

individual—whom his word now sufficed to control like a child—fallen on him, a few hours since, as a thunderbolt might fall on an oak?

Oh! I could not forget his look and his paleness when he whispered: ‘Jane, I have got a blow—I have got a blow, Jane.’ I could not forget how the arm had trembled which he rested on my shoulder: and it was no light matter which could thus bow the resolute spirit and thrill the vigorous frame of Fairfax Rochester.

‘When will he come? When will he come?’ I cried inwardly, as the night lingered and lingered—as my bleeding patient drooped, moaned, sickened: and neither day nor aid arrived. I had, again and again, held the water to Mason’s white lips; again and again offered him the stimulating salts: my efforts seemed ineffectual: either bodily or mental suffering, or loss of blood, or all three combined, were fast prostrating his strength. He moaned so, and looked so weak, wild, and lost, I feared he was dying; and I might not even speak to him.

The candle, wasted at last, went out; as it expired, I perceived streaks of grey light edging the window curtains: dawn was then approaching. Presently I heard Pilot bark far below, out of his distant kennel in the courtyard: hope revived. Nor was it unwarranted: in five minutes more the grating key, the yielding lock, warned me my watch was relieved. It could not have lasted more than two hours: many a week has seemed shorter.

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 is nervous, his spirits must be kept up. Come, set to work.’

Mr. Rochester drew back the thick curtain, drew up the holland 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 bit me,’ he murmured. ‘She worried me like a tigress, when Rochester got the knife from her.’

‘You should not have yielded: you should have grappled with her at once,’ said Mr. Rochester.

‘But under such circumstances, what could one do?’ returned Mason. ‘Oh, it was frightful!’ he added, shuddering. ‘And I did not expect it: she looked so quiet at first.’

‘I warned you,’ was his friend’s answer; ‘I said—be on your guard when you go near her. Besides, you might have waited till to-morrow, and had me with you: it was mere folly to attempt the interview to-night, and alone.’

‘I thought I could have done some good.’

‘You thought! you thought! Yes, it makes me impatient to hear you: but, however, you have suffered, and are likely to suffer enough for not taking my advice; so I’ll say no more. Carter—hurry!—hurry! The sun will soon rise, and I must have him off.’

‘Directly, sir; the shoulder is just bandaged. I must look to this other wound in the arm: she has had her teeth here too, I think.’

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

I saw Mr. Rochester shudder: a singularly marked expression of disgust, horror, hatred, warped his countenance almost to distortion; but he only said—

‘Come, be silent, Richard, and never mind her gibberish: don’t repeat it.’

‘I wish I could forget it,’ was the answer.

‘You will when you are out of the country: when you get back to Spanish Town, you may think of her as dead and buried—or rather, you need not think of her at all.’

‘Impossible to forget this night!’

‘It is not impossible: have some energy, man. You thought you were as dead as a herring two hours since, and you are all alive and talking now. There!—Carter has done with you or nearly so; I’ll make you decent in a trice. Jane’ (he turned

to me for the first time since his re-entrance), 'take this key: go down into my bedroom, and walk straight forward into my dressing-room: open the top drawer of the wardrobe and take out a clean shirt and neck- handkerchief: bring them here; and be nimble.'

I went; sought the repository he had mentioned, found the articles named, and returned with them.

'Now,' said he, 'go to the other side of the bed while I order his toilet; but don't leave the room: you may be wanted again.'

I retired as directed.

'Was anybody stirring below when you went down, Jane?' inquired Mr. Rochester presently.

'No, sir; all was very still.'

'We shall get you off cannily, Dick: and it will be better, both for your sake, and for that of the poor creature in yonder. I have striven long to avoid exposure, and I should not like it to come at last. Here, Carter, help him on with his waist-coat. Where did you leave your furred cloak? You can't travel a mile without that, I know, in this damned cold climate. In your room?—Jane, run down to Mr. Mason's room,—the one next mine,—and fetch a cloak you will see there.'

Again I ran, and again returned, bearing an immense mantle lined and edged with fur.

'Now, I've another errand for you,' said my untiring master; 'you must away to my room again. What a mercy you are shod with velvet, Jane!—a clod-hopping messenger would never do at this juncture. You must open the middle

drawer of my toilet-table and take out a little phial and a little glass you will find there,—quick!’

I flew thither and back, bringing the desired vessels.

‘That’s well! Now, doctor, I shall take the liberty of administering a dose myself, on my own responsibility. I got this cordial at Rome, of an Italian charlatan—a fellow you would have kicked, Carter. It is not a thing to be used indiscriminately, but it is good upon occasion: as now, for instance. Jane, a little water.’

He held out the tiny glass, and I half filled it from the water-bottle on the washstand.

‘That will do;—now wet the lip of the phial.’

I did so; he measured twelve drops of a crimson liquid, and presented it to Mason.

‘Drink, Richard: it will give you the heart you lack, for an hour or so.’

‘But will it hurt me?—is it inflammatory?’

‘Drink! drink! drink!’

Mr. Mason obeyed, because it was evidently useless to resist. He was dressed now: he still looked pale, but he was no longer gory and sullied. Mr. Rochester let him sit three minutes after he had swallowed the liquid; he then took his arm—

‘Now I am sure you can get on your feet,’ he said—‘try.’

The patient rose.

‘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 stillness of early morning slumbered everywhere; the curtains were yet drawn over the servants’ chamber windows; little birds were just twittering in the blossom-blanchèd orchard trees, whose boughs drooped like white garlands over the wall enclosing one side of the yard; the carriage horses stamped from time to time in their closed stables: all else was still.

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.

This done, he moved with slow step and abstracted air towards a door in the wall bordering the orchard. I, supposing he had done with me, prepared to return to the house; again, however, I heard him call ‘Jane!’ He had opened the portal and stood at it, waiting for me.

‘Come where there is some freshness, for a few moments,’ he said; ‘that house is a mere dungeon: don’t you feel it so?’

‘It seems to me a splendid mansion, sir.’

‘The glamour of inexperience is over your eyes,’ he answered; ‘and you see it through a charmed medium: you cannot discern that the gilding is slime and the silk draperies cobwebs; that the marble is sordid slate, and the polished woods mere refuse chips and scaly bark. Now HERE’ (he pointed to the leafy enclosure we had entered) ‘all is real, sweet, and pure.’

He strayed down a walk edged with box, with apple trees, pear trees, and cherry trees on one side, and a border on the other full of all sorts of old-fashioned flowers, stocks, sweet-williams, primroses, pansies, mingled with southernwood,

sweet-briar, and various fragrant herbs. They were fresh now as a succession of April showers and gleams, followed by a lovely spring morning, could make them: the sun was just entering the dappled east, and his light illumined the wreathed and dewy orchard trees and shone down the quiet walks under them.

‘Jane, will you have a flower?’

He gathered a half-blown rose, the first on the bush, and offered it to me.

‘Thank you, sir.’

‘Do you like this sunrise, Jane? That sky with its high and light clouds which are sure to melt away as the day waxes warm—this placid and balmly atmosphere?’

‘I do, very much.’

‘You have passed a strange night, Jane.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And it has made you look pale—were you afraid when I left you alone with Mason?’

‘I was afraid of some one coming out of the inner room.’

‘But I had fastened the door—I had the key in my pocket: I should have been a careless shepherd if I had left a lamb—my pet lamb—so near a wolf’s den, unguarded: you were safe.’

‘Will Grace Poole live here still, sir?’

‘Oh yes! don’t trouble your head about her—put the thing out of your thoughts.’

‘Yet it seems to me your life is hardly secure while she stays.’

‘Never fear—I will take care of myself.’



‘Is the danger you apprehended last night gone by now, sir?’

‘I cannot vouch for that till Mason is out of England: nor even then. To live, for me, Jane, is to stand on a crater-crust which may crack and spue fire any day.’

‘But Mr. Mason seems a man easily led. Your influence, sir, is evidently potent with him: he will never set you at defiance or wilfully injure you.’

‘Oh, no! Mason will not defy me; nor, knowing it, will he hurt me— but, unintentionally, he might in a moment, by one careless word, deprive me, if not of life, yet for ever of happiness.’

‘Tell him to be cautious, sir: let him know what you fear, and show him how to avert the danger.’

He laughed sardonically, hastily took my hand, and as hastily threw it from him.

‘If I could do that, simpleton, where would the danger be? Annihilated in a moment. Ever since I have known Mason, I have only had to say to him ‘Do that,’ and the thing has been done. But I cannot give him orders in this case: I cannot say ‘Beware of harming me, Richard;’ for it is imperative that I should keep him ignorant that harm to me is possible. Now you look puzzled; and I will puzzle you further. You are my little friend, are you not?’

‘I like to serve you, sir, and to obey you in all that is right.’

‘Precisely: I see you do. I see genuine contentment in your gait and mien, your eye and face, when you are helping me and pleasing me—working for me, and with me, in, as you

characteristically say, 'ALL THAT IS RIGHT:' for if I bid you do what you thought wrong, there would be no light-footed running, no neat-handed alacrity, no lively glance and animated complexion. My friend would then turn to me, quiet and pale, and would say, 'No, sir; that is impossible: I cannot do it, because it is wrong;' and would become immutable as a fixed star. Well, you too have power over me, and may injure me: yet I dare not show you where I am vulnerable, lest, faithful and friendly as you are, you should transfix me at once.'

'If you have no more to fear from Mr. Mason than you have from me, sir, you are very safe.'

'God grant it may be so! Here, Jane, is an arbour; sit down.'

The arbour was an arch in the wall, lined with ivy; it contained a rustic seat. Mr. Rochester took it, leaving room, however, for me: but I stood before him.

'Sit,' he said; 'the bench is long enough for two. You don't hesitate to take a place at my side, do you? Is that wrong, Jane?'

I answered him by assuming it: to refuse would, I felt, have been unwise.

'Now, my little friend, while the sun drinks the dew—while all the flowers in this old garden awake and expand, and the birds fetch their young ones' breakfast out of the Thornfield, and the early bees do their first spell of work—I'll put a case to you, which you must endeavour to suppose your own: but first, look at me, and tell me you are at ease, and not fearing that I err in detaining you, or that you err