

ercion, your first act, when released, would be to violate its conditions.’

‘Why, Jane, what would you have? I fear you will compel me to go through a private marriage ceremony, besides that performed at the altar. You will stipulate, I see, for peculiar terms—what will they be?’

‘I only want an easy mind, sir; not crushed by crowded obligations. Do you remember what you said of Celine Varens?—of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Celine Varens. I shall continue to act as Adele’s governess; by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides. I’ll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing but—’

‘Well, but what?’

‘Your regard; and if I give you mine in return, that debt will be quit.’

‘Well, for cool native impudence and pure innate pride, you haven’t your equal,’ said he. We were now approaching Thornfield. ‘Will it please you to dine with me to-day?’ he asked, as we re-entered the gates.

‘No, thank you, sir.’

‘And what for, ‘no, thank you?’ if one may inquire.’

‘I never have dined with you, sir: and I see no reason why I should now: till—’

‘Till what? You delight in half-phrases.’

‘Till I can’t help it.’

‘Do you suppose I eat like an ogre or a ghoul, that you dread being the companion of my repast?’

‘I have formed no supposition on the subject, sir; but I want to go on as usual for another month.’

‘You will give up your governing slavery at once.’

‘Indeed, begging your pardon, sir, I shall not. I shall just go on with it as usual. I shall keep out of your way all day, as I have been accustomed to do: you may send for me in the evening, when you feel disposed to see me, and I’ll come then; but at no other time.’

‘I want a smoke, Jane, or a pinch of snuff, to comfort me under all this, ‘pour me donner une contenance,’ as Adele would say; and unfortunately I have neither my cigar-case, nor my snuff-box. But listen—whisper. It is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just—figuratively speaking—attach you to a chain like this’ (touching his watch-guard). ‘Yes, bonny wee thing, I’ll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne.’

He said this as he helped me to alight from the carriage, and while he afterwards lifted out Adele, I entered the house, and made good my retreat upstairs.

He duly summoned me to his presence in the evening. I had prepared an occupation for him; for I was determined not to spend the whole time in a tete-e-tete conversation. I remembered his fine voice; I knew he liked to sing—good singers generally do. I was no vocalist myself, and, in his fastidious judgment, no musician, either; but I delighted in listening when the performance was good. No sooner had twilight, that hour of romance, began to lower her blue and starry banner over the lattice, than I rose, opened the piano,

and entreated him, for the love of heaven, to give me a song. He said I was a capricious witch, and that he would rather sing another time; but I averred that no time was like the present.

‘Did I like his voice?’ he asked.

‘Very much.’ I was not fond of pampering that susceptible vanity of his; but for once, and from motives of expediency, I would e’en soothe and stimulate it.

‘Then, Jane, you must play the accompaniment.’

‘Very well, sir, I will try.’

I did try, but was presently swept off the stool and denominated ‘a little bungler.’ Being pushed unceremoniously to one side—which was precisely what I wished—he usurped my place, and proceeded to accompany himself: for he could play as well as sing. I hied me to the window-recess. And while I sat there and looked out on the still trees and dim lawn, to a sweet air was sung in mellow tones the following strain:-

*‘The truest love that ever heart
Felt at its kindled core,
Did through each vein, in quickened start,
The tide of being pour.*

*Her coming was my hope each day,
Her parting was my pain;
The chance that did her steps delay
Was ice in every vein.*

*I dreamed it would be nameless bliss,
As I loved, loved to be;
And to this object did I press
As blind as eagerly.*

*But wide as pathless was the space
That lay our lives between,
And dangerous as the foamy race
Of ocean-surges green.*

*And haunted as a robber-path
Through wilderness or wood;
For Might and Right, and Woe and Wrath,
Between our spirits stood.*

*I dangers dared; I hindrance scorned;
I omens did defy:
Whatever menaced, harassed, warned,
I passed impetuous by.*

*On sped my rainbow, fast as light;
I flew as in a dream;
For glorious rose upon my sight
That child of Shower and Gleam.*

*Still bright on clouds of suffering dim
Shines that soft, solemn joy;
Nor care I now, how dense and grim
Disasters gather nigh.*

*I care not in this moment sweet,
Though all I have rushed o'er
Should come on pinion, strong and fleet,
Proclaiming vengeance sore:*

*Though haughty Hate should strike me down,
Right, bar approach to me,
And grinding Might, with furious frown,
Swear endless enmity.*

*My love has placed her little hand
With noble faith in mine,
And vowed that wedlock's sacred band
Our nature shall entwine.*

*My love has sworn, with sealing kiss,
With me to live—to die;
I have at last my nameless bliss.
As I love—loved am I!*

He rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his full falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineament. I quailed momentarily—then I rallied. Soft scene, daring demonstration, I would not have; and I stood in peril of both: a weapon of defence must be prepared—I whetted my tongue: as he reached me, I asked with asperity, 'whom he was going to marry now?'

'That was a strange question to be put by his darling Jane.'

‘Indeed! I considered it a very natural and necessary one: he had talked of his future wife dying with him. What did he mean by such a pagan idea? I had no intention of dying with him—he might depend on that.’

‘Oh, all he longed, all he prayed for, was that I might live with him! Death was not for such as I.’

‘Indeed it was: I had as good a right to die when my time came as he had: but I should bide that time, and not be hurried away in a suttee.’

‘Would I forgive him for the selfish idea, and prove my pardon by a reconciling kiss?’

‘No: I would rather be excused.’

Here I heard myself apostrophised as a ‘hard little thing;’ and it was added, ‘any other woman would have been melted to marrow at hearing such stanzas crooned in her praise.’

I assured him I was naturally hard—very flinty, and that he would often find me so; and that, moreover, I was determined to show him divers rugged points in my character before the ensuing four weeks elapsed: he should know fully what sort of a bargain he had made, while there was yet time to rescind it.

‘Would I be quiet and talk rationally?’

‘I would be quiet if he liked, and as to talking rationally, I flattered myself I was doing that now.’

He fretted, pished, and pshawed. ‘Very good,’ I thought; ‘you may fume and fidget as you please: but this is the best plan to pursue with you, I am certain. I like you more than I can say; but I’ll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and with this needle of repartee I’ll keep you from the edge of

the gulf too; and, moreover, maintain by its pungent aid that distance between you and myself most conducive to our real mutual advantage.'

From less to more, I worked him up to considerable irritation; then, after he had retired, in dudgeon, quite to the other end of the room, I got up, and saying, 'I wish you good-night, sir,' in my natural and wonted respectful manner, I slipped out by the side-door and got away.

The system thus entered on, I pursued during the whole season of probation; and with the best success. He was kept, to be sure, rather cross and crusty; but on the whole I could see he was excellently entertained, and that a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgment, satisfied his common-sense, and even suited his taste less.

In other people's presence I was, as formerly, deferential and quiet; any other line of conduct being uncalled for: it was only in the evening conferences I thus thwarted and afflicted him. He continued to send for me punctually the moment the clock struck seven; though when I appeared before him now, he had no such honeyed terms as 'love' and 'darling' on his lips: the best words at my service were 'provoking puppet,' 'malicious elf,' 'sprite,' 'changeling,' &c. For caresses, too, I now got grimaces; for a pressure of the hand, a pinch on the arm; for a kiss on the cheek, a severe tweak of the ear. It was all right: at present I decidedly preferred these fierce favours to anything more tender. Mrs. Fairfax, I saw, approved me: her anxiety on my account vanished; therefore I was certain I did well. Meantime, Mr. Rochester

affirmed I was wearing him to skin and bone, and threatened awful vengeance for my present conduct at some period fast coming. I laughed in my sleeve at his menaces. 'I can keep you in reasonable check now,' I reflected; 'and I don't doubt to be able to do it hereafter: if one expedient loses its virtue, another must be devised.'

Yet after all my task was not an easy one; often I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol.

CHAPTER XXV

The month of courtship had wasted: its very last hours were being numbered. There was no putting off the day that advanced—the bridal day; and all preparations for its arrival were complete. I, at least, had nothing more to do: there were my trunks, packed, locked, corded, ranged in a row along the wall of my little chamber; to-morrow, at this time, they would be far on their road to London: and so should I (D.V.),—or rather, not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. The cards of address alone remained to nail on: they lay, four little squares, in the drawer. Mr. Rochester had himself written the direction, ‘Mrs. Rochester,— Hotel, London,’ on each: I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o’clock a.m.; and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive before I assigned to her all that property. It was enough that in yonder closet, opposite my dressing-table, garments said to be hers had already displaced my black stuff Lowood frock and straw bonnet: for not to me appertained that suit of wedding raiment; the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil pendent from the usurped portmanteau. I shut the closet to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained; which, at this evening hour—nine o’clock— gave out certainly a

most ghostly shimmer through the shadow of my apartment. 'I will leave you by yourself, white dream,' I said. 'I am feverish: I hear the wind blowing: I will go out of doors and feel it.'

It was not only the hurry of preparation that made me feverish; not only the anticipation of the great change—the new life which was to commence to-morrow: both these circumstances had their share, doubtless, in producing that restless, excited mood which hurried me forth at this late hour into the darkening grounds: but a third cause influenced my mind more than they.

I had at heart a strange and anxious thought. Something had happened which I could not comprehend; no one knew of or had seen the event but myself: it had taken place the preceding night. Mr. Rochester that night was absent from home; nor was he yet returned: business had called him to a small estate of two or three farms he possessed thirty miles off—business it was requisite he should settle in person, previous to his meditated departure from England. I waited now his return; eager to disburthen my mind, and to seek of him the solution of the enigma that perplexed me. Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence.

I sought the orchard, driven to its shelter by the wind, which all day had blown strong and full from the south, without, however, bringing a speck of rain. Instead of subsiding as night drew on, it seemed to augment its rush and deepen its roar: the trees blew steadfastly one way, never writhing round, and scarcely tossing back their boughs