a man or a woman?’ The handle turned, the door unclosed, and passing through and curtseying low, I looked up at – a black pillar! – Such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug; the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital. Mrs Reed occupied her usual seat by the fireside; she made a signal to me to approach; I did so, and she introduced me to the stony stranger with the words: ‘This is the little girl respecting whom I applied to you.’

He, for it was a man, turned his head slowly towards where I stood, and having examined me with the two inquisitive-looking grey eyes which twinkled under a pair of bushy brows, said solemnly, and in a bass voice, ‘Her size is small: what is her age?’

‘Ten years.’

‘So much?’ was the doubtful answer; and he prolonged his scrutiny for some minutes. Presently he addressed me –

‘Your name, little girl?’

‘Jane Eyre, sir.’

‘Well, Jane Eyre, and are you a good child?’

Impossible to reply to this in the affirmative: my little world held a contrary opinion: I was silent. Mrs Reed answered for me by an expressive shake of the head, adding soon, ‘Perhaps the less said on that subject the better, Mr Brocklehurst.’

‘Sorry indeed to hear it! She and I must have some talk,’ and
bending from the perpendicular, he installed his person in the arm-chair opposite Mrs Reed's.

'Come here,' he said.

I stepped across the rug; he placed me square and straight before him. What a face he had, now that it was almost on a level with mine! What a great nose, and what a mouth! And what large prominent teeth!

'No sight so sad as that of a naughty child,' he began, 'especially a naughty little girl. Do you know where the wicked go after death?'

'They go to hell,' was my ready and orthodox answer.

'And what is hell? Can you tell me that?'

'A pit full of fire.'

'And should you like to fall into that pit, and to be burning there for ever?'

'No, sir.'

'What must you do to avoid it?'

I deliberated a moment; my answer, when it did come, was objectionable: 'I must keep in good health, and not die.'

'Do you say your prayers night and morning?' continued my interrogator.

'Yes, sir.'

'Do you read your Bible?'

'Sometimes.'

'With pleasure? Are you fond of it?'

'I like Revelations, and the book of Daniel, and Genesis and Samuel, and a little bit of Exodus, and some parts of Kings and Chronicles, and Job and Jonah.'

'And the Psalms? I hope you like them?'

'No, sir.'

'No? Oh, shocking! I have a little boy, younger than you, who knows six Psalms by heart: and when you ask him which he would rather have, a gingerbread-nut to eat or a verse of a Psalm to learn, he says: 'Oh! the verse of a Psalm! angels sing Psalms;' says he, 'I wish to be a little angel here below;' he then gets two nuts in recompense for his infant piety.'

'Psalms are not interesting,' I remarked.

'What proves you have a wicked heart; and you must pray to God to change it: to give you a new and clean one: to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.'

I was about to propound a question, touching the manner in which that operation of changing my heart was to be performed, when Mrs Reed interposed, telling me to sit down; she then proceeded to carry on the conversation herself.

'Mr Brocklehurst, I believe I intimated in the letter which I wrote to you three weeks ago, that this little girl has not quite the character and disposition I could wish: should you admit her into Lowood school, I should be glad if the superintendent and teachers were requested to keep a strict eye on her, and, above all, to guard against her worst fault, a tendency to deceit. I mention this in your hearing, Jane, that you may not attempt to impose on Mr Brocklehurst.'

'I should wish her to be brought up in a manner suit ing her prospects,' continued my benefactress; 'to be made useful, to be kept humble: as for the vacations, she will, with your permission, spend them always at Lowood.'

'Your decisions are perfectly judicious, madam,' returned Mr Brocklehurst. 'Humility is a Christian grace, and one peculiarly appropriate to the pupils of Lowood; I, therefore, direct that especial care shall be bestowed on its cultivation amongst them.'

'Quite right, sir. I may then depend upon this child being received as a pupil at Lowood, and there being trained in conformity to her position and prospects?'

'Madam, you may: she shall be placed in that nursery of chosen plants, and I trust she will show herself grateful for the inestimable privilege of her election.'

Mrs Reed and I were left alone; some minutes passed in silence; she was sewing, I was watching her.

'Go out of the room; return to the nursery,' was her mandate. My look or something else must have struck her as offensive, for she spoke with extreme though suppressed irritation. I got up, I went to the door; I came back again; I walked to the window, across the room, then close up to her.

Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely, and must turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence – 'I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed.'

Mrs Reed's hands still lay on her work inactive: her eye of ice continued to dwell freezingly on mine.

'What more have you to say?' she asked, rather in the tone in
which a person might address an opponent of adult age than such as is ordinarily used to a child.

That eye of hers, that voice stirred every antipathy I had. Shaking from head to foot, thrilled with ungovernable excitement, I continued, 'I'm glad you're no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty.'

'Jane, you are under a mistake: what is the matter with you? Why do you tremble so violently? Would you like to drink some water?'

'No, Mrs Reed.'

'Is there anything else you wish for, Jane? I assure you, I desire to be your friend.'

'Not you. You told Mr Brocklehurst I had a bad character, a deceitful disposition; and I'll let everybody at Lowood know what you are, and what you've done.'

'Jane, you don't understand these things: children must be corrected for their faults.'

'Deceit is not my fault!' I cried out in a savage, high voice.

'But you are passionate, Jane, that you must allow: and now return to the nursery there's a dear, and lie down a little.'

'I'm not your dear; I cannot lie down: send me to school soon, Mrs Reed, for I hate to live here.'

'I will indeed send her to school soon,' murmured Mrs Reed sotto voce; and gathering up her work, she abruptly quit the apartment.

On the 19th of January, I travelled by coach to Lowood, very far from Gateshead. I drifted asleep in the carriage but I had not long slumbered when the sudden cessation of motion awoke me; the coach-door was open, and a person like a servant was standing at it: I saw her face and dress by the light of the lamps.

'Is there a little girl called Jane Eyre here?' she asked. I answered 'Yes', and was then lifted out; my trunk was handed down, and the coach instantly drove away.

I was stiff with long sitting, and bewildered with the noise and motion of the coach: gathering my faculties, I looked about me. Rain, wind, and darkness filled the air; nevertheless, I dimly discerned a wall before me and a door open in it; through this door I passed with my new guide: she shut and locked it behind her. There was now visible a house or houses — for the building spread far — with many windows, and lights burning in some; we went up a broad pebbly path, splashing wet, and were admitted at a door; then the servant led me through a passage into a room with a fire, where she left me alone. I stood and warmed my numbed fingers over the blaze, then I looked round; there was no candle, but the uncertain light from the hearth showed, by intervals, papered walls, carpet, curtains, shining mahogany furniture: it was a parlour, not so spacious or splendid as the drawing-room at Gateshead, but comfortable enough. I was puzzling to make out the subject of a picture on the wall, when the door opened, and an individual carrying a light entered; another followed close behind.

The first was a tall lady with dark hair, dark eyes, and a pale and large forehead; her figure was partly enveloped in a shawl, her countenance was grave, her bearing erect.

'The child is very young to be sent alone,' said she, putting her candle down on the table. She considered me attentively for a minute or two, then further added —

'She'd better be put to bed soon; she looks tired: are you tired?' she asked, placing her hand on my shoulder.

'A little, ma'am.'

'And hungry too, no doubt: let her have some supper before she goes to bed, Miss Miller. Is this the first time you've left your parents to come to school, my little girl?'

I explained to her that I had no parents. She inquired how long they had been dead: then how old I was, what was my name, whether I could read, write, and sew a little: then she touched my cheek gently with her forefinger, and saying, 'She hoped I would be a good child,' dismissed me along with Miss Miller.

The lady I had left might be about twenty-nine; the one who went with me appeared some years younger: the first impressed me by her voice, look, and air. Miss Miller was more ordinary; ruddy in complexion, though of a careworn countenance; hurried in gait and action, like one who had always a multiplicity of tasks on hand: she looked, indeed, what I afterwards found she really was, an under-teacher. Led by her, I passed from compartment to compartment, from passage to
passage, of a large and irregular building; till, emerging from
the total and somewhat dreary silence pervading that portion of
the house we had traversed, we came upon the hum of many
voices, and presently entered a wide, long room, with great deal
tables, two at each end, on each of which burnt a pair of
 candles, and seated all round on benches, a congregation of girls
of every age, from nine or ten to twenty. Seen by the dim light
of the dips, their number appeared to me countless, though not
in reality exceeding eighty; they were uniformly dressed in
brown stuff frocks of quaint fashion, and long holland
pinafores. It was the hour of study; they were engaged in
conning over their to-morrow’s task, and the hum I had heard
was the combined result of their whispered repetitions.

Miss Miller signed to me to sit on a bench near the door, then
walking up to the top of the long room she cried out –
‘Monitors, collect the lesson-books and put them away! Four
tall girls arose from different tables, and going round, gathered
the books and removed them. Miss Miller again gave the word
of command –
‘Monitors, fetch the supper-trays!'
The tall girls went out and returned presently, each bearing a
tray, with portions of something, I knew not what, arranged
thereon, and a pitcher of water and mug in the middle of each
tray. The portions were handed round. When it came to my
turn, I drank, for I was thirsty, but did not touch the food,
excitement and fatigue rendering me incapable of eating: I now
saw, however, that it was a thin oaten cake shared into
fragments.
The meal over, prayers were read by Miss Miller, and the
classes filed off, two and two, upstairs. Tonight I was to be Miss
Miller’s bed-fellow; she helped me to undress: when laid down I
glanced at the long rows of beds, each of which was quickly
filled with two occupants; in ten minutes the single light was
extinguished, amidst silence and complete darkness I fell asleep.
When I again unclosed my eyes, a loud bell was ringing; the
girls were up and dressing; day had not yet begun to dawn, and
a rushlight or two burned in the room. It was bitter cold, and I
dressed as well as I could for shivering, and washed when there
was a basin at liberty.
Again the bell rang: all formed in file, two and two, and in
that order descended the stairs and entered the cold and dimly
lit schoolroom: here prayers were read by Miss Miller;
afterwards she called out – 'Form classes!'
In the course of the day I was enrolled a member of the fourth
class, and regular tasks and occupations were assigned me. The
duration of each lesson was measured by the clock which at last
struck twelve.
After lunch Miss Temple, the Superintendent gave the order
‘To the garden.’
As yet I had spoken to no one, nor did anybody seem to take
notice of me; but to that feeling of isolation I was accustomed; it
did not oppress me much.
The sound of a cough close behind me made me turn my
head. I saw a girl bent over a book. In turning a leaf she
happened to look up, and I said to her directly
‘Is your book interesting?’
‘I like it,’ she answered.
‘What is it about?’ I continued.
‘You may look at it,’ replied the girl, offering me the book.
I did so; a brief examination convinced me that the contents
looked dull to my trifling taste. I returned it to her; she was
about to relapse into her former studious mood: again I
ventured to disturb her.
‘Can you tell me what the writing on that stone over the door
means? What is Lowood Institution?’
‘This house where you come to live.’
‘And why do they call it Institution? Is it in any way different
from other schools?’
‘It is partly a charity-school: you and I, and all the rest of us,
are charity-children. I suppose you are an orphan: are not either
your father or your mother dead?’
‘Both died before I can remember.’
‘Well, all the girls here have lost either one or both parents,
and this is called an institution for educating orphans.’
‘Do you like the teachers?’
‘Well enough. But Miss Scatcherd is hasty – you must take
care not to offend her.’
‘Are you happy here?’
‘You ask rather too many questions. I’ve given you answers
enough for the present: now I want to read.’
The only marked event of the afternoon was, that I saw the
girl with whom I had conversed dismissed in disgrace by Miss Scatcherd from a history class, and sent to stand in the middle of the large schoolroom. The punishment seemed to me in a high degree ignominious, especially for so great a girl — she looked thirteen or upwards. I expected she would show signs of great distress and shame; but to my surprise she neither wept nor blushed: 'How can she bear it so quietly — so firmly?' I asked myself. 'Were I in her place, it seems to me I should wish the earth to open and swallow me up. She looks as if she were thinking of something beyond her punishment — beyond her situation. I wonder what sort of a girl she is — whether good or naughty.'

Soon after five p.m. we had another meal, consisting of a small mug of coffee, and half a slice of brown bread. Half-an-hour's recreation succeeded, then study; then the glass of water and the piece of oat-cake, prayers, and bed. Such was my first day at Lowood.

The next day commenced as before, but this morning we were obliged to dispense with the ceremony of washing; the water in the pitchers was frozen.

Being little accustomed to learn by heart, the lessons appeared to me both long and difficult; and I was glad when, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Miss Smith put into my hands a border of muslin two yards long, together with a needle, thimble, etc., and sent me to sit in a quiet corner of the schoolroom, with directions to hem the same. One class still stood round Miss Scatcherd's chair reading. Among the readers I observed my acquaintance. Miss Scatcherd was continually addressing to her such phrases as the following:

'Burns' (such it seems was her name), 'Burns, you are standing on the side of your shoe; turn your toes out immediately.' 'Burns, you poke your chin most unpleasantly; draw it in.' and then 'You dirty, disagreeable girl! You have never cleaned your nails this morning!'

Burns made no answer: I wondered at her silence. 'Why,' thought I, 'does she not explain that she could neither clean her nails nor wash her face, as the water was frozen?'

My attention was now called off by Miss Smith desiring me to hold a skein of thread. When I returned to my seat, Miss Scatcherd was just delivering an order of which I did not catch the import; but Burns immediately left the class, and going into the small inner room where the books were kept, returned in half a minute, carrying in her hand a bundle of twigs tied together at one end. This ominous tool she presented to Miss Scatcherd with a respectful curtsey; then she quietly, and without being told, unloosed her pinafore, and the teacher instantly and sharply inflicted on her neck a dozen strokes with the bunch of twigs. Not a tear rose to Burns' eye; and, while I paused from my sewing, because my fingers quivered at this spectacle with a sentiment of unavailing and impotent anger, not a feature of her pensive face altered its ordinary expression.

'Hardened girl!' exclaimed Miss Scatcherd; 'nothing can correct you of your slatternly habits: carry the rod away.'

Burns obeyed: I looked at her narrowly as she emerged from the book-closet; she was just putting back her handkerchief into her pocket, and the trace of a tear glistened on her thin cheek.

The play-hour in the evening I thought the pleasantest fraction of the day at Lowood: the long restraint of the day was slackened; the schoolroom felt warmer than in the morning — its fires being allowed to burn a little more brightly, to supply, in some measure, the place of candles.

Jumping over forms, and creeping under tables, I made my way to one of the fire-places; there, kneeling by the high wire fender, I found Burns, absorbed, silent, abstracted from all round her by the companionship of a book.

'What is your name besides Burns?'

'Helen.'

'Do you come a long way from here?'

'I come from a place farther north, quite on the borders of Scotland.'

'You must wish to leave Lowood?'

'No! Why should I? I was sent to Lowood to get an education.'

'But that teacher, Miss Scatcherd, is so cruel to you?'

'Crue! Not at all! She is severe: she dislikes my faults. It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; and besides, the Bible bids us return good for evil.'

I heard her with wonder: I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; still I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light invisible to my eyes, but I did not ponder the matter deeply; like Felix, I put it off to a more convenient season.
During January, February, and part of March, the deep snows, and after their melting, the almost impassable roads, prevented our stirring beyond the garden walls, except to go to church. Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold: we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes and melted there: our unglowed hands became numbed and covered with chilblains, as were our feet. Then the scanty supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetite of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid.

Spring drew on: the frosts of winter had ceased. My wretched feet, flayed and swollen to lameness by the sharp air of January, began to heal and subside under the gentler breathings of April.

Forest-dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence; which, quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into an hospital.

Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty-five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time. But I, and the rest who continued well, enjoyed fully the beauties of the season; they let us ramble in the wood, like gipsies, from morning till night; we did what we liked, went where we liked: we lived better too.

And where, meantime, was Helen Burns?

I never tired of Helen Burns; nor ever ceased to cherish for her a sentiment of attachment, as strong, tender, and respectful as any that ever animated my heart. But Helen was ill at present: her complaint was consumption, not typhus: and by consumption I, in my ignorance, understood something mild, which time and care would be sure to alleviate.

One evening, in the beginning of June, we had stayed out very late in the wood. When we got back, it was after moonrise: a pony, which we knew to belong to Mr Bates the surgeon, was standing at the garden door. Mr Bates came out, and with him was a nurse. After she had seen him mount his horse I ran up to her.

‘How is Helen Burns?’
‘Very poorly.’
I experienced a shock of horror, then a strong thrill of grief, then a desire – a necessity to see her.
‘May I go up and speak to her?’
‘Oh no, child!’ The nurse closed the front door; I went in by the side entrance which led to the schoolroom.

I must embrace her before she died, – I must give her one last kiss, exchange with her one last word.

Having descended a staircase, traversed a portion of the house below, and succeeding in opening and shutting, without noise, two doors, I reached another flight of steps; these I mounted, and then just opposite to me was Miss Temple’s room where Helen lay.

Close by Miss Temple’s bed there stood a little crib.

‘Helen!’ I whispered softly, ‘are you awake?’
She stirred herself and I saw her face, pale, wasted, but quite composed.

‘Can it be you, Jane?’
‘Oh!’ I thought, ‘she is not going to die; they are mistaken: she could not speak and look so calmly if she were.’

‘Why are you come here, Jane? It is past eleven o’clock.’

‘I came to see you, Helen: I heard you were very ill, and I could not sleep until I had spoken to you.’

‘You came to bid me good-bye, then: you are just in time probably.’

‘Are you going home?’
‘Yes; to my long home – my last home.’

‘No, no, Helen!’ I stopped, distressed. While I tried to devour my tears, a fit of coughing seized Helen; when it was over, she whispered – ‘Jane, your little feet are bare; lie down and cover yourself with my quilt.’

I did so: she put her arm over me, and I nestled close to her.

‘I am very happy, Jane; and when you hear that I am dead, you must be sure and not grieve. We must all die one day, and the illness which is removing me is not painful; my mind is at rest. By dying young, I should escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault.’

‘But where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?’

‘I believe; I have faith: I am going to God. How comfortable I am! That last fit of coughing has tired me a little; I feel as if I could sleep: but don’t leave me, Jane; I like to have you near me.’

‘Good-night, Jane.’

‘Good-night, Helen.’

When I awoke it was day: I was in somebody’s arms; the nurse
A kind fairy, in my absence, had surely dropped the required suggestion on my pillow; for as I lay down, it came quietly and naturally to my mind: ‘Those who want situations advertise; you must advertise in the Herald.’

This scheme I went over twice, thrice; it was then digested in my mind; I had it in a clear practical form: I felt satisfied, and fell asleep.

A week later I had but one reply, its contents were brief.

‘If J. E., who advertised in the Herald last Thursday, possesses the acquisitions mentioned, and if she is in a position to give satisfactory references as to character and competency, a situation can be offered her where there is but one pupil, a little girl, under ten years of age; and where the salary is thirty pounds per annum. J. E. is requested to send references, name, address, and all particulars to the direction:

‘Mrs Fairfax, Thornfield, near Millcote.’

I examined the document long: the writing was old-fashioned and rather uncertain, like that of an elderly lady. Mrs Fairfax! I saw her in a black gown and widow’s cap; frigid, perhaps, but not uncivil: a model of elderly English respectability.

Thornfield! That, doubtless, was the name of her house: a neat orderly spot, I was sure; though I failed in my efforts to conceive a correct plan of the premises. Millcote! I brushed up my recollections of the map of England; yes, I saw it; both the shire and the town. The shire was seventy miles nearer London than the remote county where I now resided: that was a recommendation to me. I longed to go where there was life and movement: Millcote was a large manufacturing town. A busy place enough, doubtless: so much the better; it would be a complete change at least. Not that my fancy was much captivated by the idea of the long chimneys and clouds of smoke, ‘but,’ I argued, ‘Thornfield will, probably, be a good way from the town.’

Here the socket of the candle dropped, and the wick went out.

A fortnight later I made my way to Millcote and my new employer. A servant collected me from the George Inn, and soon the carriage was passing a narrow galaxy of lights on a hillside. Ten minutes after, the driver got down and opened a pair of gates: we passed through, and they clashed to behind us. We now slowly ascended a drive, and came upon the long front...
of a house: candlelight gleamed from one curtained bow-window; all the rest were dark. The car stopped at the front door; it was opened by a maid-servant; I alighted and went in.

‘Will you walk this way, ma’am?’ said the girl; and I followed her across a square hall with high doors all around: she ushered me into a room whose double illumination of fire and candle at first dazzled me, contrasting as it did with the darkness to which my eyes had been for two hours inured; when I could see, however, a cozy and agreeable picture presented itself to my view.

A snug small room; a round table by a cheerful fire; an armchair high-backed and old-fashioned, wherein sat the neatest imaginable little elderly lady, in widow’s cap, black silk gown, and snowy muslin apron; exactly like what I had fancied Mrs Fairfax, only less stately and milder looking. She was occupied in knitting; a large cat sat demurely at her feet; nothing in short was wanting to complete the beau-ideal of domestic comfort. A more reassuring introduction for a new governess could scarcely be conceived; there was no grandeur to overwhelm, no stateliness to embarrass; and then, as I entered, the old lady got up and promptly and kindly came forward to meet me.

‘How do you do, my dear? I am afraid you’ve had a tedious ride; John drives so slowly; you must be cold, come to the fire.’

‘Mrs Fairfax, I suppose?’ said I.

‘Yes, you are right: do sit down.’

She conducted me to her own chair, and then began to remove my shawl and untie my bonnet-strings; I begged she would not give herself so much trouble.

‘Oh, it is no trouble; I daresay your own hands are almost numbed with cold. Leah, make a little hot negus and cut a sandwich or two: here are the keys of the storeroom.’

And she produced from her pocket a most housewifely bunch of keys, and delivered them to the servant.

‘Now, then, draw nearer to the fire,’ she continued. ‘You’ve brought your luggage with you, haven’t you, my dear?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘I’ll see it carried into your room,’ she said.

‘Shall I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Fairfax to-night?’ I asked.

‘What did you say, my dear? I’m a little deaf,’ returned the good lady, approaching her ear to my mouth.

I repeated the question more distinctly.

‘Miss Fairfax? Oh, you mean Miss Varens! Varens is the name of your future pupil.’

‘Indeed! Then she is not your daughter?’

‘No, I have no family.’

I should have followed up my first inquiry, by asking in what way Miss Varens was connected with her; but I recollected it was not polite to ask too many questions: besides, I was sure to hear in time.

Next day I rose early and went into the garden. I was yet enjoying the calm prospect and pleasant fresh air, yet listening with delight to the cawing of the rooks, yet surveying the wide, hoary front of the hall, and thinking what a great place it was for one lonely little dame like Mrs Fairfax to inhabit, when that lady appeared at the door.

‘What! Out already?’ said she. ‘I see you’re an early riser.’

I went up to her, and was received with an affable kiss and shake of the hand.

‘How do you like Thornfield?’ she asked. I told her I liked it very much.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘it is a pretty place; but I fear it will be getting out of order, unless Mr Rochester should take it into his head to come and reside here permanently; or, at least, visit it rather oftener: great houses and fine grounds require the presence of the proprietor.’

‘Mr Rochester!’ I exclaimed. ‘Who is he?’

‘The owner of Thornfield,’ she responded quietly. ‘Did you not know he was called Rochester?’

Of course I did not, I’d never heard of him before; but the old lady seemed to regard his existence as a universally understood fact, with which everybody must be acquainted by instinct.

‘I thought,’ I continued, ‘that Thornfield belonged to you.’

‘To me? Bless you, child; what an idea! To me! I’m only the housekeeper – the manager. To be sure I am distantly related to the Rochesters by the mother’s side, or at least my husband was; he was a clergyman, incumbent of Hay – that little village yonder on the hill – and that church near the gates was his. The present Mr Rochester’s mother was a Fairfax, and second cousin to my husband: but I never presume on the connection – in fact, it is nothing to me; I consider myself quite in the light of an ordinary housekeeper: my employer is always civil, and I expect nothing more.’
‘And the little girl, my pupil!’

‘She is Mr Rochester’s ward; he commissioned me to find a governess for her. He intended to have her brought up here, I believe. Here she comes, with her ‘bonne,’ as she calls her nurse.’

The enigma then was explained: this affable and kind little widow was no great dame; but a dependant like myself.

As I was meditating on this discovery, a little girl, followed by her attendant, came running up the lawn. I looked at my pupil, who did not at first appear to notice me: she was quite a child, perhaps seven or eight years old, slightly built, with a pale, small-featured face, and a redundancy of hair falling in curls to her waist.

‘Good morning, Miss Adela,’ said Mrs Fairfax. ‘Come and speak to the lady who is to teach you, and to make you a clever woman some day.’

She approached.

‘C’est là ma gouvernante?’ said she, pointing to me, and addressing her nurse; who answered –

‘Moi oui, certainement.’

‘Are they foreigners?’ I inquired, amazed at hearing the French language.

‘The nurse is a foreigner, and Adela was born on the Continent; and, I believe, never left it till within six months ago. When she first came here she could speak no English; now she can make shift to talk it a little: I don’t understand her, she mixes it so with French; but you will make out her meaning very well, I daresay.’

I found my pupil sufficiently docile, though disinclined to apply: she’d not been used to regular occupation of any kind. I felt it would be injudicious to confine her too much at first; so, when I’d talked to her a great deal, and got her to learn a little, and when the morning had advanced to noon, I allowed her to return to her nurse. I then proposed to occupy myself till dinnertime in drawing some little sketches for her use.

As I was going upstairs to fetch my portfolio and pencils, Mrs Fairfax called to me: ‘Your morning school-hours are over now, I suppose.’ She was in a room the folding doors of which stood open: I went in when she addressed me. It was a large, stately apartment, with purple chairs and curtains, a Turkey carpet, walnut-panelled walls, one vast window rich in stained glass, and a lofty ceiling, nobly moulded. Mrs Fairfax was dusting some vases of fine purple spar, which stood on a sideboard.

‘What a beautiful room!’ I exclaimed, as I looked round; for I had never before seen any half so imposing.

‘Yes; this is the dining-room. I have just opened the window, to let in a little air and sunshine; for everything gets so damp in apartments that are seldom inhabited; the drawing-room yonder feels like a vault.’

When we left the dining-room she proposed to show me over the rest of the house; and I followed her upstairs and downstairs, admiring as I went; for all was well arranged and handsome. The large front chambers I thought especially grand: and some of the third-storey rooms, though dark and low, were interesting from their air of antiquity.

‘Do the servants sleep in these rooms?’ I asked.

‘No; they occupy a range of smaller apartments to the back; no one ever sleeps here: one would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt.’

‘So I think: you have no ghost, then?’

‘None that I’ve ever heard of,’ returned Mrs Fairfax, smiling.

While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued.

‘Mrs Fairfax!’ I called out: for I now heard her descending the garret stairs. ‘Did you hear that loud laugh? Who is it?’

‘Some of the servants, very likely,’ she answered: ‘perhaps Grace Poole.’

‘Did you hear it?’ I again inquired.

‘Yes, plainly: I often hear her: she sews in one of these rooms. Sometimes Leah is with her; they are frequently noisy together.’

The laugh was repeated in its low, syllabic tone, and terminated in an odd murmur.

‘Grace!’ exclaimed Mrs Fairfax.

I really did not expect any Grace to answer; for the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard; and, but that it was high noon, and that no circumstance of ghostliness accompanied the curious cachinnation; but that neither scene
nor season favoured fear, I should have been superstitiously afraid. However, the event showed me I was a fool for entertaining a sense even of surprise.

The door nearest me opened, and a servant came out, a woman of between thirty and forty; a set, square-made figure, red-haired, and with a hard, plain face: any apparition less romantic or less ghostly could scarcely be conceived.

'Too much noise, Grace,' said Mrs Fairfax. 'Remember directions!'

Grace curtseyed silently and went in.

'She is a person we have to sew and assist Leah in her housemaid's work,' continued the widow; 'not altogether unobjectionable in some points, but she does well enough. By the bye, how have you got on with your new pupil this morning?'

The conversation, thus turned on Adèle, continued till we reached the light and cheerful region below. Adèle came running to meet us in the hall, exclaiming,

'Mesdames, vous êtes servies!' adding, 'J'ai bien faim, moi!' We found dinner ready, and waiting for us in Mrs Fairfax's room.

One afternoon in January, Mrs Fairfax had begged a holiday for Adèle, because she had a cold; and, as Adèle seconded the request with an ardour that reminded me how precious occasional holidays had been to me in my own childhood, I acceded it, deeming that I did well in showing piability on the point. It was a fine, calm day, though very cold; I was tired of sitting still in the library through a whole long morning: Mrs Fairfax had just written a letter which was waiting to be posted, so I put on my bonnet and cloak and volunteered to carry it to Hay; the distance, two miles, would be a pleasant winter afternoon walk.

The ground was hard, the air was still, my road was lonely; I walked fast till I got warm, and then I walked slowly to enjoy and analyse the species of pleasure brooding for me in the hour and situation. It was three o'clock; the church bell tolled as I passed under the belfry: the charm of the hour lay in its approaching dimness, in the low-gliding and pale-beaming sun. I was a mile from Thornfield, in a lane noted for wild roses in summer, for nuts and blackberries in autumn, and even now possessing a few coral treasures in hips and haws, but whose best winter delight lay in its utter solitude and leafless repose.

Suddenly a rude noise broke in upon my musings. The din was on the causeway: a horse was coming. It was very near, but not yet in sight; when, in addition to the tramp, tramp, I heard a rush under the hedge, and close down by the hazel stems glided a great dog, whose black and white colour made him a distinct object against the trees. The horse followed, a tall steed, and on its back a rider. The man, the human being, broke the spell at once. He passed, I went on; a few steps, and I turned: a sliding sound and an exclamation of 'What the deuce is to do now?' and a clattering tumble, arrested my attention. Man and horse were down; they'd slipped on the sheet of ice which glazed the causeway. The dog came bounding back, and seeing his master in a predicament, and hearing the horse groan, barked till the evening hills echoed the sound, which was deep in proportion to his magnitude. He snuffed round the prostrate group, and then he ran up to me; it was all he could do, there was no other help at hand to summon. I obeyed him, and walked down to the traveller, by this time struggling himself free of his steed. His efforts were so vigorous, I thought he could not be much hurt; but I asked him the question,

'Are you injured, sir?'

I think he was swearing, but am not certain; however, he was pronouncing some formula which prevented him from replying to me directly.

'Can I do anything?' I asked again.

'You must just stand on one side,' he answered as he rose, first to his knees, and then to his feet. I did; whereupon began a heaving, stamping, clattering process, accompanied by a barking and baying which removed me effectually some yards' distance; but I would not be driven quite away till I saw the event. This was finally fortunate; the horse was re-established, and the dog was silenced with a 'Down, Pilot!' The traveller now, stooping, felt his foot and leg, as if trying whether they were sound; apparently something ailed them, for he halted to the stile whence I had just risen, and sat down. I was in the mood for being useful, or at least officious, I think, for I now drew near to him again.

'If you are hurt, and want help, sir, I can fetch some one.
either from Thornfield Hall or from Hay.’
’T’Thank you: I shall do: I have no broken bones, only a sprain;’
and again he stood up and tried his foot, but the result extorted
an involuntary ‘Ugh!’
’I cannot think of leaving you, sir, at so late an hour, in this
solitary lane, till I see you are fit to mount your horse.’
He looked at me when I said this; he’d hardly turned his eyes
in my direction before.
’I should think you ought to be at home yourself,’ said he, ’if
you have a home in this neighbourhood: where do you come
from?’
’From just below; and I am not at all afraid of being out late
when it is moonlight: I will run over to Hay for you with
pleasure, if you wish it: indeed, I’m going there to post a letter.’
’You live just below – do you mean at that house with the
battlements?’ pointing to Thornfield Hall
’Yes, sir.’
’Whose house is it?’
’Mr Rochester’s,’ I said.
’Do you know Mr Rochester?’
’No, I’ve never seen him.’
’He is not resident, then?’ he asked.
’No.’
’You’re not a servant at the hall, of course. You are – ’ He
stopped, ran his eye over my dress, which, as usual, was quite
simple: a black merino cloak, a black beaver bonnet; neither of
them half fine enough for a lady’s-maid. He seemed puzzled to
decide what I was; I helped him.
’I am the governess.’
’Ah, the governess!’ he repeated; ’Deuce take me, if I’d not
forgotten! The governess!’ and again my raiment underwent
scrutiny. In two minutes he rose from the stile: his face
expressed pain when he tried to move.
’I cannot commission you to fetch help,’ he said; ’but you may
help me a little yourself, if you will be so kind.’
’Yes, sir.’
’You have not an umbrella that I can use as a stick?’
’No.’
’Try to get hold of my horse’s bridle and lead him to me.
Excuse me,’ he continued: ’necessity compels me to make you
useful.’

He laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and leaning on me with
some stress, limped to his horse. Having once caught the bridle,
he mastered it directly and sprang to his saddle; grimacing
grimly as he made the effort, for it wrenched his sprain.
’Now,’ said he, releasing his under lip from a hard bite, ’just
hand me my whip; it lies there under the hedge.’
I sought it and found it.
’Thank you; now make haste with that letter to Hay, and
return as fast as you can.’
A touch of a spurred heel made his horse first start and rear,
and then bound away; the dog rushed in his traces; all three
vanished.
I did not like re-entering Thornfield. To pass its threshold was
to return to stagnation; to cross the silent hall, to ascend the
darksome staircase, to seek my own lonely little room, and then
to meet tranquil Mrs Fairfax, and spend the long winter
evening with her, and her only, was to quell wholly the faint
excitement wakened by my walk.
I hastened to Mrs Fairfax’s room; there was a fire there, but
no candle, and no Mrs Fairfax. Instead, all alone, sitting upright
on the rug, and gazing with gravity at the blaze, I beheld a great
black and white longhaired dog, just like the dog of the lane. It
was so like it that I went forward and said ’Pilot,’ and the thing
got up and came to me and sniffed me. I caressed him, and he
wagged his great tail; but he looked an eerie creature to be alone
with, and I could not tell whence he had come. I rang the bell,
for I wanted a candle; and I wanted, too, to get an account of
this visitant. Leah entered.
’What dog is this?’
’He came with master.’
’With whom?’
’With master – Mr Rochester – he’s just arrived.’
’Indeed! And is Mrs Fairfax with him?’
’Yes, and Miss Adele; they’re in the dining-room, and John is
gone for a surgeon; for master has had an accident; his horse fell
and his ankle is sprained.’
’Did the horse fall in Hay Lane?’
’Yes, coming down-hill; it slipped on some ice.’
’Ah! Bring me a candle, will you, Leah?’
Leah brought it; she entered, followed by Mrs Fairfax, who
repeated the news; adding that Mr Carter the surgeon was
come, and was now with Mr Rochester: then she hurried out to
give orders about tea, and I went upstairs to take off my things.

Next day Mrs Fairfax told me, ‘Mr Rochester would be glad if
you and your pupil would take tea with him in the drawing-
room this evening.’

‘When is his tea-time?’ I inquired.

‘Oh, at six o’clock: he keeps early hours in the country. You’d
better change your frock now; I’ll go with you and fasten it.
Here’s a candle.’

‘Is it necessary to change my frock?’

‘Yes, you’d better: I always dress for the evening when Mr
Rochester’s here.’

This additional ceremony seemed somewhat stately; however,
I repaired to my room, and, with Mrs Fairfax’s aid, replaced my
black stuff dress by one of black silk; the best and the only
additional one I had, except one of light grey, which, in my
Lowood notions of the toilette, I thought too fine to be worn,
except on first-rate occasions.

‘You want a brooch,’ said Mrs Fairfax. I had a single little pearl
ornament. I put it on, and then we went downstairs. Two wax
candles stood lighted on the table, and two on the mantelpiece;
basking in the light and heat of a superb fire, lay Pilot, Adèle
knelt near him. Half reclined on a couch appeared Mr
Rochester, his foot supported by the cushion; he was looking at
Adèle and the dog: the fire shone full on his face. I knew my
traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows; his square forehead,
made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I
recognised his decisive nose, more remarkable for character
than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, choler; his
grim mouth, chin, and jaw – yes, all three were very grim, and
no mistake. His shape, now divested of cloak, I perceived
harmonised in squareness with his physiognomy: I suppose it
was a good figure in the athletic sense of the term – broad
chested and thin flanked, though neither tall nor graceful.

Mr Rochester must have been aware of the entrance of Mrs
Fairfax and myself; but it appeared he was not in the mood to
notice us, for he never lifted his head as we approached.

‘Here is Miss Eyre, sir,’ said Mrs Fairfax, in her quiet way. He
bowed, still not taking his eyes from the group of the dog
and child.

‘Let Miss Eyre be seated,’ said he: and there was something in
the forced stiff bow, in the impatient yet formal tone, which
seemed further to express, ‘What the deuce is it to me whether
Miss Eyre be there or not? At this moment I am not disposed to
accost her.’

‘Madam, I should like some tea,’ he said. She hastened to ring
the bell; and when the tray came, she proceeded to arrange the
cups, spoons, etc., with assiduous celerity. I and Adèle went to
the table; but the master did not leave his couch.

‘Will you hand Mr Rochester’s cup?’ said Mrs Fairfax to me;
‘Adèle might perhaps spill it.’

I did as requested.

‘Come to the fire,’ said the master, when the tray was taken
away, and Mrs Fairfax had settled into a corner with her
knitting; while Adèle was leading me by the hand round the
room, showing me the beautiful books and ornaments on the
consoles and chiffonnieres.

‘You have been resident in my house three months?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And you came from –?’

‘From Lowood school.’

‘Ah! A charitable concern. How long were you there?’

‘Eight years.’

‘Eight years! You must be tenacious of life. I thought half the
time in such a place would have done up any constitution! No
wonder you have rather the look of another world. I marvelled
where you’d got that sort of face. When you came on me in Hay
Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had
half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse:
I’m not sure yet. Who are your parents?’

‘I have none.’

‘Nor ever had, I suppose: do you remember them?’

‘No.’

‘I thought not.’

‘Where do your brothers and sisters live?’

‘I have no brothers or sisters.’

‘Who recommended you to come here?’

‘I advertised, and Mrs Fairfax answered my advertisement.’

‘Yes,’ said the good lady, who now knew what ground we were
upon, ‘and I am daily thankful for the choice Providence led me
to make. Miss Eyre has been an invaluable companion to me,
and a kind and careful teacher to Adèle.’
‘Don’t trouble yourself to give her a character,’ returned Mr Rochester: ‘eulogiums will not bias me; I shall judge for myself.’

One day Mr Rochester had company to dinner and summoned me to join. He’d been looking two minutes at the fire, and I had been looking the same length of time at him, when turning suddenly he caught my gaze fastened on his physiognomy.

‘You examine me, Miss Eyre,’ said he: ‘do you think me handsome?’ I should, if I had deliberated, have replied to this question by something conventionally vague and polite; but the answer somehow slipped from my tongue before I was aware – ‘No, sir.’

‘Ah! By my word! There is something singular about you,’ said he: ‘you have the air of a little nonnette; quaint, quiet, grave, and simple, as you sit with your hands before you, and your eyes generally bent on the carpet (except, by the bye, when they are directed piercingly to my face; as just now, for instance); and when one asks you a question, or makes a remark to which you are obliged to reply, you rap out a round rejoinder, which, if not blunt, is at least brusque. What do you mean by it?’

‘Sir, I was too plain; I beg your pardon. I ought to have replied that it was not easy to give an impromptu answer to a question about appearances; that tastes mostly differ; and that beauty is of little consequence, or something of that sort.’

‘You ought to have replied no such thing. Beauty of little consequence, indeed! And so, under pretence of softening the previous outrage, of stroking and soothing me into placidity, you stick a sly penknife under my ear! Go on: what fault do you find with me, pray? I suppose I have all my limbs and all my features like any other man?’

‘Mr Rochester, allow me to disown my first answer: I intended no pointed repartee: it was only a blunder.’

‘Just so: I think so: and you shall be answerable for it. Criticise me: does my forehead not please you?’

He lifted up the sable waves of hair which lay horizontally over his brow, and showed a solid enough mass of intellectual organs, but an abrupt deficiency where the suave sign of benevolence should have risen.

‘Now, ma’am, am I a fool?’

‘Far from it, sir. You would, perhaps, think me rude if I inquired in return whether you are a philanthropist?’

‘There again! Another stick of the penknife, when she pretended to pat my head. No, young lady, I’m not a general philanthropist; but I bear a conscience; and, besides, I once had a kind of rude tenderness of heart. When I was as old as you, I was a feeling fellow enough; partial to the unfledged, unfostered, and unlucky; but Fortune has knocked me about since: she has even kneed me with her knuckles, and now I flatter myself I am hard and tough as an India-rubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me?’

‘Hope of what, sir?’

‘Of my final re-transformation from India-rubber back to flesh?’

‘Decidedly he has had too much wine,’ I thought; and I did not know what answer to make to his queer question: how could I tell whether he was capable of being re-formed?

‘You look very much puzzled, Miss Eyre; and though you are not pretty any more than I am handsome, yet a puzzled air becomes you: besides, it is convenient, for it keeps those searching eyes of yours away from my physiognomy, and busies them with the worsted flowers of the rug; so puzzle on. Young lady, I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative tonight.’

I rose, deeming it useless to continue a discourse which was all darkness to me; and, besides, sensible that the character of my interlocutor was beyond my penetration; at least, beyond its present reach; and feeling the uncertainty, the vague sense of insecurity, which accompanies a conviction of ignorance.

‘Where are you going?’

‘To put Adéle to bed: it is past her bedtime.’

‘You are afraid of me, because I talk like a Sphinx. You are still bent on going?’

‘It has struck nine, sir.’

‘Never mind, – wait a minute: Adéle is not ready to go to bed yet. I have been green, too, Miss Eyre – ay, grass green: not a more vernal tint freshens you now than once freshened me. My Spring is gone, however, but it has left me that French floweret on my hands, which, in some moods, I would fain be rid of. I’ll explain all this some day. Good-night.’
Mr Rochester did, on a future occasion, explain it. He told me one day that Adèle was the daughter of a French opera-dancer, Celine Varens, towards whom he’d once cherished what he called ‘a grande passion.’ This passion Celine had professed to return with even superior ardour.

‘And, Miss Eyre, so much was I flattered by this preference of the Gallic sylph for her British gnome, that I installed her in an hotel; gave her a complete establishment of servants, a carriage, cashmeres, diamonds, dentelles, etc. In short, I began the process of ruining myself in the received style, like any other spoony. I had not, it seems, the originality to chalk out a new road to shame and destruction, but trod the old track with stupid exactness not to deviate an inch from the beaten centre. I had, as I deserved to have, the fate of all other spoonies. Happening to call one evening when Celine did not expect me, I found her out; but it was a warm night, and I was tired with strolling through Paris, so I sat down in her boudoir; happy to breathe the air consecrated so lately by her presence. No, – I exaggerate; I never thought there was any consecrating virtue about her: it was rather a sort of pastille perfume she had left; a scent of musk and amber, than an odour of sanctity. I was just beginning to stifle with the fumes of conservatory flowers and sprinkled essences, when I bethought myself to open the window and step out on to the balcony. It was moonlight and gaslight besides, and very still and serene.

She was returning: of course my heart thumped with impatience against the iron rails I leant upon. The carriage stopped, as I had expected, at the hotel door; my flame (that is the very word for an opera inamorata) alighted: though muffled in a cloak – an unnecessary encumbrance, by the bye, on so warm a June evening – I knew her instantly by her little foot, seen peeping from the skirt of her dress, as she skipped from the carriage step. Bending over the balcony, I was about to murmur ‘Mon ange’ – in a tone, of course, which should be audible to the ear of love alone – when a figure jumped from the carriage after her; cloaked also; but that was a spurred heel which had rung on the pavement, and that was a hatted head which now passed under the arched porte cochere of the hotel. Opening the window, I walked in upon them; liberated Celine from my protection; gave her notice to vacate her hotel; offered her a purse for her immediate exigencies; disregarded screams, hysteric, prayers, protestations, convulsions; made an appointment with her lover for a meeting at the Bois de Boulogne. Next morning I had the pleasure of encountering him; left a bullet in one of his poor etiolated arms, feeble as the wing of a chicken in the pip, and then thought I had done with the whole crew. But unluckily the Varens, six months before, had given me this fillette Adèle, who, she affirmed, was my daughter; and perhaps she may be, though I see no proofs of such grim paternity written in her countenance: Pilot is more like me than she. Some years after I had broken with the mother, she abandoned her child, and ran away to Italy with a musician or singer. I acknowledged no natural claim on Adèle’s part to be supported by me, nor do I now acknowledge any, for I am not her father; but hearing that she was quite destitute, I e’en took the poor thing out of the slime and mud of Paris, and transplanted it here, to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden. Mrs Fairfax found you to train it; but now you know that it is the illegitimate offspring of a French opera-girl, you will perhaps think differently of your post and protègé: you will be coming to me some day with notice that you have found another place, that you beg me to look out for a new governess, etc. Eh?’

‘No: Adèle is not answerable for either her mother’s faults or yours: I have a regard for her; and now that I know she is, in a sense, parentless – forsaken by her mother and disowned by you, sir – I shall cling closer to her than before. How could I possibly prefer the spoilt pet of a wealthy family, who would hate her governess as a nuisance, to a lonely little orphan, who leans towards her as a friend?’

‘Oh, that is the light in which you view it! Well, I must go in now; and you too: it darkens.’

And was Mr Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No, reader: gratitude, and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see; his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire.

Though I had now extinguished my candle and was laid down in bed, I could not sleep for thinking of his look when he paused in the avenue, and told how his destiny had risen up before him, and dared him to be happy at Thornfield.

The clock, far down in the hall, struck two. Just then it seemed my chamber-door was touched; as if fingers had swept
the panels in groping a way along the dark gallery outside. I said, 'Who's there?'

Nothing answered. I was chilled with fear. There was a demoniac laugh – low, suppressed, and deep – uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin-laughed stood at my bedside, or rather, crouched by my pillow: but I rose, looked round, and could see nothing; while, as I still gazed, the unnatural sound was reiterated: and I knew it came from behind the panels. My first impulse was to rise and fasten the bolt; my next, again to cry out, 'Who's there?'

Something gurgled and moaned. Ere long, steps retreated up the gallery towards the third-storey staircase: a door had lately been made to shut in that staircase; I heard it open and close, and all was still. Something creaked: it was a door ajar; and that door was Mr Rochester's, and the smoke rushed in a cloud from thence. I thought no more of Mrs Fairfax: I thought no more of Grace Poole, or the laugh: in an instant, I was within the chamber. Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of blaze and vapour, Mr Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep.

'Wake! Wake!' I cried. I shook him, but he only murmured and turned: the smoke had stupefied him. Not a moment could be lost: the very sheets were kindling. I rushed to his basin and ewer; fortunately, one was wide and the other deep, and both were filled with water. I heaved them up, deluged the bed and its occupant, flew back to my own room, brought my own water-jug, baptized the couch afresh; and, by God's aid, succeeded in extinguishing the flames which were devouring it.

The hiss of the quenched element, the breakage of a pitcher which I flung from my hand when I had emptied it, and, above all, the splash of the shower-bath I had liberally bestowed, roused Mr Rochester at last. Though it was now dark, I knew he was awake; because I heard him fulminating strange anathemas at finding himself lying in a pool of water.

'Is there a flood?' he cried.

'No, sir,' I answered; 'but there has been a fire: get up, do; you are quenched now; I will fetch you a candle.'

'In the name of all the elves in Christendom, is that Jane Eyre?' he demanded. 'What have you done with me, witch, sorceress? Who is in the room besides you? Have you plotted to drown me?'

'I will fetch you a candle, sir; and, in Heaven's name, get up. Somebody has plotted something: you cannot too soon find out who and what it is.'

'There! I am up now; but at your peril you fetch a candle yet: wait two minutes till I get into some dry garments, if any dry there be – yes, here is my dressing-gown. Now run!' I did run; I brought the candle which still remained in the gallery. He took it from my hand, held it up, and surveyed the bed, all blackened and scorched, the sheets drenched, the carpet round swimming in water.

'What is it? And who did it?' he asked. I briefly related to him what had transpired: the strange laugh I had heard in the gallery: the step ascending to the third storey; the smoke, – the smell of fire which had conducted me to his room; in what state I had found matters there, and how I had deluged him with all the water I could lay hands on.

'You heard an odd laugh? You've heard that laugh before, I should think, or something like it?'

'Yes, sir: there is a woman who sews here, called Grace Poole, – she laughs in that way. She is a singular person.'

'Just so. Grace Poole, you have guessed it. She is, as you say, singular – very. Well, I shall reflect on the subject. Meantime, I am glad that you are the only person, besides myself, acquainted with the precise details of tonight's incident. You are no talking fool: say nothing about it. I will account for this state of affairs' (pointing to the bed): 'and now return to your own room. I shall do very well on the sofa in the library for the rest of the night. It is near four: – in two hours the servants will be up.'

'Good-night, then, sir,' said I, departing.

He seemed surprised, very inconsistently so, as he had just told me to go.

'What!' he exclaimed, 'are you quitting me already, and in that way?'

'You said I might go, sir.'

'But not without taking leave; not without a word or two of acknowledgment and good-will: not, in short, in that brief, dry fashion. Why, you have saved my life! – Snatched me from a horrible and excruciating death! And you walk past me as if we were mutual strangers! At least shake hands.'
He held out his hand; I gave him mine: he took it first in one, then in both his own.

‘You have saved my life: I have a pleasure in owing you so immense a debt. I cannot say more. Nothing else that has being would have been tolerable to me in the character of creditor for such an obligation: but you: it is different, I feel your benefit no burden, Jane.’

He paused; gazed at me: words almost visible trembled on his lips, – but his voice was checked.

‘Good night again, sir. There is no debt, benefit, burden, obligation, in the case.’

‘I knew,’ he continued, you would do me good in some way, at some time. I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you: their expression and smile did not’ – (again he stopped) – ‘did not’ (he proceeded hastily) ‘strike delight to my very inmost heart so for nothing. People talk of natural sympathies; I have heard of good genii: there are grains of truth in the wildest fable. My cherished preserver, good-night!’

Next day I awoke to find Mr Rochester gone to stay with a party some miles distant.

Mr Rochester had been absent upwards of a fortnight, when the post brought Mrs Fairfax a letter.

‘It’s from the master,’ said she, as she looked at the direction. ‘Now I suppose we shall know whether we are to expect his return or not.’

And while she broke the seal and perused the document, I went on taking my coffee (we were at breakfast): it was hot, and I attributed to that circumstance a fiery glow which suddenly rose to my face. Why my hand shook, and why I involuntarily spilt half the contents of my cup into my saucer, I did not choose to consider.

‘Well, I sometimes think we are too quiet; but we run a chance of being busy enough now: for a little while at least,’ said Mrs Fairfax, still holding the note before her spectacles.

Ere I permitted myself to request an explanation, I tied the string of Adèle’s pinafore, which happened to be loose: having helped her also to another bun and refilled her mug with milk, I said nonchalantly – ‘Mr Rochester is not likely to return soon, I suppose?’

‘Indeed he is – in three days, he says: that will be next Thursday; and not alone either. I don’t know how many of the fine people at the Leas are coming with him: he sends directions for all the best bedrooms to be prepared; and the library and the drawing-rooms are to be cleaned out; I am to get more kitchen hands from the George Inn, at Millcote, and from wherever else I can; and the ladies will bring their maids and the gentlemen their valets: so we shall have a full house of it.’ And Mrs Fairfax swallowed her breakfast and hastened away to commence operations.

Thursday came: all work had been completed the previous evening; carpets were laid down, bed-hangings festooned, radiant white counterpanes spread, toilet tables arranged, furniture rubbed, flowers piled in vases: both chambers and saloons looked as fresh and bright as hands could make them.

‘It gets late,’ said Mrs Fairfax, entering in rustling state. ‘I am glad I ordered dinner an hour after the time Mr Rochester mentioned; for it is past six now. I’ve sent John down to the gates to see if there is anything on the road: one can see a long way from thence in the direction of Millcote.’ She went to the window. ‘Here he is!’ said she. ‘Well, John’ (leaning out), ‘any news?’

‘They’re coming, ma’am,’ was the answer. ‘They’ll be here in ten minutes.’

Adèle flew to the window. I followed, taking care to stand on one side, so that, screened by the curtain, I could see without being seen.

The ten minutes John had given seemed very long, but at last wheels were heard; four equestrians galloped up the drive, and after them came two open carriages. Fluttering veils and waving plumes filled the vehicles; two of the cavaliers were young, dashing-looking gentlemen; the third was Mr Rochester, on his black horse, Mesrour, Pilot bounding before him; at his side rode a lady, and he and she were the first of the party. Her purple riding-habit almost swept the ground, her veil streamed long on the breeze; mingling with its transparent folds, and gleaming through them, shone rich raven ringlets.

‘Miss Ingram!’ exclaimed Mrs Fairfax, and away she hurried to her post below.

That evening Adèle and I descended to the drawing room where all Mr Rochester’s guests were gathered. The three most distinguished – partly, perhaps, because the tallest figures of
the band – were the Dowager Lady Ingram and her daughters, Blanche and Mary. They were all three of the loftiest stature of women. The Dowager might be between forty and fifty; her shape was still fine; her hair (by candlelight at least) still black; her teeth, too, were still apparently perfect. Most people would have termed her a splendid woman of her age: and so she was, no doubt, physically speaking; but then there was an expression of almost insupportable haughtiness in her bearing and countenance.

And where is Mr Rochester? He comes in last: I'm not looking at the door way, yet I see him enter.

And Blanche Ingram? She is standing alone at the table, bending gracefully over an album. She seems waiting to be sought; but she will not wait too long: she herself selects a mate. Mr Rochester, having quitted the Eshtons, stands on the hearth as solitary as she stands by the table: she confronts him, taking her station on the opposite side of the mantelpiece.

‘Mr Rochester, I thought you were not fond of children?’

‘Nor am I.’

‘Then, what induced you to take charge of such a little doll as that?’ (pointing to Adèle). ‘Where did you pick her up?’

‘I did not pick her up; she was left on my hands.’

‘You should have sent her to school.’

‘I could not afford it: schools are so dear.’

‘Why, I suppose you have a governess for her: I saw a person with her just now, is she gone? Oh, no! There she is still, behind the window-curtain. You pay her, of course; I should think it quite as expensive, more so; for you have them both to keep in addition.’ I feared, or should I say, hoped, the allusion to me would make Mr Rochester glance my way; and I involuntarily shrank farther into the shade: but he never turned his eyes.

‘I have not considered the subject,’ he said indifferently, looking straight before him.

‘No, you men never do consider economy and common sense. You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi – were they not, mama?’

‘My dearest, don’t mention governesses; the word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice. I thank Heaven I have now done with them!’

I then quitted my sheltered corner and made my exit by the side-door, which was fortunately near. Thence a narrow passage led into the hall: in crossing it, I perceived my sandal was loose; I stopped to tie it, kneeling down for that purpose on the mat at the foot of the staircase. I heard the dining-room door unclose; a gentleman came out; rising hastily, I stood face to face with him: it was Mr Rochester.

‘How do you do?’ he asked.

‘I'm very well, sir.’

‘Why did you not come and speak to me in the room?’

I thought I might have retorted the question on him who put it: but I would not take that freedom. I answered, ‘I did not wish to disturb you, as you seemed engaged, sir.’

‘What have you been doing during my absence?’

‘Nothing particular; teaching Adèle as usual.’

‘And getting a good deal paler than you were, as I saw at first sight. What is the matter?’

‘Nothing at all, sir.’

‘Did you take any cold that night you half drowned me?’

‘Not the least.’

‘Return to the drawing-room: you are deserting too early.’

‘I am tired, sir.’

He looked at me for a minute.

‘And a little depressed,’ he said. ‘What about? Tell me.’

‘Nothing – nothing, sir. I am not depressed.’

‘But I affirm that you are: so much depressed that a few more words would bring tears to your eyes, indeed, there they are now, shining and swimming; and a bead has slipped from the lash and fallen on to the flag. If I had time, and was not in mortal dread of some prating prig of a servant passing, I would know what all this means. Well, to-night I excuse you; but understand that so long as my visitors stay, I expect you to appear in the drawing-room every evening; it is my wish; don’t neglect it. Now go, and send Sophie for Adèle. Good-night, my – ’ He stopped, bit his lip, and abruptly left me.

I had learnt to love Mr Rochester: I could not unlove him now, merely because I found that he had ceased to notice me – because I might pass hours in his presence, and he would never once turn his eyes in my direction – because I saw all his
attentions appropriated by a great lady, who scorned to touch me with the hem of her robes as she passed; who, if ever her dark and imperious eye fell on me by chance, would withdraw it instantly as from an object too mean to merit observation.

But I was not jealous: or very rarely. The nature of the pain I suffered could not be explained by that word. Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. Pardon the seeming paradox; I mean what I say.

I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons, because her rank and connections suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point – this was where the nerve was touched and teased – this was where the fever was sustained and fed: she could not charm him.

One afternoon, when Mr Rochester and his guests were out riding, a Mr Mason arrived at the house. On Mr Rochester’s return I told him of who had arrived.

‘Are you aware, Mr Rochester, that a stranger has arrived here since you left this morning?’

‘A stranger! No; who can it be? I expected no one; is he gone?’

‘No; he said he had known you long, and that he could take the liberty of installing himself here till you returned.’

‘The devil he did! Did he give his name?’

‘His name is Mason, sir; and he comes from the West Indies; from Spanish Town, in Jamaica, I think.’

Mr Rochester was standing near me; he had taken my hand, as if to lead me to a chair. As I spoke he gave my wrist a convulsive grip; the smile on his lips froze: apparently a spasm caught his breath.

‘Mason! – The West Indies!’ he said, in the tone one might fancy a speaking automaton to enounce its single words; ‘Mason! – The West Indies!’ he reiterated; and he went over the syllables three times, growing, in the intervals of speaking, whiter than ashes: he hardly seemed to know what he was doing.

‘Do you feel ill, sir?’ I inquired.

‘Jane, I’ve got a blow; I’ve got a blow, Jane!’ He staggered.

‘Oh, lean on me, sir.’

‘Jane, you offered me your shoulder once before; let me have it now.’

‘Yes, sir; yes; and my arm.’

He sat down, and made me sit beside him. Holding my hand in both his own, he chafed it; gazing on me, at the same time, with the most troubled and dreary look.

‘Go back now into the room; step quietly up to Mason, and whisper in his ear that Mr Rochester is come and wishes to see him: show him in here and then leave me.’

‘Yes, sir.’

I did his behest.

Good God! What a cry! The night – its silence – its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall. My pulse stopped: my heart stood still; my stretched arm was paralysed. The cry died, and was not renewed. Indeed, whatever being uttered that fearful shriek could not soon repeat it: not the widest-winged condor on the Andes could, twice in succession, send out such a yell from the cloud shrouding his eyrie. The thing delivering such utterance must rest ere it could repeat the effort.

It came out of the third storey; for it passed overhead. And overhead – yes, in the room just above my chamber ceiling – I now heard a struggle: a deadly one it seemed from the noise; and a half-smothered voice shouted, ‘Help! Help! Help!’ three times rapidly. ‘Will no one come?’ it cried; and then, while the staggering and stamping went on wildly, I distinguished through plank and plaster: – ‘Rochester! Rochester! for God’s sake, come!’

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

I had put on some clothes, though horror shook all my limbs; I issued from my apartment. The sleepers were all aroused: ejaculations, terrified murmurs sounded in every room; door after door unclosed; one looked out and another looked out; the gallery filled. Gentlemen and ladies alike had quit their beds; and ‘Oh! What’s that?’ – ‘Who’s hurt?’ – ‘What has happened?’ – ‘Fetch a light!’ – ‘Is it fire?’ – ‘Are there robbers?’ – ‘Where shall we run?’ was demanded confusedly on all hands. But for the moonlight they would have been in complete darkness. They ran to and fro; they crowded together: some sobbed, some stumbled: confusion was inextricable.
And the door at the end of the gallery opened, and Mr Rochester advanced with a candle: he had just descended from the upper storey. One of the ladies ran to him directly; she seized his arm: it was Miss Ingram.

‘What awful event has taken place?’ said she. ‘Speak! Let us know the worst at once!’

‘All right! All right!’ he cried. ‘It’s a mere rehearsal of Much Ado about Nothing. Ladies, keep off, or I shall wax dangerous.’ And dangerous he looked: his black eyes darted sparks. Calming himself by an effort, he added, ‘A servant has had a nightmare; that is all. She is an excitable, nervous person: she construed her dream into an apparition, or something of that sort, no doubt; and has taken a fit with fright. Now, then, I must see you all back into your rooms; for, till the house is settled, she cannot be looked after. Gentlemen, have the goodness to set the ladies the example. Miss Ingram, I am sure you will not fail in evincing superiority to idle terrors. Mesdames’ (to the dowagers), ‘you will take cold to a dead certainty, if you stay in this chill gallery any longer.’

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

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

‘Am I wanted?’ I asked.

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

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And dressed?’

‘Yes.’

‘Come out, then, quietly.’

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

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

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

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

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Have you any salts – volatile salts?’

‘Yes.’

‘Go back and fetch both.’

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

‘You don’t turn sick at the sight of blood?’

‘I think I shall not: I’ve never been tried yet.’

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

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

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

I saw a room I remembered to have seen before, the day Mrs Fairfax showed me over the house: it was hung with tapestry; but the tapestry was now looped up in one part, and there was a door apparent, which had then been concealed. This door was open; a light shone out of the room within: I heard thence a snarling, snatchling sound, almost like a dog quarrelling. Mr Rochester, putting down his candle, said to me, ‘Wait a minute,’ and he went forward to the inner apartment. A shout of laughter greeted his entrance; noisy at first, and terminating in Grace Poole’s own goblin ha! ha! She then was there. He made some sort of arrangement without speaking, though I heard a low voice address him: he came out and closed the door behind him.

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

‘Hold the candle,’ said Mr Rochester, and I took it: he fetched a basin of water from the washstand: ‘Hold that,’ said he. I obeyed. He took the sponge, dipped it in, and moistened the
corpse-like face; he asked for my smelling-bottle, and applied it to the nostrils. Mr Mason shortly unclosed his eyes; he groaned. Mr Rochester opened the shirt of the wounded man, whose arm and shoulder were bandaged: he sponged away blood, trickling fast down.

‘Is there immediate danger?’ murmured Mr Mason.

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

‘Sir?’

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

Again the poor man groaned; he looked as if he dared not move; fear, either of death or of something else, appeared almost to paralyse him. Mr Rochester put the now bloody sponge into my hand, and I proceeded to use it as he had done. He watched me a second, then saying, ‘Remember! No conversation,’ he left the room.

I experienced a strange feeling as the key grated in the lock, and the sound of his retreating step ceased to be heard.

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

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

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

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

‘But is he fit to move, sir?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘I do feel better,’ remarked Mr Mason.

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

It was by this time half-past five, and the sun was on the point of rising; but I found the kitchen still dark and silent. The side-passage door was fastened; I opened it with as little noise as possible: all the yard was quiet; but the gates stood wide open, and there was a post-chaise, with horses ready harnessed, and driver seated on the box, stationed outside. I approached him, and said the gentlemen were coming; he nodded: then I looked carefully round and listened. The gentlemen now appeared. Mason, supported by Mr Rochester and the surgeon, seemed to walk with tolerable ease: they assisted him into the chaise; Carter followed.
‘Take care of him,’ said Mr Rochester to the latter, ‘and keep him at your house till he is quite well: I shall ride over in a day or two to see how he gets on. Richard, how is it with you?’

‘The fresh air revives me, Fairfax.’

‘Leave the window open on his side, Carter; there is no wind. Good-bye, Dick.’

‘Fairfax –’

‘Well, what is it?’

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

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

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

Some days after this drama, I received news from my aunt, Mrs Read. John Read had killed himself and my aunt was very ill. She asked me to visit her and I decided that I would, despite her unkindnesses to me in the past. But first I had to take leave of my master.

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

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

‘What to do? where to go?’

‘To see a sick lady who has sent for me.’

‘What sick lady – where does she live?’

‘At Gateshead.’

‘Gateshead? That is a hundred miles off! Who may she be that sends for people to see her that distance?’

‘Her name is Reed sir – Mrs Reed,’ I said.

‘Reed of Gateshead? There was a Reed of Gateshead, a magistrate.’

‘It is his widow, sir.’

‘And what have you to do with her? How do you know her?’

‘Mr Reed was my uncle – my mother’s brother.’

‘The deuce he was! You never told me that before: you always said you had no relations,’ he said

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

‘How long will you stay?’

‘As short a time as possible, sir.’

‘Promise me only to stay a week.’

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

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

‘Oh, no! I shall certainly return if all be well,’ I said. ‘Mr Rochester, I may as well mention another matter of business to you while I have the opportunity.’

‘Matter of business? I am curious to hear it.’

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

‘Yes; what then?’

‘In that case, sir, Adèle ought to go to school: I’m sure you will perceive the necessity of it.’

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

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

‘In course!’ he exclaimed, with a twang of voice and a distortion of features equally fantastic and ludicrous. He looked at me some minutes.

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

‘No, sir, I must prepare for the journey.’

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

‘I suppose so, sir.’

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

‘They say, Farewell, or any other form they prefer.’

‘Then say it.’

‘Farewell, Mr Rochester, for the present.’

‘What must I say?’

‘The same, if you like, sir.’

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

‘Yes.’

‘It seems stingy, to my notions, and dry, and unfriendly. I should like something else: a little addition to the rite. If one shook hands, for instance; but no – that would not content me either. So you’ll do no more than say Farewell, Jane?’

‘It is enough, sir: as much good-will may be conveyed in one hearty word as in many.’
I arrived at Gateshead on the first of May, to find my aunt earnest in her desire to talk to me. She handed me a letter, it was short, and thus conceived:

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

‘John Eyre, Madeira.’

It was dated three years back.

‘Why did I never hear of this?’ I asked.

‘Because I disliked you too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting you to prosperity. I could not forget your conduct to me, Jane – the fury with which you once turned on me. I tell you I could not forget it; and I took my revenge: for you to be adopted by your uncle, and placed in a state of ease and comfort, was what I could not endure. I wrote to him; I said I was sorry for his disappointment, but Jane Eyre was dead: she had died of typhus fever at Lowood. Now act as you please: write and contradict my assertion – expose my falsehood as soon as you like. You were born, I think, to be my torment: my last hour is racked by the recollection of a deed which, but for you, I should never have been tempted to commit.’

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

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

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

I approached my cheek to her lips: she would not touch it. She said I oppressed her by leaning over the bed, and again demanded water. As I laid her down – for I raised her and supported her on my arm while she drank – I covered her ice-cold and clammy hand with mine: the feeble fingers shrank from my touch – the glazing eyes shunned my gaze.

‘Love me, then, or hate me, as you will,’ I said at last, ‘you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God’s, and be at peace.’

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

The nurse now entered, and Bessie followed. I yet lingered half-an-hour longer, hoping to see some sign of amity: but she gave none. She was fast relapsing into stupor; nor did her mind again rally: at twelve o’clock that night she died.

At last I returned to Thornfield. I see the narrow stile with stone steps; and I see Mr Rochester sitting there, a book and a pencil in his hand; he is writing.

‘And this is Jane Eyre? Are you coming from Millcote, and on foot? Yes – just one of your tricks: not to send for a carriage, and come clattering over street and road like a common mortal, but to steal into the vicinage of your home along with twilight, just as if you were a dream or a shade. What the deuce have you done with yourself this last month?’

‘I have been with my aunt, sir, who is dead.’

‘Truant! Truant! Absent from me a whole month, and forgetting me quite, I’ll be sworn! Pass, Janet,’ said he, making room for me to cross the stile: ‘go up home, and stay your weary little wandering feet at a friend’s threshold.’

All I had now to do was to obey him in silence: no need for me to colloquise further. I got over the stile without a word, and meant to leave him calmly. An impulse held me fast – a force turned me round. I said – or something in me said for me, and in spite of me –

‘Thank you, Mr Rochester, for your great kindness. I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home – my only home.’
On Midsummer-eve, Adele, weary with gathering wild strawberries in Hay Lane half the day, had gone to bed with the sun. I watched her drop asleep, and when I left her, I sought the garden. Mr Rochester had the same inclination, for he was there also.

‘Jane,’ he commenced, as we entered the laurel walk, and slowly strayed down in the direction of the sunk fence and the horse-chestnut, ‘Thornfield is a pleasant place in the summer, is it not?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You must have become in some degree attached to the house, — you, who have an eye for natural beauties, and a good deal of the organ of Adhesiveness?’

‘I am attached to it, indeed.’

‘And though I don’t comprehend how it is, I perceive you have acquired a degree of regard for that foolish little child Adele, too; and even for simple dame Fairfax?’

‘Yes, sir; in different ways, I have an affection for both.’

‘And would be sorry to part with them?’

‘Yes.’

‘Pity!’ he said, and sighed and paused. ‘It is always the way of events in this life,’ he continued presently: ‘no sooner have you got settled in a pleasant resting-place, than a voice calls out to you to rise and move on, for the hour of repose is expired.’

‘Must I move on, sir?’ I asked. ‘Must I leave Thornfield?’

‘I believe you must, Jane. I am sorry, Janet, but I believe indeed you must.’

This was a blow: but I did not let it prostrate me.

‘Well, sir, I shall be ready when the order to march comes.’

‘It is come now — I must give it to-night.’

‘Then you are going to be married, sir?’

‘Ex-act-ly — pre-cise-ly: with your usual acuteness, you have hit the nail straight on the head.’

‘Soon, sir?’

‘Jane, do you hear that nightingale singing in the wood? Listen!’

In listening, I sobbed convulsively; for I could repress what I endured no longer; I was obliged to yield, and I was shaken from head to foot with acute distress. When I did speak, it was only to express an impetuous wish that I had never been born, or never come to Thornfield.

‘Because you are sorry to leave it?’ he asked.

The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway, and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last: yes, — and to speak.

‘I grieve to leave Thornfield: I love Thornfield: — I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life, — momentarily at least. I have not been trampled on. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what is bright and energetic and high. I have talked, face to face, with what I reverence, with what I delight in, — with an original, a vigorous, an expanded mind. I have known you, Mr Rochester; and it strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you for ever. I see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death.’

‘Where do you see the necessity?’ he asked suddenly.

‘Where? You, sir, have placed it before me.’

‘In what shape?’

‘In the shape of Miss Ingram; a noble and beautiful woman, — your bride.’

‘My bride! What bride? I have no bride!’

‘But you will have.’

‘Yes; — I will!’ — I will!’ He set his teeth.

‘Then I must go: — you have said it yourself.’

‘No: you must stay! I swear it — and the oath shall be kept.’

‘Come to my side, Jane, and let us explain and understand one another.’

‘I will never again come to your side: I’m torn away now, and cannot return.’

‘But, Jane, I summon you as my wife: it is you only I intend to marry.’

I was silent: I thought he mocked me.

‘Come, Jane — come hither.’

‘Your bride stands between us.’

He rose, and with a stride reached me.

‘My bride is here,’ he said, again drawing me to him, ‘because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?’

Still I did not answer, and still I writhed myself from grasp: for I was still incredulous.

‘Do you doubt me, Jane?’
‘ Entirely.’
‘ You have no faith in me?’
‘Not a whit.’

‘Am I a liar in your eyes?’ he asked passionately. ‘Little sceptic, you shall be convinced. What love have I for Miss Ingram? None: and that you know. What love has she for me? None: as I have taken pains to prove: I caused a rumour to reach her that my fortune was not a third of what was supposed, and after that I presented myself to see the result; it was coldness both from her and her mother. I would not – I could not – marry Miss Ingram. You – you strange, you almost unearthly thing! – I love as my own flesh. You – poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are – I entreat to accept me as a husband.’

‘What, me!’ I ejaculated, beginning in his earnestness – and especially in his incivility – to credit his sincerity: ‘me who have not a friend in the world but you – if you are my friend: not a shilling but what you've given me?’

‘You, Jane, I must have you for my own – entirely my own. Will you be mine? Say yes, quickly.’

‘Are you in earnest? Do you truly love me? Do you sincerely wish me to be your wife?’

‘I do; and if an oath is necessary to satisfy you, I swear it.’

‘Then, sir, I will marry you.’

‘My little wife!’

‘Dear Edward!’

‘Come to me – come to me entirely now,’ said he; and added, in his deepest tone, speaking in my ear as his cheek was laid on mine, ‘Make my happiness – I will make yours.’

‘God pardon me! he subjoined ere long; ‘and man meddle not with me: I have her, and will hold her.’

‘There is no one to meddle, sir. I have no kindred to interfere.’

‘No – that is the best of it,’ he said.

And if I had loved him less I should have thought his accent and look of exultation savage; but, sitting by him, roused from the nightmare of parting – called to the paradise of union – I thought only of the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow.

The month of courtship had wasted: its very last hours were being numbered. There was no putting off the day that advanced – the bridal day; and all preparations for its arrival were complete. I, at least, had nothing more to do: there were my trunks, packed, locked, corded, ranged in a row along the wall of my little chamber; to-morrow, at this time, they would be far on their road to London: and so should I – or rather, not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. The cards of address alone remained to nail on: they lay, four little squares, in the drawer. Mr Rochester himself had written the direction, 'Mrs Rochester, London,' on each: I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o'clock A.M.; and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive before I assigned to her all that property.

Next morning I rose early. There were no groomsmen, no bridesmaids, no relatives to wait for or marshal: none but Mr Rochester and I. Mrs Fairfax stood in the hall as we passed. I fain would have spoken to her, but my hand was held by a grasp of iron: I was hurried along by a stride I could hardly follow; and to look at Mr Rochester's face was to feel that not a second of delay would be tolerated for any purpose. I wonder what other bridegroom ever looked as he did – so bent up to a purpose, so grimly resolute: or who, under such steadfast brows, ever revealed such flaming and flashing eyes.

We entered the quiet and humble temple; the priest waited in his white surplice at the lowly altar, the clerk beside him. All was still: two shadows only moved in a remote corner. The strangers had slipped in before us, and they now stood by the vault of the Rochesters, their backs towards us, viewing through the rails the old times-stained marble tomb, where a kneeling angel guarded the remains of Damer de Rochester, slain at Marston Moor in the time of the civil wars, and of Elizabeth, his wife.

Our place was taken at the communion rails. Hearing a cautious step behind me, I glanced over my shoulder: one of the strangers – a gentleman, evidently – was advancing up the chancel. The service began. The explanation of the intent of matrimony was gone through; and then the clergyman came a step farther forward, and, bending slightly towards Mr Rochester, went on.

'I require and charge you both (as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be
disclosed), that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it; for be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God’s Word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful.

He paused, as the custom is. When is the pause after that sentence ever broken by reply? Not, perhaps, once in a hundred years. And the clergyman, who had not lifted his eyes from his book, and had held his breath but for a moment, was proceeding: his hand was already stretched towards Mr Rochester, as his lips unclosed to ask, ‘Wilt thou have this woman for thy wedded wife? –’ when a distinct and near voice said –

‘The marriage cannot go on: I declare the existence of an impediment.’

The clergyman looked up at the speaker and stood mute; the clerk did the same; Mr Rochester moved slightly, as if an earthquake had rolled under his feet: taking a firmer footing, and not turning his head or eyes, he said, ‘Proceed.’

Profound silence fell when he had uttered that word, with deep but low intonation. Presently the clergyman said –

‘I cannot proceed without some investigation into what has been asserted, and evidence of its truth or falsehood.’

‘The ceremony is quite broken off,’ subjoined the voice behind us. ‘I am in a condition to prove my allegation: an insuperable impediment to this marriage exists.’

The speaker came forward and leaned on the rails. He continued, uttering each word distinctly, calmly, steadily, but not loudly – ‘It simply consists in the existence of a previous marriage. Mr Rochester has a wife now living.’

My nerves vibrated to those low-spoken words as they had never vibrated to thunder – my blood felt their subtle violence as it had never felt frost or fire; but I was collected, and in no danger of swooning. I looked at Mr Rochester: I made him look at me. His whole face was colourless rock: his eye was both spark and flint. He disavowed nothing: he seemed as if he would defy all things. Without speaking, without smiling, without seeming to recognise in me a human being, he only twined my waist with his arm and riveted me to his side.

‘Who are you?’ he asked of the intruder.

‘My name is Briggs, a solicitor of London.’

‘And you would thrust on me a wife?’

‘I would remind you of your lady’s existence, sir, which the law recognises, if you do not.’

‘Favour me with an account of her – with her name, her parentage, her place of abode.’

‘Certainly.’ Mr Briggs calmly took a paper from his pocket, and read out in a sort of official, nasal voice: –

‘I affirm and can prove that fifteen years ago, Edward Fairfax Rochester, of Thornfield Hall, and of Ferndean Manor, England, was married to my sister, Bertha Antoinetta Mason, daughter of Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta his wife, a Creole, in Spanish Town, Jamaica. The record of the marriage will be found in the register of that church – a copy of it is now in my possession. Signed, Richard Mason.’

‘That – if a genuine document – may prove I have been married, but it does not prove that the woman mentioned therein as my wife is still living.’

‘She was living three months ago,’ returned the lawyer.

‘How do you know?’

‘I have a witness to the fact, whose testimony even you, sir, will scarcely controvert.’

‘Produce him – or go to hell.’

‘I will produce him first – he is on the spot. Mr Mason, have the goodness to step forward.’

Mr Rochester, on hearing the name, set his teeth; he experienced, too, a sort of strong convulsive quiver; near to him as I was, I felt the spasmodic movement of fury or despair run through his frame. The second stranger, who had hitherto lingered in the background, now drew near; a pale face looked over the solicitor’s shoulder – yes, it was Mason himself. Mr Rochester turned and glared at him. His eye, as I have often said, was a black eye: it had now a tawny, nay, a bloody light in its gloom; and his face flushed – olive cheek and hueless forehead received a glow as from spreading, ascending heart-fire: and he stirred, lifted his strong arm – he could have struck Mason, dashed him on the church-floor, shocked by ruthless blow the breath from his body – but Mason shrank away and cried faintly, ‘Good God!’

Contempt fell cool on Mr Rochester – his passion died as if a blight had shrivelled it up: he only asked, ‘What have you to say?’
An inaudible reply escaped Mason’s white lips.
‘The devil is in it if you cannot answer distinctly. I again demand, what have you to say?’
‘Sir – sir,’ interrupted the clergyman, ‘do not forget you are in a sacred place.’ Then addressing Mason, he inquired gently, ‘Are you aware, sir, whether or not this gentleman’s wife is still living?’
‘Courage,’ urged the lawyer, ‘speak out.’
‘She is now living at Thornfield Hall,’ said Mason, in more articulate tones: ‘I saw her there last April. I am her brother.’
‘At Thornfield Hall!’ ejaculated the clergyman. ‘Impossible! I am an old resident in this neighbourhood, sir, and I have never heard of a Mrs Rochester at Thornfield Hall.’
I saw a grim smile contort Mr Rochester’s lips, and he muttered – ‘No, by God! I took care that none should hear of it – or of her under that name.’
He mused – for ten minutes he held counsel with himself: he formed his resolve, and announced it, ‘Enough! All shall bolt out at once, like the bullet from the barrel. Leave the church: there will be no wedding to-day. I invite you all to come up to the house and visit Mrs Poole’s patient, and my wife! You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human. This girl,’ he continued, looking at me, ‘knew no more than you, of the disgusting secret: she thought all was fair and legal, and never dreamed she was going to be entrapped into a feigned union with a defrauded wretch, already bound to a bad, mad, and embittered partner! Come all of you, follow!’

Still holding me fast, he left the church: the three gentlemen came after. At the front door of the hall we found the carriage.
‘Take it back to the coach-house, John,’ said Mr Rochester coolly: ‘it will not be wanted to-day.’
At our entrance, Mrs Fairfax, Adèle, Sophie, Leah, advanced to meet and greet us.
‘To the right-about – every soul!’ cried the master; ‘away with your congratulations! Who wants them? Not I! They are fifteen years too late!’
He passed on and ascended the stairs, still holding my hand, and still beckoning the gentlemen to follow him, which they did. We mounted the first staircase, passed up the gallery, proceeded to the third storey: the low, black door, opened by Mr Rochester’s master-key, admitted us to the tapestried room, with its great bed and its pictorial cabinet.
‘You know this place, Mason,’ said our guide; ‘she bit and stabbed you here.’
He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door: this, too, he opened. In a room without a window, there burnt a fire guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain. Grace Poole bent over the fire, apparently cooking something in a saucepan. In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal; but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.
‘Good-morrow, Mrs Poole!’ said Mr Rochester. ‘How are you? And how is your charge to-day?’
‘We’re tolerable, sir, I thank you,’ replied Grace, lifting the boiling mess carefully on to the hob: ‘rather snappish, but not ‘rageous.’
A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favourable report: the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet.
‘Ah! sir, she sees you!’ exclaimed Grace: ‘you’d better not stay.’
‘Only a few moments, Grace: you must allow me a few moments.’
‘Take care then, sir! – for God’s sake, take care!’
The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. Mrs Poole advanced.
‘Keep out of the way,’ said Mr Rochester, thrusting her aside: ‘she has no knife now, I suppose, and I’m on my guard.’
‘One never knows what she has, sir: she’s so cunning: it is not in mortal discretion to fathom her craft.’
‘We’d better leave her,’ whispered Mason.
‘Go to the devil!’ was his brother-in-law’s recommendation.
‘Ware!’ cried Grace. The three gentlemen retreated simultaneously. Mr Rochester flung me behind him: the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equaling her husband, and corpulent besides: she
showed virile force in the contest – more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. He could have settled her with a well- planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he master ed her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinion ed them behind her: with more rope, he bound her to a chair. The operation was performed amidst the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges. Mr Rochester then turned to the spectators: he looked at them with a smile both acrid and desolate.

‘That is my wife,’ said he.

My eyes were covered and closed: eddying darkness seemed to swim around me, and reflection came in as black and confused a flow. Self-abandoned, relaxed, and effortless, I seemed to have laid me down in the dried-up bed of a great river; I heard a flood loosened in remote mountains, and I felt the torrent come: to rise I had no will, to flee I had no strength. I lay faint, longing to be dead. One idea only still throbb ed life-like within me – a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer: these words went wandering up and down in my rayless mind, as something that would be whispered, but no energy was found to express them.

‘Be not far from me, for trouble is near: there is none to help.’

It was near: and as I had lifted no petition to Heaven to avert it – as I had neither joined my hands, nor bent my knees, nor moved my lips – it came: in full heavy swing the torrent poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, ‘the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing: I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me.’

Some time in the afternoon I raised my head, and looking round and seeing the western sun gilding the sign of its decline on the wall, I asked, ‘What am I to do?’

I rose up suddenly, terror-struck at the solitude which so ruthless a judge haunted, – at the silence which so awful a voice filled. My head swam as I stood erect. I perceived that I was sickening from excitement and inanition; neither meat nor drink had passed my lips that day, for I’d taken no breakfast. And, with a strange pang, I now reflected that, long as I had been shut up here, no message had been sent to ask how I was, or to invite me to come down: not even little Adèle had tapped at the door; nor even Mrs Fairfax had sought me. ‘Friends always forget those whom fortune forsakes,’ I murmured, as I undrew the bolt and passed out. I stumbled over an obstacle: my head was still dizzy, my sight was dim, and limbs were feeble. I could not soon recover myself. I fell, but not on to the ground; an outstretched arm caught me. I looked up – I was supported by Mr Rochester, who sat in a chair across my chamber threshold.

‘You come out at last,’ he said. ‘Well, I have been waiting for you long, and listening: yet not one movement have I heard, nor one sob: five minutes more of that death-like hush, and I should have forced the lock like a burglar. So you shun me? You shut yourself up and grieve alone! I would rather you had come and upbraided me with vehemence. Jane, I never meant to wound you thus. If the man who had but one little ewe lamb that was dear to him as a daughter, that ate of his bread and drank of his cup, and lay in his bosom, had by some mistake slaughtered it at the shambles, he would not have rued his bloody blunder more than I now rue mine. Will you ever forgive me?’

Reader, I forgave him at that moment and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner; and besides, there was such unchange love in his whole look and mien – I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart’s core.

I cleared and stayed my voice to reply: ‘All is changed about me, sir; I must change too – there is no doubt of that; and to avoid fluctuations of feeling, and continual combats with recollections and associations, there is only one way – Adèle must have a new governess, sir.’

‘Oh, Adèle will go to school – I’ve settled that already; nor do I mean to torment you with the hideous associations and recollections of Thornfield Hall – this accursed place – this insolent vault, offering the ghastliness of living death to the light of the open sky – this narrow stone hell, with its one real fiend, worse than a legion of such as we imagine. Jane, you shall not stay here, nor will I. I’ll shut up Thornfield Hall: I’ll nail up the front door and board the lower windows: I’ll give Mrs Poole two hundred a year to live here with my wife, as you term that fearful hag: Grace will do much for money, and she shall have
her son, the keeper at Grimsby Retreat, to bear her company and be at hand to give her aid in the paroxysms, when my wife is prompted by her familiar to burn people in their beds at night, to stab them, to bite their flesh from their bones, and so on —

’Sir,’ I interrupted him, ‘you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate — with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel — she cannot help being mad.’

‘Jane, my little darling (so I will call you, for so you are), you don’t know what you’re talking about; you misjudge me again: it is not because she is mad I hate her. If you were mad, do you think I should hate you?’

‘I do indeed, sir.’

‘Then you are mistaken, and you know nothing about me, and nothing about the sort of love of which I am capable. Every atom of your flesh is as dear to me as my own: in pain and sickness it would still be dear.’ He continued, ‘All, you know, is prepared for prompt departure: to-morrow you shall go. I only ask you to endure one more night under this roof, Jane; and then, farewell to its miseries and terrors for ever! I have a place to repair to, which will be a secure sanctuary from hateful reminiscences, from unwelcome intrusion — even from falsehood and slander.’

‘And take Adèle with you, sir,’ I interrupted; ‘she will be a companion for you.’

‘What do you mean, Jane? I told you I would send Adèle to school; and what do I want with a child for a companion, and not my own child, — a French dancer’s bastard? Why do you importune me about her! I say, why do you assign Adèle to me for a companion?’

‘You spoke of a retirement, sir; and retirement and solitude are dull: too dull for you.’

‘Solitude! Solitude!’ he reiterated with irritation. ‘I see I must come to an explanation. I don’t know what sphinx-like expression is forming in your countenance. You are to share my solitude. Do you understand?’

I shook my head: it required a degree of courage, excited as he was becoming, even to risk that mute sign of dissent. He’d been walking fast about the room, and he stopped, as if suddenly rooted to one spot.

‘Jane! Jane!’ he said, in such an accent of bitter sadness it thrilled along every nerve I had; ‘you don’t love me, then? It was only my station, and the rank of my wife, that you valued? Now that you think me disqualified to become your husband, you recoil from my touch as if I were some toad or ape.’

‘Mr Rochester, I will not be yours.’

His fury was wrought to the highest: he must yield to it for a moment, whatever followed; he crossed the floor and seized my arm and grasped my waist.

‘Jane!’

‘Mr Rochester!’

‘Withdraw, then, I consent; but remember, you leave me here in anguish. Go up to your own room; think over what I have said, and, Jane, cast a glance on my sufferings — think of me.’

He turned away; he threw himself on his face on the sofa.

‘Oh, Jane! My hope — my love — my life!’ broke in anguish from his lips. Then came a deep, strong sob.

I had already gained the door; but, reader, I walked back — walked back as determinedly as I had retreated. I knelt down by him; I turned his face from the cushion to me; I kissed his cheek; I smoothed his hair with my hand.

‘God bless you, my dear master!’ I said. ‘God keep you from harm and wrong — direct you, solace you — reward you well for your past kindness to me.’

‘Little Jane’s love would have been my best reward,’ he answered; ‘without it, my heart is broken. But Jane will give me her love; yes — nobly, generously.’

Up the blood rushed to his face; forth flashed the fire from his eyes; erect he sprang; he held his arms out; but I evaded the embrace, and at once quitted the room.

‘Farewell!’ was the cry of my heart as I left him. Despair added, ‘Farewell for ever!’

I left Thornfield early next morning and travelled to a place called Whitcross. For several days I wandered, a beggar for bread and shelter, until I saw one evening the silhouette of a house. As I approached I could see three women in the kitchen. I listened to them converse. Diana and Mary were evidently young ladies of quality while the eldest, Hannah was clearly a servant.

I knocked at the door. 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’d 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 bit 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 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’s 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’m turned away.’

‘Not you. I’m feared you have some ill plans agate, that bring you about folk’s houses at this time o’ night. If you have 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.

‘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, 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 that you, Mr St. John?’ cried Hannah.

‘Yes – yes; open quickly.’

‘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’s been a beggar-woman – I declare she’s 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 and 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, and 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, and I answered – ‘My name is Jane Elliott.’

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

Over the next few days I discovered I was in the house of Mr St. John Rivers, a parson, and of his two sisters, Diana and Mary Rivers. Mr St. John was young – perhaps from twenty-eight to thirty – tall, slender; his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline: quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin. It is seldom, indeed, an English face comes so near the antique models as did his. He might well be a little shocked at the irregularity of my lineaments, his own being so harmonious. His eyes were large and blue, with brown lashes; his high forehead, colourless as
ivory, was partially streaked over by careless locks of fair hair.

Over breakfast on my fourth day at their home Mr St. John said to me, 'It is well for you that a low fever has forced you to abstain for the last three days: there would have been danger in yielding to the cravings of your appetite at first. Now you may eat, though still not immoderately.'

'I trust I shall not eat long at your expense, sir,' was my very clumsily-contrived, unpolished answer.

'No,' he said coolly: 'when you've indicated to us the residence of your friends, we can write to them, and you may be restored to home.'

'That, I must plainly tell you, is out of my power to do; being absolutely without home and friends.'

The three looked at me, but not distrustfully; I felt there was no suspicion in their glances: there was more of curiosity.

'Do you mean to say,' he asked, 'that you are completely isolated from every connection?'

'I do. Not a tie links me to any living thing: not a claim do I possess to admittance under any roof in England.'

'A most singular position at your age!'

Here I saw his glance directed to my hands, which were folded on the table before me. I wondered what he sought there: his words soon explained the quest.

'You've never been married? You are a spinster?'

Diana laughed. 'Why, she can't be above seventeen or eighteen years old, St. John,' said she.

'I am near nineteen: but I am not married. No. Mr Rivers,' I said, turning to him, and looking at him, as he looked at me, openly and without diffidence, 'you and your sisters have done me a great service – the greatest man can do his fellow-being; you have rescued me, by your noble hospitality, from death. This benefit conferred gives you an unlimited claim on my gratitude, and a claim, to a certain extent, on my confidence. I will tell you as much of the history of the wanderer you have harboured, as I can tell without compromising my own peace of mind – my own security, moral and physical, and that of others.

I told them I was an orphan; of my time at Lowood; but of all else I said nothing.

'Don't make her talk any more now, St. John,' said Diana, as I paused; 'she is evidently not yet fit for excitement. Come to the sofa and sit down, Miss Elliott.'

I gave an involuntary half start at hearing the alias: I had forgotten my new name. Mr Rivers, whom nothing seemed to escape, noticed it at once.

'You said your name was Jane Elliott?' he observed.

'I did say so; and it is the name by which I think it expedient to be called at present, but it is not my real name, and when I hear it, it sounds strange to me.'

'Your real name you will not give?'

'No: I fear discovery above all things; and whatever disclosure would lead to it, I avoid.'

'You are quite right, I am sure,' said Diana. 'Now do, brother, let her be at peace a while.'

A month quickly passed at Moor House. Mr St. John told me of his plans for a village school at Morton and asked me to be the mistress of it, a proposal I gladly accepted. I moved into a small cottage.

One winter evening I heard a noise: the wind, I thought, shook the door. No; it was St. John Rivers, who, lifting the latch, came in out of the frozen hurricane – the howling darkness – and stood before me: the cloak that covered his tall figure all white as a glacier. I was almost in consternation, so little had I expected any guest from the blocked-up vale that night.

'Any ill news?' I demanded. 'Has anything happened?'

'No. How very easily alarmed you are!' he answered, removing his cloak and hanging it up against the door, towards which he again coolly pushed the mat which his entrance had deranged. He stamped the snow from his boots.

'I shall sully the purity of your floor,' said he, 'but you must excuse me for once.' Then he approached the fire. 'I have had hard work to get here, I assure you,' he observed, as he warmed his hands over the flame. 'One drift took me up to the waist; happily the snow is quite soft yet.'

'But why are you come?' I could not forbear saying.

'Rather an inhospitable question to put to a visitor; but since you ask it, I answer simply to have a little talk with you; I got tired of my mute books and empty rooms. Besides, since yesterday I have experienced the excitement of a person to whom a tale has been half-told, and who is impatient to hear the sequel.'
He bade me sit. And then he quietly told me he knew everything of my history; of Mrs Read and of Mr Rochester. Mr St. John told me he had learnt all this from a letter from a Mr Briggs, a solicitor.

‘Briggs wrote to me of a Jane Eyre:’ he said, ‘the advertisements demanded a Jane Eyre: I knew a Jane Elliott. I confess I had my suspicions, but it was only yesterday afternoon they were at once resolved into certainty. You own the name and renounce the alias?’

‘Yes – yes; but where is Mr Briggs? He perhaps knows more of Mr Rochester than you do.’

‘Briggs is in London. I should doubt his knowing anything at all about Mr Rochester; it is not in Mr Rochester he is interested. Meantime, you forget essential points in pursuing trifles: you do not inquire why Mr Briggs sought after you – what he wanted with you.’

‘Well, what did he want?’

‘Merely to tell you that your uncle, Mr Eyre of Madeira, is dead; that he has left you all his property, and that you are now rich – merely that – nothing more.’

‘It – Rich?’

‘Yes, you, rich – quite an heiress.’

Silence succeeded.

‘You must prove your identity of course,’ resumed St. John presently: ‘a step which will offer no difficulties; you can then enter on immediate possession. Your fortune is vested in the English funds; Briggs has the will and the necessary documents.’

‘How much am I worth?’

‘Oh, a trifle! Nothing of course to speak of – twenty thousand pounds, I think they say – but what is that?’

‘Twenty thousand pounds?’

Here was a new stunner – I had been calculating on four or five thousand. This news actually took my breath for a moment: Mr St. John, whom I had never heard laugh before, laughed now.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘if you had committed a murder, and I had told you your crime was discovered, you could scarcely look more aghast.’

‘It is a large sum – don’t you think there is a mistake?’

‘No mistake at all.’

‘Perhaps you’ve read the figures wrong – it may be two thousand!’

‘It is written in letters, not figures, – twenty thousand.’

I again felt rather like an individual of but average gastronomical powers sitting down to a feast alone at a table spread with provisions for a hundred. Mr Rivers rose now and put his cloak on.

‘If it were not such a very wild night,’ he said, ‘I would send Hannah down to keep you company: you look too desperately miserable to be left alone. But Hannah, poor woman, could not stride the drifts so well as I: her legs are not quite so long: so I must e’en leave you to your sorrows. Good-night.’

He was lifting the latch: a sudden thought occurred to me. ‘Stop one minute!’ I cried.

‘Well?’

‘It puzzles me to know why Mr Briggs wrote to you about me; or how he knew you, or could fancy that you, living in such an out-of-the-way place, had the power to aid in my discovery.’

‘Oh! I am a clergyman,’ he said; ‘and the clergy are often appealed to about odd matters.’ Again the latch rattled.

‘No; that does not satisfy me!’ I exclaimed. ‘It is a very strange piece of business,’ I added; ‘I must know more about it.’

‘Another time.’

‘No; tonight! Tonight!’ and as he turned from the door, I placed myself between it and him. He looked rather embarrassed.

‘You certainly shall not go till you have told me all,’ I said.

‘I would rather not just now.’

‘You shall! You must!’

‘Well, then,’ he said, ‘I yield; if not to your earnestness, to your perseverance: as stone is worn by continual dropping. Besides, you must know some day, – as well now as later. Your name is Jane Eyre?’

‘Of course: that was all settled before.’

‘You are not, perhaps, aware that I am your namesake? – That I was christened St. John Eyre Rivers?’

‘No, indeed! I remember now seeing the letter E. comprised in your initials written in books you have at different times lent me; but I never asked for what name it stood. But what then? Surely –’

‘My mother’s name was Eyre; she had two brothers; one a clergyman, who married Miss Jane Reed, of Gateshead; the
other, John Eyre, Esq., merchant, late of Funchal, Madeira. Mr Briggs, being Mr Eyre's solicitor, wrote to us last August to inform us of our uncle's death, and to say that he had left his property to his brother the clergyman's orphan daughter, overlooking us, in consequence of a quarrel, never forgiven, between him and my father. He wrote again a few weeks since, to intimate that the heiress was lost, and asking if we knew anything of her. You know the rest.

Again he was going, but I set my back against the door.

'Do let me speak,' I said; 'let me have one moment to draw breath and reflect.'

I paused – he stood before me, hat in hand, looking composed enough. I resumed, 'Your mother was my father's sister?'

'Yes.'

'My aunt, consequently?'

He bowed.

'My uncle John was your uncle John? You, Diana, and Mary are his sister's children, as I am his brother's child?'

'Undeniably.'

'You three, then, are my cousins; half our blood on each side flows from the same source?'

'We are cousins; yes.'

'Oh, I am glad! – I am glad!' I exclaimed.

St. John smiled. 'Did I not say you neglected essential points to pursue trifles?' he asked. 'You were serious when I told you you had got a fortune; and now, for a matter of no moment, you are excited.'

'What can you mean? It may be of no moment to you; you have sisters and don't care for a cousin; but I had nobody; and now three relations, – or two, if you don't choose to be counted, – are born into my world full-grown. I say again, I am glad!'

'Perhaps, if you explained yourself a little more fully, I should comprehend better,' he said.

'Explain! What is there to explain? You cannot fail to see that twenty thousand pounds, the sum in question, divided equally between the nephew and three nieces of our uncle, will give five thousand to each? What I want is, that you should write to your sisters and tell them of the fortune that has accrued to them.'

'To you, you mean.'

'I have intimated my view of the case: I'm incapable of taking any other. I'm not brutally selfish, blindly unjust, or fiendishly ungrateful. Besides, I am resolved I will have a home and connections. I like Moor House, and I will live at Moor House; I like Diana and Mary, and I will attach myself for life to Diana and Mary. It would please and benefit me to have five thousand pounds; it would torment and oppress me to have twenty thousand; which, moreover, could never be mine in justice, though it might in law. I abandon to you, then, what is absolutely superfluous to me. Let there be no opposition, and no discussion about it; let us agree amongst each other, and decide the point at once.'

'This is acting on first impulses; you must take days to consider such a matter, ere your word can be regarded as valid.'

'Oh! If all you doubt is my sincerity, I am easy: you see the justice of the case?'

'I do see a certain justice; but it is contrary to all custom. Besides, the entire fortune is your right: my uncle gained it by his own efforts; he was free to leave it to whom he would: he left it to you. After all, justice permits you to keep it: you may, with a clear conscience, consider it absolutely your own.'

'With me,' said I, 'it is fully as much a matter of feeling as of conscience: I must indulge my feelings; I do seldom have had an opportunity of doing so. Were you to argue, object, and annoy me for a year, I could not forego the delicious pleasure of which I have caught a glimpse – that of repaying, in part, a mighty obligation, and winning to myself life-long friends.'

'And the school, Miss Eyre? It must now be shut up, I suppose?'

'No. I will retain my post of mistress till you get a substitute.'

He smiled approbation: we shook hands, and he took leave.

One day St. John asked me to take a walk with him. After a while we seated ourselves on some rocks, and he sat in thought. After half an hour he spoke, 'Jane, I go in six weeks; I have taken my berth in an East Indiaman which sails on the 20th of June.'

'God will protect you; for you've undertaken His work,' I answered.

'Yes,' said he, 'there is my glory and joy. I am the servant of an infallible Master. I'm not going out under human guidance, subject to the defective laws and erring control of my feeble fellow-worms: my king, my lawgiver, my captain, is the All-
‘Oh! I will give my heart to God,’ I said. ‘You do not want it.’
‘It is what I want,’ he said, speaking to himself; ‘it is just what I want. And there are obstacles in the way: they must be hewn down. Jane, you would not repent marrying me—be certain of that; we must be married. I repeat it: there is no other way; and undoubtedly enough of love would follow upon marriage to render the union right even in your eyes.’

‘I scorn your idea of love,’ I could not help saying, as I rose up and stood before him, leaning my back against the rock. ‘I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it.’

He looked at me fixedly, compressing his well-cut lips while he did so. Whether he was incensed or surprised, or what, it was not easy to tell: he could command his countenance thoroughly.

‘I scarcely expected to hear that expression from you,’ he said: ‘I think I have done and uttered nothing to deserve scorn.’

And with that answer he left me. I would much rather he had knocked me down.

At breakfast I announced to Diana and Mary that I was going a journey, and should be absent at least four days.

‘Alone, Jane?’ they asked.

‘Yes; it was to see or hear news of a friend about whom I had for some time been uneasy.’

They might have said, as I have no doubt they thought, that they had believed me to be without any friends save them: for, indeed, I had often said so; but, with their true natural delicacy, they abstained from comment, except that Diana asked me if I was sure I was well enough to travel. I looked very pale, she observed. I replied, that nothing ailed me save anxiety of mind, which I hoped soon to alleviate.

I left Moor House at three o’clock P.M., and soon after four I stood at the foot of the sign-post of Whitcross, waiting the arrival of the coach which was to take me to distant Thornfield. Amidst the silence of those solitary roads and desert hills, I heard it approach from a great distance. It was the same vehicle whence, a year ago, I had alighted one summer evening on this very spot—how desolate, and hopeless, and objectless! It stopped as I beckoned. I entered—not now obliged to part with my whole fortune as the price of its accommodation. Once more on the road to Thornfield, I felt like the messenger-pigeon flying home.
It was a journey of six-and-thirty hours. I had set out from Whitcross on a Tuesday afternoon, and early on the succeeding Thursday morning the coach stopped to water the horses at a wayside inn, situated in the midst of scenery whose green hedges and large fields and low pastoral hills (how mild of feature and verdant of hue compared with the stern North-Midland moors of Morton!) met my eye like the lineaments of a once familiar face. Yes, I knew the character of this landscape: I was sure we were near my bourne.

‘How far is Thornfield Hall from here?’ I asked of the ostler.

‘Just two miles, ma’am, across the fields.’

‘My journey is closed,’ I thought to myself.

I got out of the coach, gave a box I had into the ostler’s charge, to be kept till I called for it; paid my fare; satisfied the coachman, and was going: the brightening day gleamed on the sign of the inn, and I read in gilt letters, ‘The Rochester Arms.’

My heart leapt up: I was already on my master’s very lands. How fast I walked! How I ran sometimes! How I looked forward to catch the first view of the well-known woods! With what feelings I welcomed single trees I knew, and familiar glimpses of meadow and hill between them!

I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house: I saw a blackened ruin.

No need to cover behind a gate-post, indeed! – To peep up at chamber lattices, fearing life was astray behind them! No need to listen for doors opening – to fancy steps on the pavement or the gravel-walk! The lawn, the grounds were trodden and waste: the portal yawned void. The front was, as I had once seen it in a dream, but a shell-like wall, very high and very fragile-looking, perforated with paneless windows: no roof, no battlements, no chimney – all had crashed in.

And there was the silence of death about it: the solitude of a lonesome wild. No wonder that letters addressed to people here had never received an answer: as well despatch epistles to a vault in a church aisle. The grim blackness of the stones told by what fate the Hall had fallen – by conflagration: but how kindled? What story belonged to this disaster? What loss, besides mortar and marble and woodwork had followed upon it? Had life been wrecked as well as property? If so, whose? Dreadful question: there was no one here to answer it – not even dumb sign, mute token.

Some answer must be had to these questions. I could find it nowhere but at the inn, and thither, ere long, I returned. The host himself brought my breakfast into the parlour. I requested him to shut the door and sit down: I had some questions to ask him. But when he complied, I scarcely knew how to begin; such horror had I of the possible answers. And yet the spectacle of desolation I had just left prepared me in a measure for a tale of misery. The host was a respectable-looking, middle-aged man.

‘You know Thornfield Hall, of course?’ I managed to say at last.

‘Yes, ma’am; I lived there once.’

‘Did you?’ Not in my time, I thought: you are a stranger to me.

‘I was the late Mr Rochester’s butler,’ he added.

The late! I seem to have received, with full force, the blow I’d been trying to evade.

‘The late!’ I gasped. ‘Is he dead?’

‘I mean the present gentleman, Mr Edward’s father,’ he explained. I breathed again: my blood resumed its flow. Fully assured by these words that Mr Edward – my Mr Rochester (God bless him, wherever he was!) – was at least alive: was, in short, ‘the present gentleman.’ Gladdening words! It seemed I could hear all that was to come – whatever the disclosures might be – with comparative tranquillity. Since he was not in the grave, I could bear it, I thought, to learn that he was at the Antipodes.

‘Is Mr Rochester living at Thornfield Hall now?’ I asked, knowing, of course, what the answer would be, but yet desirous of deferring the direct question as to where he really was.

‘No, ma’am – oh, no! No one’s living there. I suppose you’re a stranger in these parts, or you would have heard what happened last autumn, – Thornfield Hall is quite a ruin: it was burnt down just about harvest-time. A dreadful calamity! Such an immense quantity of valuable property destroyed: hardly any of the furniture could be saved. The fire broke out at the dead of night, and before the engines arrived from Millcote, the building was one mass of flame. It was a terrible spectacle: I witnessed it myself.’

‘At dead of night!’ I muttered. Yes, that was ever the hour of fatality at Thornfield.

‘Was it known how it originated?’ I demanded.
They guessed, ma'am: they guessed. Indeed, I should say it was ascertained beyond a doubt. You are not perhaps aware,' he continued, edging his chair a little nearer the table, and speaking low, 'that there was a—a lady—a—a lunatic, kept at the house?'

'I have heard something of it.'

'She was kept in very close confinement, ma'am; people even for some years were not absolutely certain of her existence. No one saw her: they only knew by rumour that such a person was at the Hall; and who or what she was it was difficult to conjecture. They said Mr Edward had brought her from abroad, and some believed she had been his mistress. But a queer thing happened a year since—a very queer thing.'

I feared now to hear my own story. I endeavoured to recall him to the main fact.

'And this lady?'

'This lady, ma'am,' he answered, 'turned out to be Mr Rochester's wife!'

'Was it suspected that this lunatic, Mrs Rochester, had any hand in it?' I asked.

'You've hit it, ma'am: it's quite certain that it was her, and nobody but her, that set it going. She set fire first to the hangings of the room next to her own, and then she got down to a lower storey, and made her way to the chamber that had been the governess's—(she was like as if she knew somehow how matters had got on, and had a spite at her)—and she kindled the bed there; but there was nobody sleeping in it, fortunately. The governess had run away two months before; and for all Mr Rochester sought her as if she had been the most precious thing he had in the world, he could never hear a word of her; and he grew savage—quite savage on his disappointment: he never was a wild man, but he got dangerous after he lost her. He would be alone, too. He sent Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper, away to her friends at a distance; but he—he did it handsomely, for he settled an annuity on her for life: she deserved it—he was a very good woman. And Miss Adèle, a ward he had, was put to school. He broke off acquaintance with all the gentry, and shut himself up like a hermit at the Hall.'

'What! Did he not leave England?'

'Leave England? Bless you, no! He would not cross the door-stones of the house, except at night, when he walked just like a ghost about the grounds and in the orchard as if he had lost his senses—which it is my opinion he had; for a more spirited, bolder, keener gentleman than he was before that midge of a governess crossed him, you never saw, ma'am. He was not a man given to wine, or cards, or racing, as some are, and he was not so very handsome; but he had a courage and a will of his own, if ever man had. I knew him from a boy, you see: and for my part, I have often wished that Miss Eyre had been sunk in the sea before she came to Thornfield Hall.'

'Then Mr Rochester was at home when the fire broke out?'

'Yes, indeed was he; and he went up to the attics when all was burning above and below, and got the servants out of their beds and helped them down himself, and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell. And then they called out to him that she was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms, above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off: I saw her and heard her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and several more witnessed, Mr Rochester ascend through the skylight on to the roof; we heard him call 'Bertha!' We saw him approach her; and then, ma'am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement.'

'Dead?'

'Dead! Ay, dead as the stones on which her brains and blood were scattered.'

'Good God!'

'You may well say so, ma'am: it was frightful!' He shuddered.

'And afterwards?' I urged.

'Well, ma'am, afterwards the house was burnt to the ground: there are only some bits of walls standing now.'

'Were any other lives lost?'

'No perhaps it would have been better if there had.'

'What do you mean?'

'Poor Mr Edward!' he ejaculated, 'I little thought ever to have seen it? Some say it was a just judgment on him for keeping his first marriage secret, and wanting to take another wife while he had one living: but I pity him, for my part.'

'You said he was alive?' I exclaimed.

'Yes, yes: he is alive; but many think he had better be dead.'
Why? How?” My blood was again running cold. ‘Where is he?’ I demanded. ‘Is he in England?’

‘Ay – ay – he’s in England; he can’t get out of England, I fancy – he’s a fixture now.’

What agony was this! And the man seemed resolved to protract it.

‘He is stone-blind,’ he said at last. ‘Yes, he is stone-blind, is Mr Edward.’

I had dreaded worse. I had dreaded he was mad. I summoned strength to ask what had caused this calamity.

‘It was all his own courage, and a body may say, his kindness, in a way, ma’am: he wouldn’t leave the house till every one else was out before him. As he came down the great staircase at last, after Mrs Rochester had flung herself from the battlements, there was a great crash – all fell. He was taken out from under the ruins, alive, but sadly hurt: a beam had fallen in such a way as to protect him partly; but one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly. The other eye inflamed: he lost the sight of that also. He is now helpless, indeed – blind and a cripple.’

‘Where is he? Where does he now live?’

‘At Ferndean, a manor-house on a farm he has, about thirty miles off: quite a desolate spot.’

‘Who is with him?’

‘Old John and his wife: he would have none else. He’s quite broken down, they say.’

‘Have you any sort of conveyance?’

‘We have a chaise, ma’am, a very handsome chaise.’

‘Let it be got ready instantly; and if your post-boy can drive me to Ferndean before dark this day, I’ll pay both you and him twice the hire you usually demand.’

I came to Ferndean at evening. It was a desolate spot. I drew near the house and knocked: and Mary, Mr Rochester’s old servant answered. 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 all which had happened since I left Thornfield, and that I was come to see Mr Rochester. 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.

‘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 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 imprisoned 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 – is it Jane? What is it? This is her shape – this her size.'

'And this her voice,' I added. 'She is all here: her heart, too. God bless you, sir! I'm 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've 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?'

'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 a 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.'

Reader, I married him. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present. When we got back from church, I went into the kitchen of the manor-house, where Mary was cooking the dinner and John cleaning the knives, and I said, 'Mary, I have been married to Mr Rochester this morning.'
The housekeeper and her husband were both of that decent phlegmatic order of people, to whom one may at any time safely communicate a remarkable piece of news without incurring the danger of having one’s ears pierced by some shrill ejaculation, and subsequently stunned by a torrent of wordy wonderment. Mary did look up, and she did stare at me: the ladle with which she was basting a pair of chickens roasting at the fire, did for some three minutes hang suspended in air; and for the same space of time John’s knives also had rest from the polishing process: but Mary, bending again over the roast, said only, ’Have you, Miss? Well, for sure!’

How St. John received the news, I don’t know: he never answered the letter in which I communicated it: yet six months after he wrote to me, without, however, mentioning Mr Rochester’s name or alluding to my marriage.

You have not quite forgotten little Adèle, have you, reader? I had not; I soon asked and obtained leave of Mr Rochester, to go and see her at the school where he had placed her. Her frantic joy at beholding me again moved me much. She looked pale and thin: she said she was not happy. I found the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of study too severe for a child of her age: I took her home with me. I meant to become her governess once more, but I soon found this impracticable; my time and cares were now required by another – my husband needed them all. So I sought out a school conducted on a more indulgent system, and near enough to permit of my visiting her often, and bringing her home sometimes. I took care she should never want for anything that could contribute to her comfort: she soon settled in her new abode, became very happy there, and made fair progress in her studies.

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband’s life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward’s society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company.

We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result. Mr Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near – that knit us so very close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature – he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam – of the landscape before us; of the weather round us – and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye.

One morning at the end of the two years, as I was writing a letter to his dictation, he came and bent over me, and said, ’Jane, have you a glittering ornament round your neck?’

I had a gold watch-chain: I answered ’Yes.’

’And have you a pale-blue dress on?’

I had. He informed me then, that for some time he had fancied the obscurity clouding one eye was becoming less dense; and that now he was sure of it.

He and I went up to London. He had the advice of an eminent oculist; and he eventually recovered the sight of that one eye. He cannot now see very distinctly: he cannot read or write much; but he can find his way without being led by the hand: the sky is no longer a blank to him – the earth no longer a void. When his first-born was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were – large, brilliant, and black. On that occasion, he again, with a full heart, acknowledged that God had tempered judgment with mercy.