

‘Hasten to take off your wet things,’ said he; ‘and before you go, good-night—good-night, my darling!’

He kissed me repeatedly. When I looked up, on leaving his arms, there stood the widow, pale, grave, and amazed. I only smiled at her, and ran upstairs. ‘Explanation will do for another time,’ thought I. Still, when I reached my chamber, I felt a pang at the idea she should even temporarily misconstrue what she had seen. But joy soon effaced every other feeling; and loud as the wind blew, near and deep as the thunder crashed, fierce and frequent as the lightning gleamed, cataract-like as the rain fell during a storm of two hours’ duration, I experienced no fear and little awe. Mr. Rochester came thrice to my door in the course of it, to ask if I was safe and tranquil: and that was comfort, that was strength for anything.

Before I left my bed in the morning, little Adele came running in to tell me that the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away.

## CHAPTER XXIV

As I rose and dressed, I thought over what had happened, and wondered if it were a dream. I could not be certain of the reality till I had seen Mr. Rochester again, and heard him renew his words of love and promise.

While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect and life in its colour; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look; but I was sure I might lift my face to his now, and not cool his affection by its expression. I took a plain but clean and light summer dress from my drawer and put it on: it seemed no attire had ever so well become me, because none had I ever worn in so blissful a mood.

I was not surprised, when I ran down into the hall, to see that a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy. A beggar-woman and her little boy—pale, ragged objects both—were coming up the walk, and I ran down and gave them all the money I happened to have in my purse—some three or four shillings: good or bad, they must partake of my jubilee. The rooks

cawed, and blither birds sang; but nothing was so merry or so musical as my own rejoicing heart.

Mrs. Fairfax surprised me by looking out of the window with a sad countenance, and saying gravely—‘Miss Eyre, will you come to breakfast?’ During the meal she was quiet and cool: but I could not undeceive her then. I must wait for my master to give explanations; and so must she. I ate what I could, and then I hastened upstairs. I met Adele leaving the schoolroom.

‘Where are you going? It is time for lessons.’

‘Mr. Rochester has sent me away to the nursery.’

‘Where is he?’

‘In there,’ pointing to the apartment she had left; and I went in, and there he stood.

‘Come and bid me good-morning,’ said he. I gladly advanced; and it was not merely a cold word now, or even a shake of the hand that I received, but an embrace and a kiss. It seemed natural: it seemed genial to be so well loved, so caressed by him.

‘Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty,’ said he: ‘truly pretty this morning. Is this my pale, little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?’ (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake: for him they were new-dyed, I suppose.)

‘It is Jane Eyre, sir.’

‘Soon to be Jane Rochester,’ he added: ‘in four weeks, Janet; not a day more. Do you hear that?’

I did, and I could not quite comprehend it: it made me giddy. The feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something stronger than was consistent with joy—something that smote and stunned. It was, I think almost fear.

‘You blushed, and now you are white, Jane: what is that for?’

‘Because you gave me a new name—Jane Rochester; and it seems so strange.’

‘Yes, Mrs. Rochester,’ said he; ‘young Mrs. Rochester—Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride.’

‘It can never be, sir; it does not sound likely. Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world. I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species: to imagine such a lot befalling me is a fairy tale—a day-dream.’

‘Which I can and will realise. I shall begin to-day. This morning I wrote to my banker in London to send me certain jewels he has in his keeping,—heirlooms for the ladies of Thornfield. In a day or two I hope to pour them into your lap: for every privilege, every attention shall be yours that I would accord a peer’s daughter, if about to marry her.’

‘Oh, sir!—never rain jewels! I don’t like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them.’

‘I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead,—which it will become: for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings.’

‘No, no, sir! think of other subjects, and speak of other things, and in another strain. Don’t address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess.’

‘You are a beauty in my eyes, and a beauty just after the desire of my heart,—delicate and aerial.’

‘Puny and insignificant, you mean. You are dreaming, sir,—or you are sneering. For God’s sake don’t be ironical!’

‘I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty, too,’ he went on, while I really became uneasy at the strain he had adopted, because I felt he was either deluding himself or trying to delude me. ‘I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil.’

‘And then you won’t know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin’s jacket—a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr. Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady’s robe; and I don’t call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly: far too dearly to flatter you. Don’t flatter me.’

He pursued his theme, however, without noticing my deprecation. ‘This very day I shall take you in the carriage to Millcote, and you must choose some dresses for yourself. I told you we shall be married in four weeks. The wedding is to take place quietly, in the church down below yonder; and then I shall waft you away at once to town. After a brief stay there, I shall bear my treasure to regions nearer the sun: to French vineyards and Italian plains; and she shall see what-ever is famous in old story and in modern record: she shall

taste, too, of the life of cities; and she shall learn to value herself by just comparison with others.'

'Shall I travel?—and with you, sir?'

'You shall sojourn at Paris, Rome, and Naples: at Florence, Venice, and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you: wherever I stamped my hoof, your sylph's foot shall step also. Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage as my companions: now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter.'

I laughed at him as he said this. 'I am not an angel,' I asserted; 'and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me—for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate.'

'What do you anticipate of me?'

'For a little while you will perhaps be as you are now,—a very little while; and then you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you: but when you get well used to me, you will perhaps like me again,—LIKE me, I say, not LOVE me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband's ardour extends. Yet, after all, as a friend and companion, I hope never to become quite distasteful to my dear master.'

'Distasteful! and like you again! I think I shall like you again, and yet again: and I will make you confess I do not only LIKE, but LOVE you—with truth, fervour, constancy.'

‘Yet are you not capricious, sir?’

‘To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts—when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper: but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break—at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent I am ever tender and true.’

‘Had you ever experience of such a character, sir? Did you ever love such an one?’

‘I love it now.’

‘But before me: if I, indeed, in any respect come up to your difficult standard?’

‘I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me, and you master me you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced—conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win. Why do you smile, Jane? What does that inexplicable, that uncanny turn of countenance mean?’

‘I was thinking, sir (you will excuse the idea; it was involuntary), I was thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers—’

‘You were, you little elfish—’

‘Hush, sir! You don’t talk very wisely just now; any more than those gentlemen acted very wisely. However, had they

been married, they would no doubt by their severity as husbands have made up for their softness as suitors; and so will you, I fear. I wonder how you will answer me a year hence, should I ask a favour it does not suit your convenience or pleasure to grant.'

'Ask me something now, Jane,—the least thing: I desire to be entreated—'

'Indeed I will, sir; I have my petition all ready.'

'Speak! But if you look up and smile with that countenance, I shall swear concession before I know to what, and that will make a fool of me.'

'Not at all, sir; I ask only this: don't send for the jewels, and don't crown me with roses: you might as well put a border of gold lace round that plain pocket handkerchief you have there.'

'I might as well 'gild refined gold.' I know it: you request is granted then—for the time. I will remand the order I despatched to my banker. But you have not yet asked for anything; you have prayed a gift to be withdrawn: try again.'

'Well then, sir, have the goodness to gratify my curiosity, which is much piqued on one point.'

He looked disturbed. 'What? what?' he said hastily. 'Curiosity is a dangerous petition: it is well I have not taken a vow to accord every request—'

'But there can be no danger in complying with this, sir.'

'Utter it, Jane: but I wish that instead of a mere inquiry into, perhaps, a secret, it was a wish for half my estate.'

'Now, King Ahasuerus! What do I want with half your



estate? Do you think I am a Jew-usurer, seeking good investment in land? I would much rather have all your confidence. You will not exclude me from your confidence if you admit me to your heart?’

‘You are welcome to all my confidence that is worth having, Jane; but for God’s sake, don’t desire a useless burden! Don’t long for poison—don’t turn out a downright Eve on my hands!’

‘Why not, sir? You have just been telling me how much you liked to be conquered, and how pleasant over-persuasion is to you. Don’t you think I had better take advantage of the confession, and begin and coax and entreat—even cry and be sulky if necessary—for the sake of a mere essay of my power?’

‘I dare you to any such experiment. Encroach, presume, and the game is up.’

‘Is it, sir? You soon give in. How stern you look now! Your eyebrows have become as thick as my finger, and your forehead resembles what, in some very astonishing poetry, I once saw styled, ‘a blue-piled thunderloft.’ That will be your married look, sir, I suppose?’

‘If that will be YOUR married look, I, as a Christian, will soon give up the notion of consorting with a mere sprite or salamander. But what had you to ask, thing,—out with it?’

‘There, you are less than civil now; and I like rudeness a great deal better than flattery. I had rather be a THING than an angel. This is what I have to ask,—Why did you take such pains to make me believe you wished to marry Miss Ingram?’

‘Is that all? Thank God it is no worse!’ And now he unknit his black brows; looked down, smiling at me, and stroked my hair, as if well pleased at seeing a danger averted. ‘I think I may confess,’ he continued, ‘even although I should make you a little indignant, Jane—and I have seen what a fire-spirit you can be when you are indignant. You glowed in the cool moonlight last night, when you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal. Janet, by-the-bye, it was you who made me the offer.’

‘Of course I did. But to the point if you please, sir—Miss Ingram?’

‘Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end.’

‘Excellent! Now you are small—not one whit bigger than the end of my little finger. It was a burning shame and a scandalous disgrace to act in that way. Did you think nothing of Miss Ingram’s feelings, sir?’

‘Her feelings are concentrated in one—pride; and that needs humbling. Were you jealous, Jane?’

‘Never mind, Mr. Rochester: it is in no way interesting to you to know that. Answer me truly once more. Do you think Miss Ingram will not suffer from your dishonest coquetry? Won’t she feel forsaken and deserted?’

‘Impossible!—when I told you how she, on the contrary, deserted me: the idea of my insolvency cooled, or rather extinguished, her flame in a moment.’

‘You have a curious, designing mind, Mr. Rochester. I am