**24.19**

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** How do you do, my dear?

**JANE:** Are you Mrs Fairfax?

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** Indeed I am.

*Mrs. Fairfax is leading Jane in.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** What a tedious journey you must havehad. John is quite the slowestdriver in the county. Your poorhands must be numb; here.

*Mrs. Fairfax undoes the ribbon on Jane's bonnet. Jane is taken aback, unused to motherliness of any kind.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** My goodness... How young you are.

**JANE:** I’m eighteen. I’ve been teaching atLowood for two years.

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** Of course you have... I was mostimpressed with your references. I’msure we’re very lucky to have you.Leah, would you ask Martha to make alittle hot port and cut a sandwichor two.

*Leah eyes Jane with great curiosity. She hurries away.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** Draw nearer the fire. John istaking your trunk up to your room.

*She moves her abandoned knitting aside and gestures for Jane to sit.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** I've put you at the back of thehouse; I hope you don't mind. Therooms at the front have much finer furniture but they’re so gloomy and solitary I think.

*Jane can't help noticing that every surface is covered in lace, embroidery, or fine crochet. The whole room is an advertisement for Mrs. Fairfax's skill at handicrafts – and testament to the hours she has spent alone.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** I'm so glad you are come. To be surethis is a grand old house but I mustconfess that in winter one can feel alittle dreary and alone. Leah is avery nice girl and John and Marthagood people too, but they areservants - and one cannot talk tothem on terms of equality.

*Mrs. Fairfax leads Jane through the great hall, lit only by a candle. Jane can perceive grandeur looming out of the darkness; a richly carved Jacobean fireplace, heavy drapes, ancient tapestries, the head of a stag. Very gloomy, eerie. Her breath is vapourising in the cold.*

**JANE:** Am I to have the pleasure of meetingMiss Fairfax tonight?

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** Who?

**JANE:** Miss Fairfax - my pupil?

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** You mean Miss Varens; Mr. Rochester'sward. She is to be your pupil.

**JANE:** Who’s Mr Rochester?

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** Why, the owner of Thornfield.

**JANE:** I thought Thornfield Hall belongedto you.

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** *(bursting into laughter)*Oh bless you child, what an idea. Tome? I am only the housekeeper.

**JANE:** Forgive me -

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** There is a distant connectionbetween Mr. Rochester and I – hismother was a Fairfax - but I’dnever presume on it. Heavens, me,owner of Thornfield?

*Her laughter fills the darkness. A bashful smile is playing on Jane's lips. Mrs. Fairfax is beginning to thaw her. They move on. Mrs. Fairfax turns up a wooden staircase. Leaded windows reflect the candlelight.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** We shall have a cheerful house thiswinter...

*Light is thrown on portraits of long dead ancestors. Mrs. Fairfax is as warm as the house is cold.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** With Miss Varens here - and with you -we'll have quite a merry time of it.

*Dark heavy drapes, another striking portrait. A dark, voluptuous woman in an 18th Century gown, ruby lipped, one full breast exposed. Jane glances away, taken aback by the woman’s bold expression and her nakedness.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** I'm sure that last winter - and whata severe one - if it didn't rain it

snowed and if it didn't snow it blew - last winter I declare that not a soul came to the house from November to February.

*Mrs. Fairfax leads Jane through the wood-panelled darkness.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** I got quite melancholy night afternight alone. When spring finallycame I thought it a great reliefthat I hadn't gone distracted.

*She bursts into peals of laughter.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** Here. I’ve had Martha lay a fire.

*She opens the door to a small but delightful room. Jane**looks in: a fire burning, a soft quilt, pale chintz**curtains - and a bright lamp. She is utterly speechless.*

**MRS. FAIRFAX:** I hope you will be comfortable.

*Jane smiles her thanks. Mrs. Fairfax can see how affected she is - and how hard she is trying to button it down.*