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Henry Dixon

*Jane Eyre*

Grace Poole

I glanced up. Her body lay over the hardly carpeted floor, and it was only when it was situated in such a position could I appreciate to the full extent the size of it. When she was animated, her body usually took on some sort of defensive and animalistic form, making it difficult for one to appreciate the sheer size of her frame. When she was conscious (which was thankfully rare), she usually assumed a position not unlike that of a dog or another form of beast, rather than that typical of man.

All of her muscles appeared relaxed, which I found especially apparent in her face. The set of physical features that made up the madwoman’s face was not the wrinkled, contorted snarl as it normally appeared. It was only in this state of unconsciousness that Bertha was not forced to struggle with her conscious mind, and she appeared to me a person. Even in sleep, when her body appeared perhaps more human and normal than it ever did, I still found it unsettling to view the tattered clothing haphazardly enclose bits and pieces of the madwoman’s skin and bones. The dark black fleece of hair that covered her figure was thick enough to have served as clothing if it had only grown out with some consistency, but Bertha Mason had no such luck. Her body lay on the ground directly adjacent to the military-grade cot Rochester had provided for her. I could come up with no reason for Bertha’s aversion to rest on the cot, but I stopped trying to reason logically years ago.

On the evening just prior, I had seen the carriage arrive through the only window I had in the room. Thankfully, Bertha chose to pay little attention to events that occurred outside that window, leaving me with a relatively uncontested outlook on the world that lay beyond the glass. When the carriage had stopped, I half-expected to see Rochester himself stumble out and through the front door, but instead a woman stepped out cautiously into the night, appearing as an infant does when thrust into a new environment. I did not have any good theories as to who this new woman was. Other than my brief sighting of her arrival, the only interaction I've had involving this newcomer was hearing muffled noises she made as she settled into her new residence. I heard her vague sounds that arose from her opening of various chests, drawers, and cabinets in a chamber not adjacent to mine.

Presently, I heard two sets footsteps strolling leisurely through the halls and up the third staircase, which were accompanied by the gentle voice of Mrs. Fairfax, whose soft cadence permeated the entire estate. From time to time, I would hear remnants of another, quieter voice. However, although I could not distinguish any more than the vague intonation - the outline of the voice - this second voice did not continue onwards like the constant hum of that of Mrs. Fairfax. This voice did not seem to have either pattern or rhythm, being comprised instead of shy interjections and short responses, which seemed to me to suggest the speaker's lack of comfort and overall unease.

The footsteps continued, growing louder more defined with each pace, when an abrupt noise struck me from across the room. It had certainly not been the first time I had encountered Bertha’s distinct and empty laugh. More noise ejaculated from the area in which she laid; another low laugh louder than the first reverberated through the construction of the house. I glanced over, worried about the disturbance she had been causing; Bertha appeared to be still asleep, yet a hollow grin had subtly crept across her features. The voices pressed closer to the room, and I could distinguish the unfamiliar voice clearly now. The stranger called, “Mrs. Fairfax!” and I heard another set of footsteps further away, treading carefully down the third-floor stairs. The unfamiliar voice continued more quietly, and I could not quite make out the wording, only that the intonation gave the impression that the speaker was asking a question.

“Some of the servants, very likely; perhaps Grace Poole.” I felt a minor jolt upon hearing my name, although I was not very surprised due to the ruckus that Bertha had just caused. My brain trudged through excuses and explanations for the noise, eventually choosing to resort to any usual justification. As I readied myself for what came next, Mrs. Fairfax’s exclamation of “Grace!” rang through the halls.