

inflexible servant clapped the door to and bolted it within.

This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering—a throe of true despair—rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned—I wrung my hands—I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour, approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation—this banishment from my kind! Not only the anchor of hope, but the footing of fortitude was gone—at least for a moment; but the last I soon endeavoured to regain.

‘I can but die,’ I said, ‘and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence.’

These words I not only thought, but uttered; and thrusting back all my misery into my heart, I made an effort to compel it to remain there—dumb and still.

‘All men must die,’ said a voice quite close at hand; ‘but all are not condemned to meet a lingering and premature doom, such as yours would be if you perished here of want.’

‘Who or what speaks?’ I asked, terrified at the unexpected sound, and incapable now of deriving from any occurrence a hope of aid. A form was near—what form, the pitch-dark night and my enfeebled vision prevented me from distinguishing. With a loud long knock, the new-comer appealed to the door.

‘Is it you, Mr. St. John?’ cried Hannah.

‘Yes—yes; open quickly.’

‘Well, how wet and cold you must be, such a wild night as it is! Come in—your sisters are quite uneasy about you, and I believe there are bad folks about. There has been a beg-

gar-woman—I declare she is not gone yet!—laid down there. Get up! for shame! Move off, I say!’

‘Hush, Hannah! I have a word to say to the woman. You have done your duty in excluding, now let me do mine in admitting her. I was near, and listened to both you and her. I think this is a peculiar case—I must at least examine into it. Young woman, rise, and pass before me into the house.’

With difficulty I obeyed him. Presently I stood within that clean, bright kitchen—on the very hearth—trembling, sickening; conscious of an aspect in the last degree ghastly, wild, and weather-beaten. The two ladies, their brother, Mr. St. John, the old servant, were all gazing at me.

‘St. John, who is it?’ I heard one ask.

‘I cannot tell: I found her at the door,’ was the reply.

‘She does look white,’ said Hannah.

‘As white as clay or death,’ was responded. ‘She will fall: let her sit.’

And indeed my head swam: I dropped, but a chair received me. I still possessed my senses, though just now I could not speak.

‘Perhaps a little water would restore her. Hannah, fetch some. But she is worn to nothing. How very thin, and how very bloodless!’

‘A mere spectre!’

‘Is she ill, or only famished?’

‘Famished, I think. Hannah, is that milk? Give it me, and a piece of bread.’

Diana (I knew her by the long curls which I saw drooping between me and the fire as she bent over me) broke some

bread, dipped it in milk, and put it to my lips. Her face was near mine: I saw there was pity in it, and I felt sympathy in her hurried breathing. In her simple words, too, the same balm-like emotion spoke: 'Try to eat.'

'Yes—try,' repeated Mary gently; and Mary's hand removed my sodden bonnet and lifted my head. I tasted what they offered me: feebly at first, eagerly soon.

'Not too much at first—restrain her,' said the brother; 'she has had enough.' And he withdrew the cup of milk and the plate of bread.

'A little more, St. John—look at the avidity in her eyes.'

'No more at present, sister. Try if she can speak now—ask her her name.'

I felt I could speak, and I answered—'My name is Jane Elliott.' Anxious as ever to avoid discovery, I had before resolved to assume an ALIAS.

'And where do you live? Where are your friends?'

I was silent.

'Can we send for any one you know?'

I shook my head.

'What account can you give of yourself?'

Somehow, now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house, and once was brought face to face with its owners, I felt no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world. I dared to put off the mendicant—to resume my natural manner and character. I began once more to know myself; and when Mr. St. John demanded an account—which at present I was far too weak to render—I said after a brief pause—

‘Sir, I can give you no details to-night.’

‘But what, then,’ said he, ‘do you expect me to do for you?’

‘Nothing,’ I replied. My strength sufficed for but short answers. Diana took the word—

‘Do you mean,’ she asked, ‘that we have now given you what aid you require? and that we may dismiss you to the moor and the rainy night?’

I looked at her. She had, I thought, a remarkable countenance, instinct both with power and goodness. I took sudden courage. Answering her compassionate gaze with a smile, I said—‘I will trust you. If I were a masterless and stray dog, I know that you would not turn me from your hearth to-night: as it is, I really have no fear. Do with me and for me as you like; but excuse me from much discourse—my breath is short—I feel a spasm when I speak.’ All three surveyed me, and all three were silent.

‘Hannah,’ said Mr. St. John, at last, ‘let her sit there at present, and ask her no questions; in ten minutes more, give her the remainder of that milk and bread. Mary and Diana, let us go into the parlour and talk the matter over.’

They withdrew. Very soon one of the ladies returned—I could not tell which. A kind of pleasant stupor was stealing over me as I sat by the genial fire. In an undertone she gave some directions to Hannah. Ere long, with the servant’s aid, I contrived to mount a staircase; my dripping clothes were removed; soon a warm, dry bed received me. I thanked God—experienced amidst unutterable exhaustion a glow of grateful joy—and slept.

## CHAPTER XXIX

THE recollection of about three days and nights succeeding this is very dim in my mind. I can recall some sensations felt in that interval; but few thoughts framed, and no actions performed. I knew I was in a small room and in a narrow bed. To that bed I seemed to have grown; I lay on it motionless as a stone; and to have torn me from it would have been almost to kill me. I took no note of the lapse of time—of the change from morning to noon, from noon to evening. I observed when any one entered or left the apartment: I could even tell who they were; I could understand what was said when the speaker stood near to me; but I could not answer; to open my lips or move my limbs was equally impossible. Hannah, the servant, was my most frequent visitor. Her coming disturbed me. I had a feeling that she wished me away; that she did not understand me or my circumstances; that she was prejudiced against me. Diana and Mary appeared in the chamber once or twice a day. They would whisper sentences of this sort at my bedside—

‘It is very well we took her in.’

‘Yes; she would certainly have been found dead at the door in the morning had she been left out all night. I wonder what she has gone through?’

‘Strange hardships, I imagine—poor, emaciated, pallid wanderer?’

‘She is not an uneducated person, I should think, by her manner of speaking; her accent was quite pure; and the clothes she took off, though splashed and wet, were little worn and fine.’

‘She has a peculiar face; fleshless and haggard as it is, I rather like it; and when in good health and animated, I can fancy her physiognomy would be agreeable.’

Never once in their dialogues did I hear a syllable of regret at the hospitality they had extended to me, or of suspicion of, or aversion to, myself. I was comforted.

Mr. St. John came but once: he looked at me, and said my state of lethargy was the result of reaction from excessive and protracted fatigue. He pronounced it needless to send for a doctor: nature, he was sure, would manage best, left to herself. He said every nerve had been overstrained in some way, and the whole system must sleep torpid a while. There was no disease. He imagined my recovery would be rapid enough when once commenced. These opinions he delivered in a few words, in a quiet, low voice; and added, after a pause, in the tone of a man little accustomed to expansive comment, ‘Rather an unusual physiognomy; certainly, not indicative of vulgarity or degradation.’

‘Far otherwise,’ responded Diana. ‘To speak truth, St. John, my heart rather warms to the poor little soul. I wish we may be able to benefit her permanently.’

‘That is hardly likely,’ was the reply. ‘You will find she is some young lady who has had a misunderstanding with her friends, and has probably injudiciously left them. We may, perhaps, succeed in restoring her to them, if she is not

obstinate: but I trace lines of force in her face which make me sceptical of her tractability.' He stood considering me some minutes; then added, 'She looks sensible, but not at all handsome.'

'She is so ill, St. John.'

'Ill or well, she would always be plain. The grace and harmony of beauty are quite wanting in those features.'

On the third day I was better; on the fourth, I could speak, move, rise in bed, and turn. Hannah had brought me some gruel and dry toast, about, as I supposed, the dinner-hour. I had eaten with relish: the food was good—void of the feverish flavour which had hitherto poisoned what I had swallowed. When she left me, I felt comparatively strong and revived: ere long satiety of repose and desire for action stirred me. I wished to rise; but what could I put on? Only my damp and bemired apparel; in which I had slept on the ground and fallen in the marsh. I felt ashamed to appear before my benefactors so clad. I was spared the humiliation.

On a chair by the bedside were all my own things, clean and dry. My black silk frock hung against the wall. The traces of the bog were removed from it; the creases left by the wet smoothed out: it was quite decent. My very shoes and stockings were purified and rendered presentable. There were the means of washing in the room, and a comb and brush to smooth my hair. After a weary process, and resting every five minutes, I succeeded in dressing myself. My clothes hung loose on me; for I was much wasted, but I covered deficiencies with a shawl, and once more, clean and respectable looking—no speck of the dirt, no trace of the

disorder I so hated, and which seemed so to degrade me, left—I crept down a stone staircase with the aid of the banisters, to a narrow low passage, and found my way presently to the kitchen.

It was full of the fragrance of new bread and the warmth of a generous fire. Hannah was baking. Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilised by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones. Hannah had been cold and stiff, indeed, at the first: latterly she had begun to relent a little; and when she saw me come in tidy and well-dressed, she even smiled.

‘What, you have got up!’ she said. ‘You are better, then. You may sit you down in my chair on the hearthstone, if you will.’

She pointed to the rocking-chair: I took it. She bustled about, examining me every now and then with the corner of her eye. Turning to me, as she took some loaves from the oven, she asked bluntly—

‘Did you ever go a-begging afore you came here?’

I was indignant for a moment; but remembering that anger was out of the question, and that I had indeed appeared as a beggar to her, I answered quietly, but still not without a certain marked firmness—

‘You are mistaken in supposing me a beggar. I am no beggar; any more than yourself or your young ladies.’

After a pause she said, ‘I dunnut understand that: you’ve like no house, nor no brass, I guess?’

‘The want of house or brass (by which I suppose you



mean money) does not make a beggar in your sense of the word.'

'Are you book-learned?' she inquired presently.

'Yes, very.'

'But you've never been to a boarding-school?'

'I was at a boarding-school eight years.'

She opened her eyes wide. 'Whatever cannot ye keep yourself for, then?'

'I have kept myself; and, I trust, shall keep myself again. What are you going to do with these gooseberries?' I inquired, as she brought out a basket of the fruit.

'Mak' 'em into pies.'

'Give them to me and I'll pick them.'

'Nay; I dunnut want ye to do nought.'

'But I must do something. Let me have them.'

She consented; and she even brought me a clean towel to spread over my dress, 'lest,' as she said, 'I should mucky it.'

'Ye've not been used to sarvant's wark, I see by your hands,' she remarked. 'Happen ye've been a dressmaker?'

'No, you are wrong. And now, never mind what I have been: don't trouble your head further about me; but tell me the name of the house where we are.'

'Some calls it Marsh End, and some calls it Moor House.'

'And the gentleman who lives here is called Mr. St. John?'

'Nay; he doesn't live here: he is only staying a while. When he is at home, he is in his own parish at Morton.'

'That village a few miles off?'

'Aye.'

‘And what is he?’

‘He is a parson.’

I remembered the answer of the old housekeeper at the parsonage, when I had asked to see the clergyman. ‘This, then, was his father’s residence?’

‘Aye; old Mr. Rivers lived here, and his father, and grandfather, and gurt (great) grandfather afore him.’

‘The name, then, of that gentleman, is Mr. St. John Rivers?’

‘Aye; St. John is like his kirstened name.’

‘And his sisters are called Diana and Mary Rivers?’

‘Yes.’

‘Their father is dead?’

‘Dead three weeks sin’ of a stroke.’

‘They have no mother?’

‘The mistress has been dead this mony a year.’

‘Have you lived with the family long?’

‘I’ve lived here thirty year. I nursed them all three.’

‘That proves you must have been an honest and faithful servant. I will say so much for you, though you have had the incivility to call me a beggar.’

She again regarded me with a surprised stare. ‘I believe,’ she said, ‘I was quite mista’en in my thoughts of you: but there is so mony cheats goes about, you mun forgie me.’

‘And though,’ I continued, rather severely, ‘you wished to turn me from the door, on a night when you should not have shut out a dog.’

‘Well, it was hard: but what can a body do? I thought more o’ th’ childer nor of mysel: poor things! They’ve like nobody