

presents he had brought her: for it appears he had intimated the night before, that when his luggage came from Millcote, there would be found amongst it a little box in whose contents she had an interest.

‘Et cela doit signifier,’ said she, ‘qu’il y aura le dedans un cadeau pour moi, et peut-etre pour vous aussi, mademoiselle. Monsieur a parle de vous: il m’a demande le nom de ma gouvernante, et si elle n’était pas une petite personne, assez mince et un peu pale. J’ai dit qu’oui: car c’est vrai, n’est-ce pas, mademoiselle?’

I and my pupil dined as usual in Mrs. Fairfax’s parlour; the afternoon was wild and snowy, and we passed it in the schoolroom. At dark I allowed Adele to put away books and work, and to run downstairs; for, from the comparative silence below, and from the cessation of appeals to the door-bell, I conjectured that Mr. Rochester was now at liberty. Left alone, I walked to the window; but nothing was to be seen thence: twilight and snowflakes together thickened the air, and hid the very shrubs on the lawn. I let down the curtain and went back to the fireside.

In the clear embers I was tracing a view, not unlike a picture I remembered to have seen of the castle of Heidelberg, on the Rhine, when Mrs. Fairfax came in, breaking up by her entrance the fiery mosaic I had been piercing together, and scattering too some heavy unwelcome thoughts that were beginning to throng on my solitude.

‘Mr. Rochester would be glad if you and your pupil would take tea with him in the drawing-room this evening,’ said she: ‘he has been so much engaged all day that he could not

ask to see you before.'

'When is his tea-time?' I inquired.

'Oh, at six o'clock: he keeps early hours in the country. You had better change your frock now; I will go with you and fasten it. Here is a candle.'

'Is it necessary to change my frock?'

'Yes, you had better: I always dress for the evening when Mr. Rochester is 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 which Miss Temple gave me as a parting keepsake: I put it on, and then we went downstairs. Unused as I was to strangers, it was rather a trial to appear thus formally summoned in Mr. Rochester's presence. I let Mrs. Fairfax precede me into the dining-room, and kept in her shade as we crossed that apartment; and, passing the arch, whose curtain was now dropped, entered the elegant recess beyond.

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—Adele knelt near him. Half reclined on a couch appeared Mr. Rochester, his foot supported by the cushion; he was looking at Adele 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.’

I sat down quite disembarrassed. A reception of finished politeness would probably have confused me: I could not have returned or repaid it by answering grace and elegance on my part; but harsh caprice laid me under no obligation; on the contrary, a decent quiescence, under the freak of manner, gave me the advantage. Besides, the eccentricity of the proceeding was piquant: I felt interested to see how he would go on.

He went on as a statue would, that is, he neither spoke nor moved. Mrs. Fairfax seemed to think it necessary that some one should be amiable, and she began to talk. Kindly, as usual—and, as usual, rather trite—she condoled with him on the pressure of business he had had all day; on the annoyance it must have been to him with that painful sprain: then she commended his patience and perseverance in going through with it.

‘Madam, I should like some tea,’ was the sole rejoinder she got. She hastened to ring the bell; and when the tray came, she proceeded to arrange the cups, spoons, &c., with assiduous celerity. I and Adele went to the table; but the master did not leave his couch.

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

I did as requested. As he took the cup from my hand, Adele, thinking the moment propitious for making a request in my favour, cried out—

‘N’est-ce pas, monsieur, qu’il y a un cadeau pour Mademoiselle Eyre dans votre petit coffre?’

‘Who talks of cadeaux?’ said he gruffly. ‘Did you expect a present, Miss Eyre? Are you fond of presents?’ and he searched my face with eyes that I saw were dark, irate, and piercing.

‘I hardly know, sir; I have little experience of them: they are generally thought pleasant things.’

‘Generally thought? But what do YOU think?’

‘I should be obliged to take time, sir, before I could give you an answer worthy of your acceptance: a present has

many faces to it, has it not? and one should consider all, before pronouncing an opinion as to its nature.'

'Miss Eyre, you are not so unsophisticated as Adele: she demands a 'cadeau,' clamorously, the moment she sees me: you beat about the bush.'

'Because I have less confidence in my deserts than Adele has: she can prefer the claim of old acquaintance, and the right too of custom; for she says you have always been in the habit of giving her playthings; but if I had to make out a case I should be puzzled, since I am a stranger, and have done nothing to entitle me to an acknowledgment.'

'Oh, don't fall back on over-modesty! I have examined Adele, and find you have taken great pains with her: she is not bright, she has no talents; yet in a short time she has made much improvement.'

'Sir, you have now given me my 'cadeau;' I am obliged to you: it is the meed teachers most covet—praise of their pupils' progress.'

'Humph!' said Mr. Rochester, and he took his tea in silence.

'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 Adele was leading me by the hand round the room, showing me the beautiful books and ornaments on the consoles and chiffonnières. We obeyed, as in duty bound; Adele wanted to take a seat on my knee, but she was ordered to amuse herself with Pilot.

'You have been resident in my house three months?'

'Yes, sir.'

‘And you came from—?’

‘From Lowood school, in—shire.’

‘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 had 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 am not sure yet. Who are your parents?’

‘I have none.’

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

‘No.’

‘I thought not. And so you were waiting for your people when you sat on that stile?’

‘For whom, sir?’

‘For the men in green: it was a proper moonlight evening for them. Did I break through one of your rings, that you spread that damned ice on the causeway?’

I shook my head. ‘The men in green all forsook England a hundred years ago,’ said I, speaking as seriously as he had done. ‘And not even in Hay Lane, or the fields about it, could you find a trace of them. I don’t think either summer or harvest, or winter moon, will ever shine on their revels more.’

Mrs. Fairfax had dropped her knitting, and, with raised eyebrows, seemed wondering what sort of talk this was.

‘Well,’ resumed Mr. Rochester, ‘if you disown parents,

you must have some sort of kinsfolk: uncles and aunts?’

‘No; none that I ever saw.’

‘And your home?’

‘I have none.’

‘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 Adele.’

‘Don’t trouble yourself to give her a character,’ returned Mr. Rochester: ‘eulogiums will not bias me; I shall judge for myself. She began by felling my horse.’

‘Sir?’ said Mrs. Fairfax.

‘I have to thank her for this sprain.’

The widow looked bewildered.

‘Miss Eyre, have you ever lived in a town?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Have you seen much society?’

‘None but the pupils and teachers of Lowood, and now the inmates of Thornfield.’

‘Have you read much?’

‘Only such books as came in my way; and they have not been numerous or very learned.’

‘You have lived the life of a nun: no doubt you are well drilled in religious forms;—Brocklehurst, who I under-

stand directs Lowood, is a parson, is he not?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And you girls probably worshipped him, as a convent full of religieuses would worship their director.’

‘Oh, no.’

‘You are very cool! No! What! a novice not worship her priest! That sounds blasphemous.’

‘I disliked Mr. Brocklehurst; and I was not alone in the feeling. He is a harsh man; at once pompous and meddling; he cut off our hair; and for economy’s sake bought us bad needles and thread, with which we could hardly sew.’

‘That was very false economy,’ remarked Mrs. Fairfax, who now again caught the drift of the dialogue.

‘And was that the head and front of his offending?’ demanded Mr. Rochester.

‘He starved us when he had the sole superintendence of the provision department, before the committee was appointed; and he bored us with long lectures once a week, and with evening readings from books of his own inditing, about sudden deaths and judgments, which made us afraid to go to bed.’

‘What age were you when you went to Lowood?’

‘About ten.’

‘And you stayed there eight years: you are now, then, eighteen?’

I assented.

‘Arithmetic, you see, is useful; without its aid, I should hardly have been able to guess your age. It is a point difficult to fix where the features and countenance are so much



at variance as in your case. And now what did you learn at Lowood? Can you play?’

‘A little.’

‘Of course: that is the established answer. Go into the library—I mean, if you please.—(Excuse my tone of command; I am used to say, ‘Do this,’ and it is done: I cannot alter my customary habits for one new inmate.)—Go, then, into the library; take a candle with you; leave the door open; sit down to the piano, and play a tune.’

I departed, obeying his directions.

‘Enough!’ he called out in a few minutes. ‘You play A LITTLE, I see; like any other English school-girl; perhaps rather better than some, but not well.’

I closed the piano and returned. Mr. Rochester continued—‘Adele showed me some sketches this morning, which she said were yours. I don’t know whether they were entirely of your doing; probably a master aided you?’

‘No, indeed!’ I interjected.

‘Ah! that pricks pride. Well, fetch me your portfolio, if you can vouch for its contents being original; but don’t pass your word unless you are certain: I can recognise patch-work.’

‘Then I will say nothing, and you shall judge for yourself, sir.’

I brought the portfolio from the library.

‘Approach the table,’ said he; and I wheeled it to his couch. Adele and Mrs. Fairfax drew near to see the pictures.

‘No crowding,’ said Mr. Rochester: ‘take the drawings from my hand as I finish with them; but don’t push your

faces up to mine.'

He deliberately scrutinised each sketch and painting. Three he laid aside; the others, when he had examined them, he swept from him.

'Take them off to the other table, Mrs. Fairfax,' said he, and look at them with Adele;—you' (glancing at me) 'resume your seat, and answer my questions. I perceive those pictures were done by one hand: was that hand yours?'

'Yes.'

'And when did you find time to do them? They have taken much time, and some thought.'

'I did them in the last two vacations I spent at Lowood, when I had no other occupation.'

'Where did you get your copies?'

'Out of my head.'

'That head I see now on your shoulders?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Has it other furniture of the same kind within?'

'I should think it may have: I should hope—better.'

He spread the pictures before him, and again surveyed them alternately.

While he is so occupied, I will tell you, reader, what they are: and first, I must premise that they are nothing wonderful. The subjects had, indeed, risen vividly on my mind. As I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived.

These pictures were in water-colours. The first represent-