

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,

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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

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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.'

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'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.'

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'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 to tak' care on 'em but me. I'm like to look sharpish.'

I maintained a grave silence for some minutes.

'You munnot think too hardly of me,' she again remarked.

'But I do think hardly of you,' I said; 'and I'll tell you why- not so much because you refused to give me shelter, or regarded me as an impostor, as because you just now made it a species of reproach that I had no "brass" and no house. Some of the best people that ever lived have been as destitute as I am; and if you are a Christian, you ought not to consider poverty a crime.'

'No more I ought,' said she: 'Mr. St. John tells me so too; and I see I wor wrang- but I've clear a different notion on you now to what I had. You look a raight down dacent little crater.'

'That will do- I forgive you now. Shake hands.'

She put her floury and horny hand into mine; another and heartier smile illumined her rough face, and from that moment we were friends.

Hannah was evidently fond of talking. While I picked the fruit, and she made the paste for the pies, she proceeded to give me sundry details about her deceased master and mistress, and 'the childer,' as she called the young people.

Old Mr. Rivers, she said, was a plain man enough, but a gentleman, and of as ancient a family as could be found. Marsh End had belonged to the Rivers ever since it was a house: and it was, she affirmed, 'aboon two hundred year old- for all it looked but a small, humble place, naught to compare wi' Mr. Oliver's grand hall down i' Morton Vale. But she could remember Bill Oliver's father a journeyman needle-maker; and th' Rivers wor gentry i' th' owd days o' th' Henrys, as onybody might see by looking into th' registers i' Morton Church vestry.' Still, she allowed, 'the owd maister was like other folk- naught mich out o' th' common way: stark mad o' shooting, and farming, and sich like.' The mistress was different. She was a great reader, and studied a deal; and the 'bairns' had taken after her. There was nothing like them in these parts, nor ever had been; they had liked learning, all three, almost from the time they could speak; and they had always been 'of a mak' of their own.' Mr. St. John, when he grew up, would go to college and be a parson; and the girls, as soon as they left school, would seek places as governesses: for they had told her their father had some years ago lost a great deal of money by a man he had trusted turning bankrupt; and as he was now not rich enough to give them fortunes, they must provide for themselves. They had lived very little at home for a long while, and were only come now to stay a few weeks on account of their father's death; but they did so like Marsh End and Morton, and all these moors and hills about. They had been in London, and many other grand towns; but they always said there was no place like home; and then they were so agreeable with each other- never fell out nor 'threaped.' She did not know where there was such a family for being united.

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Having finished my task of gooseberry picking, I asked where the two ladies and their brother were now.

'Gone over to Morton for a walk; but they would be back in half an hour to tea.'

They returned within the time Hannah had allotted them: they entered by the kitchen door. Mr. St. John, when he saw me, merely bowed and passed through; the two ladies stopped: Mary, in a few words, kindly and calmly expressed the pleasure she felt in seeing me well enough to be able to come down; Diana took my hand: she shook her head at me.

'You should have waited for my leave to descend,' she said. 'You still look very pale- and so thin! Poor child!- poor girl!'

Diana had a voice toned, to my ear, like the cooing of a dove.

She possessed eyes whose gaze I delighted to encounter. Her whole face seemed to me full of charm. Mary's countenance was equally intelligent- her features equally pretty; but her expression was more reserved, and her manners, though gentle, more distant. Diana looked and spoke with a certain authority: she had a will, evidently. It was my nature to feel pleasure in yielding to an authority supported like hers, and to bend, where my conscience and self-respect permitted, to an active will.

'And what business have you here?' she continued. 'It is not your place. Mary and I sit in the kitchen sometimes, because at home we like to be free, even to license- but you are a visitor, and must go into the parlour.'

'I am very well here.'

'Not at all, with Hannah bustling about and covering you with flour.'

'Besides, the fire is too hot for you,' interposed Mary.

'To be sure,' added her sister. 'Come, you must be obedient.' And still holding my hand she made me rise, and led me into the inner room.

'Sit there,' she said, placing me on the sofa, 'while we take our things off and get the tea ready; it is another privilege we exercise in our little moorland home- to prepare our own meals when we are so inclined, or when Hannah is baking, brewing, washing, or ironing.'

She closed the door, leaving me solus with Mr. St. John, who sat opposite, a book or newspaper in his hand. I examined first, the parlour, and then its occupant.

The parlour was rather a small room, very plainly furnished, yet comfortable, because clean and neat. The old-fashioned chairs were very bright, and the walnut-wood table was like a looking-

glass. A few strange, antique portraits of the men and women of other days decorated the stained walls; a cupboard with glass doors contained some books and an ancient set of china. There was no superfluous ornament in the room- not one modern piece of furniture, save a brace of workboxes and a lady's desk in rosewood, which stood on a side-table: everything- including the carpet and curtains- looked at once well worn and well saved.

Mr. St. John- sitting as still as one of the dusty pictures on the walls, keeping his eyes fixed on the page he perused, and his lips mutely sealed- was easy enough to examine. Had he been a statue instead of a man, he could not have been easier. He was young- perhaps from twenty-eight to thirty- tall, slender; his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline: quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin. It is seldom, indeed, an English face comes so near the antique models as did his.

He might well be a little shocked at the irregularity of my lineaments, his own being so harmonious. His eyes were large and blue, with brown lashes; his high forehead, colourless as ivory, was partially streaked over by careless locks of fair hair.

This is a gentle delineation, is it not, reader? Yet he whom it describes scarcely impressed one with the idea of a gentle, a yielding, an impressible, or even of a placid nature. Quiescent as he now sat, there was something about his nostril, his mouth, his brow, which, to my perceptions, indicated elements within either restless, or hard, or eager. He did not speak to me one word, nor even direct to me one glance, till his sisters returned. Diana, as she passed in and out, in the course of preparing tea, brought me a little cake, baked on the top of the oven.

'Eat that now,' she said: 'you must be hungry. Hannah says you have had nothing but some gruel since breakfast.'

I did not refuse it, for my appetite was awakened and keen. Mr. Rivers now closed his book, approached the table, and, as he took a seat, fixed his blue pictorial-looking eyes full on me. There was an unceremonious directness, a searching, decided steadfastness in his gaze now, which told that intention and not diffidence, had hitherto kept it averted from the stranger.

'You are very hungry,' he said.

'I am, sir.' It is my way- it always was my way, by instinct- ever to meet the brief with brevity, the direct with plainness.

'It is well for you that a low fever has forced you to abstain for the last three days: there would have been danger in yielding to the cravings of your appetite at first. Now you may eat, though still not immoderately.'

'I trust I shall not eat long at your expense, sir,' was my very clumsily-contrived, unpolished answer.

'No,' he said coolly: 'when you have indicated to us the residence of your friends, we can write to

them, and you may be restored to home.'

'That, I must plainly tell you, is out of my power to do; being absolutely without home and friends.'

The three looked at me, but not distrustfully; I felt there was no suspicion in their glances: there was more of curiosity. I speak particularly of the young ladies. St. John's eyes, though clear enough in a literal sense, in a figurative one were difficult to fathom. He seemed to use them rather as instruments to search other people's thoughts, than as agents to reveal his own: the which combination of keenness and reserve was considerably more calculated to embarrass than to encourage.

'Do you mean to say,' he asked, 'that you are completely isolated from every connection?'

'I do. Not a tie links me to any living thing: not a claim do I possess to admittance under any roof in England.'

'A most singular position at your age!'

Here I saw his glance directed to my hands, which were folded on the table before me. I wondered what he sought there: his words soon explained the quest.

'You have never been married? You are a spinster?'

Diana laughed. 'Why, she can't be above seventeen or eighteen years old, St. John,' said she.

'I am near nineteen: but I am not married. No.'

I felt a burning glow mount to my face; for bitter and agitating recollections were awakened by the allusion to marriage. They all saw the embarrassment and the emotion. Diana and Mary relieved me by turning their eyes elsewhere than to my crimsoned visage; but the colder and sterner brother continued to gaze, till the trouble he had excited forced out tears as well as colour.

'Where did you last reside?' he now asked.

'You are too inquisitive, St. John,' murmured Mary in a low voice; but he leaned over the table and required an answer by a second firm and piercing look.

'The name of the place where, and of the person with whom I lived, is my secret,' I replied concisely.

'Which, if you like, you have, in my opinion, a right to keep, both from St. John and every other questioner,' remarked Diana.

'Yet if I know nothing about you or your history, I cannot help you,' he said. 'And you need help, do



you not?'

'I need it, and I seek it so far, sir, that some true philanthropist will put me in the way of getting work which I can do, and the remuneration for which will keep me, if but in the barest necessities of life.'

'I know not whether I am a true philanthropist; yet I am willing to aid you to the utmost of my power in a purpose so honest. First, then, tell me what you have been accustomed to do, and what you can do.'

I had now swallowed my tea. I was mightily refreshed by the beverage; as much so as a giant with wine: it gave new tone to my unstrung nerves, and enabled me to address this penetrating young judge steadily.

'Mr. Rivers,' I said, turning to him, and looking at him, as he looked at me, openly and without diffidence, 'you and your sisters have done me a great service- the greatest man can do his fellow-being; you have rescued me, by your noble hospitality, from death. This benefit conferred gives you an unlimited claim on my gratitude, and a claim, to a certain extent, on my confidence. I will tell you as much of the history of the wanderer you have harboured, as I can tell without compromising my own peace of mind- my own security, moral and physical, and that of others.

'I am an orphan, the daughter of a clergyman. My parents died before I could know them. I was brought up a dependant; educated in a charitable institution. I will even tell you the name of the establishment, where I passed six years as a pupil, and two as a Mr. Rivers?- the Rev. Robert Brocklehurst is the treasurer.'

'I have heard of Mr. Brocklehurst, and I have seen the school.'

'I left Lowood nearly a year since to become a private governess. I obtained a good situation, and was happy. This place I was obliged to leave four days before I came here. The reason of my departure I cannot and ought not to explain: it would be useless, dangerous, and would sound incredible. No blame attached to me: I am as free from culpability as any one of you three. Miserable I am, and must be for a time; for the catastrophe which drove me from a house I had found a paradise was of a strange and direful nature. I observed but two points in planning my departure- speed, secrecy: to secure these, I had to leave behind me everything I possessed except a small parcel;

which, in my hurry and trouble of mind, I forgot to take out of the coach that brought me to Whitcross. To this neighbourhood, then, I came, quite destitute. I slept two nights in the open air, and wandered about two days without crossing a threshold: but twice in that space of time did I taste food; and it was when brought by hunger, exhaustion, and despair almost to the last gasp, that you, Mr. Rivers, forbade me to perish of want at your door, and took me under the shelter of your roof. I know all your sisters have done for me since- for I have not been insensible during my seeming torpor- and I owe to their spontaneous, genuine, genial compassion as large a debt as to

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your evangelical charity.'

'Don't make her talk any more now, St. John,' said Diana, as I paused; 'she is evidently not yet fit for excitement. Come to the sofa and sit down now, Miss Elliott.'

I gave an involuntary half start at hearing the alias: I had forgotten my new name. Mr. Rivers, whom nothing seemed to escape, noticed it at once.

'You said your name was Jane Elliott?' he observed.

'I did say so; and it is the name by which I think it expedient to be called at present, but it is not my real name, and when I hear it, it sounds strange to me.'

'Your real name you will not give?'

'No: I fear discovery above all things; and whatever disclosure would lead to it, I avoid.'

'You are quite right, I am sure,' said Diana. 'Now do, brother, let her be at peace a while.'

But when St. John had mused a few moments he recommenced as imperturbably and with as much acumen as ever.

'You would not like to be long dependent on our hospitality- you would wish, I see, to dispense as soon as may be with my sisters' compassion, and, above all, with my charity (I am quite sensible of the distinction drawn, nor do I resent it- it is just): you desire to be independent of us?'

'I do: I have already said so. Show me how to work, or how to seek work: that is all I now ask; then let me go, if it be but to the meanest cottage; but till then, allow me to stay here: I dread another essay of the horrors of homeless destitution.'

'Indeed you shall stay here,' said Diana, putting her white hand on my head. 'You shall,' repeated Mary, in the tone of undemonstrative sincerity which seemed natural to her.

'My sisters, you see, have a pleasure in keeping you,' said Mr. St. John, 'as they would have a pleasure in keeping and cherishing a half-frozen bird, some wintry wind might have driven through their casement. I feel more inclination to put you in the way of keeping yourself, and shall endeavour to do so; but observe, my sphere is narrow. I am but the incumbent of a poor country parish: my aid must be of the humblest sort. And if you are inclined to despise the day of small things, seek some more efficient succour than such as I can offer.'

'She has already said that she is willing to do anything honest she can do,' answered Diana for me; 'and you know, St. John, she has no choice of helpers: she is forced to put up with such crusty people as you.'

'I will be a dressmaker; I will be a plain-workwoman; I will be a servant, a nurse-girl, if I can be no better,' I answered.

'Right,' said Mr. St. John, quite coolly. 'If such is your spirit, I promise to aid you, in my own time and way.'

He now resumed the book with which he had been occupied before tea.

I soon withdrew, for I had talked as much, and sat up as long, as my present strength would permit.

### 第二十九章

这以后的三天三夜，我脑子里的记忆很模糊。我能回忆起那段时间一鳞半爪的感觉，但形不成什么想法，付诸不了行动。我知道自己在一个小房间里，躺在狭窄的床上，我与那张床似乎已难舍难分。我躺着一动不动，像块石头。把我从那儿挣开，几乎等于要我的命。我并不在乎时间的流逝——不在乎上午转为下午、下午转为晚上的变化。我观察别人进出房间，甚至还能分辨出他们是谁，能听懂别人在我身旁所说的话，但回答不上来。动嘴唇与动手脚一样不行。佣人汉娜来得最多，她一来就使我感到不安。我有一种感觉，她希望我走。她不了解我和我的处境，对我怀有偏见。黛安娜和玛丽每天到房间来一两回。她们会在我床边悄声说着这一类话：

“幸好我们把她收留下来了。”

“是呀，要是她整夜给关在房子外面，第二天早晨准会死有门口。不知道她吃了什么苦头。”

“我想象是少见的苦头吧，——消瘦、苍白、可怜的流浪者！”

“从她说话的神态看，我认为她不是一个没有受过教育的人、她的口音很纯。她脱下的衣服虽然湿淋淋溅了泥，但不旧，而且很精致。”

“她的脸很奇特，尽管皮包骨头又很憔悴，但我比较喜欢。可以想见她健康而有生气时、面孔一定很可爱。”

在她们的交谈中，我从来没有听到她们说过一句话，对自己的好客，表示懊悔，或者对我表示怀疑或厌恶。我得到了安慰。

圣·约翰先生只来过一次，他瞧着我，说我昏睡不醒是长期疲劳过度的反应，认为不必去叫医生，确信最好的办法是顺其自然。他说每根神经都有些紧张过度，所以整个机体得有一段沉睡麻木的时期，而并不是什么病。他想歇而不是我自己，他们也怪可怜的，除了我没有人照应。我总该当心些。”

我沉着脸几分钟没有吱声。

“你别把我想得太坏，”她又说。

“不过我确实把你想得很坏”，我说，“而且我告诉过你，说实话，圣·约翰，我内心对这可怜的小幽灵产生了好感。但愿我们永远能够帮助她。”

“这不大可能，”对方回答，“你会发现她是某个年轻小姐，与自己朋友产生了误会，可能轻率地一走了之。要是她不固执，我们也许可以把她送回去。但是我注意到了她脸上很有力的线条，这使我怀疑她脾气很倔强。”他站着端详了我一会，随后补充说，“她看上去很聪明，但一点也不漂亮。”

“她病得那么重，圣·约翰。”

“不管身体好不好，反正长得很一般。那些五官缺少美的雅致与和谐。”

到了第三天我好些了，第四天我已能说话，移动，从床上坐起来，转动身子。我想大约晚饭时间，汉娜端来一些粥和烤面包。我吃得津津有味，觉得这些东西很好吃——不像前几天发烧时，吃什么都没有味道，她离开我时，我觉得已有些力气，恢复了元气。不久，我对休息感到厌烦，很想起来动动，想从床上爬起来。但是穿什么好呢？只有溅了泥的湿衣服，我就是那么穿着睡在地上，倒在沼泽地里的，我羞于以这身打扮出现在我的恩人们面前。不过我免掉了这种羞辱。

我床边的椅子上摆着我所有的衣物，又干净又干燥。我的黑丝上衣挂在墙上。泥沼的印迹已经洗去，潮湿留下的褶皱已经熨平，看上去很不错了，我的鞋子和袜子已洗得干干净净，很是象样了，房子里有流洗的工具，有一把梳子和一把刷子可把头发梳理整齐。我疲乏地挣扎了一番，每隔五分钟休息一下，终于穿好了衣服。因为消瘦，衣服穿在身上很宽松，不过我用披肩掩盖了这个不足。于是我再一次清清爽爽体体面面了——没有一丝我最讨厌、并似乎很降低我身份的尘土和凌乱——我扶着栏杆，爬下了石头楼梯，到了一条低矮窄小的过道，立刻进了厨房。

厨房里弥漫着新鲜面包的香气和熊熊炉火的暖意。汉娜正在烤面包。众所周知，偏见很难从没有用教育松过土施过肥的心田里根除。它象野草钻出石缝那样顽强地在那儿生长。说实在，起初汉娜冷淡生硬。近来开始和气一点了，而这回见我衣冠楚楚，竟笑了起来。

“什么，你已经起来了？”她说，“那么你好些了。要是你愿意，你可以坐在炉边我的椅子上，”

她指了指那把摇椅。我坐了下来。她忙碌着，不时从眼角瞟我。她一边从烤炉里取出面包，一面转向我生硬地问道：

“你到这个地方来之前也讨过饭吗？”

我一时很生气，但想起发火是不行的，何况在她看来我曾像个乞丐，于是便平心静气地回答了她，不过仍带着明显的强硬口气

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“你错把我当成乞丐了，跟你自己或者你的小姐们一样，我不是什么乞丐。”

她顿了一下后说：“那我就不大明白了，你象是既没有房子，也没有铜子儿？”

“没有房子或铜子儿（我猜你指的是钱）并不就成了你说的那个意思上的乞丐。”

“你读过书吗？”她立刻问，

“是的，读过不少书。”

“不过你从来没有进过寄宿学校吧？”

“我在寄宿学校呆了八年。”

她眼睛睁得大大的。“那你为什么还养不活自己呢？”

“我养活了自己，而且我相信以后还能养活自己。拿这些鹅莓干什么呀？”她拎出一篮子鹅莓时我问。

“做饼。”

“给我吧，我来拣。”

“不，我什么也不要你干。”

“但我总得干点什么。还是让我来吧。”

她同意了，甚至还拿来一块干净的毛巾铺在我衣服上，一面还说：“怕你把衣服弄脏了。”

“你不是干惯佣人活的，从你的手上看得出来，”她说，“也许是个裁缝吧？”

“不是，你猜错啦，现在别管我以前是干什么的。不要为我再去伤你的脑筋，不过告诉我你们这所房子叫什么名字。”

“有人叫它沼泽居，有人叫它沼泽宅。”

“住在这儿的那位先生叫圣·约翰先生？”

“不，他不住在这儿，只不过暂时呆一下。他的家在自己的教区莫尔顿。”

“离这儿几英里的那个村子？”

“是呀。”

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“他干什么的。”

“是个牧师。”

我还记得我要求见牧师时那所住宅里老管家的回答。

“那么这里是他的居所了？”

“不错。老里弗斯先生在这儿住过，还有他父亲，他祖父，他曾祖父。”

“那么，那位先生的名字是圣.约翰.里弗斯先生了。”

“是呀，圣.约翰是他受洗礼时的名字。”

“他的妹妹名叫黛安娜和玛丽.里弗斯？”

“是的。”

“他们的父亲去世了？”

“三个星期前中风死的。”

“他们没有母亲吗，”

“太太去世已经多年了。”

“你同这家人生活得很久了吗？”

“我住在这里三十年了，三个人都是我带大的。”

“那说明你准是个忠厚的仆人。尽管你那么没有礼貌地把我当作乞丐，我还是愿意那么说你的好话。”

她再次诧异地打量着我。“我相信，”她说，“我完全把你看错了，不过这里来往的骗子很多，你得原谅我。”

“而且，”我往下说，口气颇有些严厉，“尽管你要在一个连条狗都不该撵走的夜晚，把我赶出门外。”

“嗯，是有点狠心。可是叫人怎么办呢？我想得更多的是孩子们而不是我自己，他们也怪可怜的，除了我没有别人照应。我总该当心些。”

我沉着脸几分钟没有吱声。



“你别把我想得太坏，”她又说。

“不过我确实把你想得很坏”，我说，“而且我告诉你为什么——倒不是因为你不许我投宿，或者把我看成了骗子，而是因为你刚才把我没‘铜子儿’没房子当成了一种耻辱。有些在世的好人像我一样穷得一个子儿也没有。如果你是个基督徒，你就不该把贫困看作罪过。”

“以后不该这样了，”她说，“圣·约翰先生也是这么同我说的。我知道自己错了一一但是，我现在对你的看法跟以前明显不同了。你看来完全是个体面的小家伙。”

“那行了——我现在原谅你了，握握手吧。”她把沾了面粉布满老茧的手塞进我手里，她粗糙的脸上闪起了一个更亲切的笑容，从那时起我们便成了朋友。

汉娜显然很健谈。我拣果子她捏面团做饼时，她继续细谈着过世的主人和女主人，以及她称作“孩子们”的年轻人。

她说老里弗斯先生是个极为朴实的人，但是位绅士，出身于一个十分古老的家族。沼泽居自建成以后就一直属于里弗斯先生，她还肯定，这座房子“已有两百年左右历史了——尽管它看上去不过是个不起眼的小地方，丝毫比不上奥利弗先生在莫尔顿谷的豪华富宅，但我还记得比尔·奥利弗的父亲是个走家穿户的制针人，而里弗斯家族在过去亨利时代都是贵族，看看莫尔顿教堂法衣室记事簿，就谁都知道。”不过她仍认为“老主人像别人一样——并没有太出格，只是完全迷恋于狩猎种田等等。”女主人可不同。她爱读书，而且学得很多。“孩子们”像她。这一带没有人跟他们一样的，以往也没有。三个人都喜欢学习，差不多从能说话的时候起就这样了，他们自己一直“另有一套”。圣·约翰先生长大了就进大学，做起牧师来、而姑娘们一离开学校就去找家庭教师的活，他们告诉她，他们的父亲，几年前由于信托人破产，而丧失了一大笔钱。他现在已不富裕，没法给他们财产，他们就得自谋生计了。好久以来他们已很少住在家里了，这会儿是因为父亲去世才来这里小住几周的。不过他们确实也喜欢沼泽居和莫尔顿，以及附近所有的荒原和小山。他们到过伦敦和其他很多大城市，但总是说什么地方也比不上家里。另外，他们彼此又是那么融洽——从来不争不吵。她不知道哪里还找得到这样一个和睦的家庭。

我拣完了鹅莓后问她，两位小姐和她们的哥哥上哪儿去了。

“散步上莫尔顿去了，半小时内会回来吃茶点。”

他们在汉娜规定的时间内回来了，是从厨房门进来的。圣·约翰先生见了我不过点了点头就走过了。两位小姐停了下来。玛丽心平气和地说了几句话，表示很高兴见我已经好到能下楼了。黛安娜握住我的手，对我摇摇头。

“你该等我允许后才好下楼，”她说。“你脸色还是很苍白——又那么瘦！可怜的孩子？——可怜的姑娘！”

黛安娜的声调在我听来象鸽子的咕咕声。她有一双我很乐意接触她目光的眼睛。她的整张脸似乎都充满魅力。玛丽的面容，一样聪明——她的五官一样漂亮，但她的表情更加冷淡，她的仪态虽然文雅却更显得隔膜。黛安娜的神态和说话的样子都有一种权威派头，显然很有主

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意。我生性喜欢服从像她那样有依靠的权威，在我的良心和自尊允许范围内，向富有活力的意志低头。

“你在这儿干什么？”她继续说。“这不是你呆的地方。玛丽和我有时在厨房里坐坐，因为在家里我们爱随便些，甚至有些放肆——但你是客人，得到客厅去。”

“我在这儿很舒服。”

“一点也不——汉娜这么忙这忙那会把面粉沾在你身上。”

“另外，火炉对你也有些太热，”玛丽插嘴说。

“没有错，”她姐姐补充说。“来吧，你得听话。”她一面握着我的手一面拉我起来，领进内室。

“那儿坐着吧，”她说着把我安顿在沙发上，“我们来脱掉衣服，准备好茶点。在沼泽居小家庭中享受的另一个特权，是自己准备饭菜，那往往是想要这么干，或者汉娜忙着烘烤，调制、烫衣的时候，”

她关了门，留下我与圣·约翰先生单独呆着。他坐在我对面，手里捧着一本书或一张报纸。我先是打量了一下客厅。随后再看看厅主人。

客厅不大，陈设也很朴实，但于净整洁十分舒服。老式椅子油光锃亮，那张胡桃木桌子象面穿衣镜。斑驳的墙上装饰着几张过去时代奇怪而古老的男女画像。在一个装有玻璃门的橱里，放着几本书和一套古瓷器。除了放在书桌上的一对针线盒和青龙木女用书台，房间里没有多余的装饰品——没有一件现代家具。包括地毯和窗帘在内的一切，看上去既陈旧而又保养得很好。

圣·约翰先生——一动不动地坐着，犹如墙上色彩暗淡的画，眼睛盯着他细读着的那页书，嘴唇默默地闭着，——很容易让我细看个究竟，他要是装成塑像，而不是人，那是再容易不过了，他很年青——二十八至三十光景——高挑个子，身材颇长。他的脸引人注目，像一张希腊人的脸，轮廓完美、长着一个笔直的古典式鼻子，一张十足雅典人的嘴和下巴。说实在，英国人的脸很少像他那样如此酷似古典脸型的。他自己的五官那么匀称，也许对我的不匀称便有点儿吃惊了。他的眼睛又大又蓝，长着棕色的睫毛，高高的额头跟象牙一般苍白，额头上不经意披下了几缕金色的头发。

这是一幅线条柔和的写生，是不是，读者？然而画中的人给人的印象却并不属于那种温和忍让、容易打动甚至十分平静的个性。虽然他此刻默默地坐着，但我觉察到，他的鼻孔、嘴巴、额头有着某种东西，表现出内心的不安、冷酷或急切。他的妹妹们回来之前、他还没有同我说过一个字，或者朝我看过一眼。黛安娜走进走出，准备着茶点，给我带来了一块在炉顶上烤着的小饼。

“这会儿就把它吃掉吧，”她说、“你准饿了。汉娜说从早饭到现在，你只喝了点粥，什么也没吃。”

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我没有谢绝，我的胃口恢复了，而且很好，这时里弗斯先生合上书，走到桌子旁边。他就座时，那双画一般的蓝眼睛紧盯着我。目光里有一种不拘礼节的直率，一种锐利、明确的坚定，说明他一直避开陌生人不是出于腼腆，而是故意的。

“你很饿，”他说。

“是的，先生。”这是我的习惯——向来的习惯，完全是直觉——简问简答，直问直说。

“幸好三天来的低烧迫使你禁食，要是一开始便放开肚子吃就危险了。现在你可以吃了，不过还是得节制。”

“我相信不会花你的钱吃得很久，先生，”这是我笨嘴笨舌、粗里粗气的回答。

“不，”他冷冷地说：“等你把朋友的住址告诉我们后，我们可以写信给他们，你就又可以回家了。”

“我得直率地告诉你们，我没有能力这么做，因为我既没有家，也没有朋友。”

三位都看着我，但并非不信任。我觉得他们眼神里没有怀疑的表情，而更多的是好奇。我尤其指小姐们。圣.约翰的眼睛表面看来相当明净，但实际上深不可测。他似乎要把它用作探测别人思想的工具，而不是暴露自己内心的窗口。眼神里热情与冷漠的交融，很大程度上不是为了鼓励别人，而是要使人感到窘迫。

“你的意思是说，”他问，“你孤孤单单，没有一个亲朋？”

“是的。没有一根纽带把我同哪位活着的人维系在一起，我也没有任何权利走进英国的任何人家。”

“像你这样年纪，这种状况是绝无仅有的。”

说到这里我看到他的目光扫到了我手上，这时我双手交叉，放在面前的桌子上。我不知道他在找什么。但他的话立刻解释了那种探寻。

“你没有结婚？是个单身女人？”

黛安娜大笑起来。“嗨，她不会超过十七、十八岁，圣.约翰。”她说。

“我快十九了，不过没有结过婚，没有。”

我只觉得脸上一阵热辣辣的火烧，一提起结婚又勾起了我痛苦和兴奋的回忆。他们都看出了我的发窘和激动。黛安娜和玛丽把目光从我涨得通红的脸上转向别处，以便使我得到宽慰，但是她们那位有些冷漠和严厉的哥哥却继续盯着我，直至他引起的麻烦弄得我既流泪又变脸，

“你以前住在什么地方，”他此刻又问了。

“你也太爱打听了，圣·约翰，”玛丽低声咕哝着。但他带着诱人肺腑的坚定的眼光，将身子俯过桌子，要求得到回答。

“我住在哪儿，跟谁住在一起，这是我的秘密，”我回答得很简略。

“在我看来，要是你高兴，不管是圣·约翰还是其他人的提问，你都有权不说，”黛安娜回答说。

“不过要是我不了解你和你的身世，我无法帮助你，”他说。“而你是需要帮助的，是不是？”

“到现在为止我需要帮助，也寻求帮助，先生——希望某个真正的慈善家会让我有一份力所能及的工作，以及让我把日子过下去的报酬，就是能满足生活的必需也好。”

“我不知道自己是不是位真正的慈善家，不过我愿意真诚地竭尽全力帮助你。那么首先你得告诉我，你习惯于干什么，你能干什么。”

这会儿我已经吞下了茶点，饮料使我犹如喝了酒的巨人，精神大为振作，它给我衰弱的神经注入了新的活力，使我能够不慌不忙同这位目光敏锐的年轻法官说话，

“里弗斯先生，”我说着转向了他，像他看我那样，堂而皇之毫无羞色地看着他，“你和你的妹妹们已经帮了我很大的忙——一个最伟大的人，能为他的同类所做的，你以你高尚的殷勤，从死亡中拯救了我。你所施予的恩惠，使你绝对有权要求我感激你，并且某种程度上要求知道我的秘密。我会在不损害我心境的平静、自身及他人道德和人身的安全的前提下，尽量把你们所庇护的流浪者的身世说个明白。”

“我是一个孤儿，一个牧师的女儿。我还不能记事父母就去世了。我靠人赡养长大，在一个慈善机构受了教育。我甚至可以告诉你这个机构的名字，在那里我做了六年学生，两年教师——××郡罗沃德孤儿院，你可能听到过它，里弗斯先主？——罗伯特·布罗克赫斯特牧师是司库。”

“我听说过布罗克赫斯特先生，也见过这学校。”

“差不多一年前我离开了罗沃德，去当私人家庭教师。我得到了一份很好的工作，也很愉快。来这里的四天前，我不得不离开那个地方。离开的原因我不能也不该解释，就是解释也没有用——会招来危险，听起来也难以令人置信。我没有责任，像你们三位中的任何一位那样是无罪的。我很难过，以后一段时间还得这样，因为把我从我看作天堂的房子里赶出来的原因，奇怪而可怕。在计划逃离时我看到了两点——速度和秘密，为了做到这两点，我不得不把我的所有统统留下，只拿了一包裹。就是这个包裹，我也在匆忙和烦恼中，忘了从把我带到惠特克劳斯的马车上拿下来了。于是我囊空如洗来到这附近。我在露天宿了两夜，游荡了两天，没有跨进过一条门槛，在这段时间只有两回吃过东西。正当我由于饥饿、疲乏和绝望到了几乎只剩最后一口气时，你里弗斯先生，不让我饿死冻死在家门口，把我收留进你们的房

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子。我知道从那时起你妹妹们为我所做的一切——因为在我外表上麻木迟钝的那些日子里，我并不是没有感觉的——我对你们自然、真诚、亲切的怜悯，如同对你合乎福音的慈善，欠下了一笔很大的债。”

“这会儿别要她再谈下去了，圣.约翰，”我停下来时黛安娜说。“显然她不宜激动，上沙发这儿来，坐下吧，爱略特小姐。”

一听这个别名，我不由自主地微微一惊，我已忘了我新起的名字。但什么都逃不过他眼睛的里弗斯先生，立刻注意到了。

“你说你的名字叫简.爱略特是吗？”他说，

“我是这么说过，这个名字，我想是作为权宜之计暂时用用的，但不是我的真名、所以初一听有些陌生。”

“你不愿讲你的真名，”

“不愿。我尤其担心被人发现。凡是要导致这种后果的事，我都要避开，”

“我敢肯定你做得很对，”黛安娜说。“现在，哥哥，一定得让她安宁，一会儿了。”

但是，圣.约翰静默了一会儿后，又开腔了，还是像刚才那样目光敏锐，不慌不忙。

“你不愿长期依赖我们的好客吧——我看你会希望尽快摆脱我妹妹们的怜悯，尤其是我的慈善（我对他的强调很敏感，但也不生气——因为那是正当的），你希望不依赖我们吗？”

“是的。我已经这么说过了。告诉我怎么干活，或者怎么找活干，这就是我现在所要求的，然后我走，即使是到最简陋的草屋去——但在那之前，请让我呆在这儿，我害怕再去品尝无家可归饥寒交迫的恐怖。”

“说实在你应当留在这儿，”黛安娜把她白皙的手搭在我头上说。“你应当这样，”玛丽重复说，口气里透出了含蓄的真诚，这在她似乎是自然的流露。

“你瞧，我的妹妹们很乐意收留你，”圣.约翰先生说，“就像乐意收留和抚育一只被寒风驱赶到了窗前，快要冻僵的鸟一样。我更倾向于让你自己养活自己，而且要努力这样做。但是请注意，我的活动范围很窄，不过是个贫苦乡村教区的牧师。我的帮助肯定是最微不足道的。要是你不屑于干日常琐事，那就去寻找比我所能提供的更有效的帮助吧。”

“她已经说过，凡是力所能及的正当活儿，她都愿意干。”黛安娜替我作了回答。“而且你知道，圣.约翰，她无法挑谁来帮忙，连你这种犟脾气的人，她也不得不忍受。”

“我可以当个裁缝，我可以当个普通女工，要是干不了更好的活，我可以当个仆人，做个护理女。”我回答。

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“行，”圣.约翰先生十分冷淡地说。“如果你有这志气，我就答应帮你忙了，用我自己的时间，按我自己的方式。”

这时他又继续看他那本茶点之前就已埋头在看的书了。我立刻退了出去，因为就眼下体力所及，我已经谈得够多，坐得够长了。