### Chapter XVI

[*Jane asks the housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax about the young lady in the party who visits Thornfield, and whom she thinks is Mr. Rochester’s intended bride.*]

“You saw her, you say, Mrs. Fairfax: what was she like?”

[…]

“Tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders; long, graceful neck: olive complexion, dark and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr. Rochester’s: large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair; raven-black and so becomingly arranged: a crown of thick plaits behind, and in front the longest, the glossiest curls I ever saw. She was dressed in pure white; an amber-coloured scarf was passed over her shoulder and across her breast, tied at the side, and descending in long, fringed ends below her knee. She wore an amber-coloured flower, too, in her hair: it contrasted well with the jetty mass of her curls.”

[…]

I was about again to revert to the probability of a union between Mr. Rochester and the beautiful Blanche; but Adèle came in, and the conversation was turned into another channel.

When once more alone, I reviewed the information I had got; looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavoured to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination’s boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense.

Arraigned at my own bar, Memory having given her evidence of the hopes, wishes, sentiments I had been cherishing since last night—of the general state of mind in which I had indulged for nearly a fortnight past; Reason having come forward and told, in her own quiet way a plain, unvarnished tale, showing how I had rejected the real, and rabidly devoured the ideal;—I pronounced judgment to this effect:—

That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life; that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar.

“*You*,” I said, “a favourite with Mr. Rochester? *You* gifted with the power of pleasing him? *You* of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me. And you have derived pleasure from occasional tokens of preference—equivocal tokens shown by a gentleman of family and a man of the world to a dependent and a novice. How dared you? Poor stupid dupe!—Could not even self-interest make you wiser? You repeated to yourself this morning the brief scene of last night?—Cover your face and be ashamed! He said something in praise of your eyes, did he? Blind puppy! Open their bleared lids and look on your own accursed senselessness! It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, *ignis-fatuus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication.

“Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.’

“Afterwards, take a piece of smooth ivory—you have one prepared in your drawing-box: take your palette, mix your freshest, finest, clearest tints; choose your most delicate camel-hair pencils; delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine; paint it in your softest shades and sweetest lines, according to the description given by Mrs. Fairfax of Blanche Ingram; remember the raven ringlets, the oriental eye;—What! you revert to Mr. Rochester as a model! Order! No snivel!—no sentiment!—no regret! I will endure only sense and resolution. Recall the august yet harmonious lineaments, the Grecian neck and bust; let the round and dazzling arm be visible, and the delicate hand; omit neither diamond ring nor gold bracelet; portray faithfully the attire, aërial lace and glistening satin, graceful scarf and golden rose; call it ‘Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank.’

“Whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them: say, ‘Mr. Rochester might probably win that noble lady’s love, if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?’”

“I’ll do it,” I resolved: and having framed this determination, I grew calm, and fell asleep.

I kept my word. An hour or two sufficed to sketch my own portrait in crayons; and in less than a fortnight I had completed an ivory miniature of an imaginary Blanche Ingram. It looked a lovely face enough […]

Ere long, I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit. Thanks to it, I was able to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm, which, had they found me unprepared, I should probably have been unequal to maintain, even externally.

### Chapter XVII

I have told you, reader, that I had learnt to love Mr. Rochester: I could not unlove him now, merely because I found that he had ceased to notice me—because I might pass hours in his presence, and he would never once turn his eyes in my direction—because I saw all his attentions appropriated by a great lady, who scorned to touch me with the hem of her robes as she passed; who, if ever her dark and imperious eye fell on me by chance, would withdraw it instantly as from an object too mean to merit observation. I could not unlove him, because I felt sure he would soon marry this very lady—because I read daily in her a proud security in his intentions respecting her—because I witnessed hourly in him a style of courtship which, if careless and choosing rather to be sought than to seek, was yet, in its very carelessness, captivating, and in its very pride, irresistible.

There was nothing to cool or banish love in these circumstances, though much to create despair. Much too, you will think, reader, to engender jealousy: if a woman, in my position, could presume to be jealous of a woman in Miss Ingram’s. But I was not jealous: or very rarely;—the nature of the pain I suffered could not be explained by that word. Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. Pardon the seeming paradox; I mean what I say. She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her. Too often she betrayed this, by the undue vent she gave to a spiteful antipathy she had conceived against little Adèle: pushing her away with some contumelious epithet if she happened to approach her; sometimes ordering her from the room, and always treating her with coldness and acrimony. Other eyes besides mine watched these manifestations of character—watched them closely, keenly, shrewdly. Yes; the future bridegroom, Mr. Rochester himself, exercised over his intended a ceaseless surveillance; and it was from this sagacity—this guardedness of his—this perfect, clear consciousness of his fair one’s defects—this obvious absence of passion in his sentiments towards her, that my ever-torturing pain arose.

I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons, because her rank and connections suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point—this was where the nerve was touched and teased—this was where the fever was sustained and fed: *she could not charm him*. […] Arrows that continually glanced off from Mr. Rochester’s breast and fell harmless at his feet, might, I knew, if shot by a surer hand, have quivered keen in his proud heart—have called love into his stern eye, and softness into his sardonic face; or, better still, without weapons a silent conquest might have been won.

### Chapter XXIII

[*Rochester pretends that he is going to marry Miss Blanche and that Jane will have to take a job elsewhere—in Ireland!*] I have already, through my future mother-in-law, heard of a place that I think will suit: it is to undertake the education of the five daughters of Mrs. Dionysius O’Gall of Bitternutt Lodge, Connaught, Ireland. You’ll like Ireland, I think: they’re such warm-hearted people there, they say.”

“It is a long way off, sir.”

“No matter—a girl of your sense will not object to the voyage or the distance.”

“Not the voyage, but the distance: and then the sea is a barrier—”

“From what, Jane?”

“From England and from Thornfield: and—”

“Well?”

“From *you*, sir.”

I said this almost involuntarily, and, with as little sanction of free will, my tears gushed out. I did not cry so as to be heard, however; I avoided sobbing. The thought of Mrs. O’Gall and Bitternutt Lodge struck cold to my heart; and colder the thought of all the brine and foam, destined, as it seemed, to rush between me and the master at whose side I now walked, and coldest the remembrance of the wider ocean—wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably loved.

“It is a long way,” I again said.

“It is, to be sure; and when you get to Bitternutt Lodge, Connaught, Ireland, I shall never see you again, Jane: that’s morally certain. I never go over to Ireland, not having myself much of a fancy for the country. We have been good friends, Jane; have we not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And when friends are on the eve of separation, they like to spend the little time that remains to them close to each other. Come! we’ll talk over the voyage and the parting quietly half-an-hour or so, while the stars enter into their shining life up in heaven yonder: here is the chestnut tree: here is the bench at its old roots. Come, we will sit there in peace to-night, though we should never more be destined to sit there together.” He seated me and himself.

“It is a long way to Ireland, Janet, and I am sorry to send my little friend on such weary travels: but if I can’t do better, how is it to be helped? Are you anything akin to me, do you think, Jane?”

I could risk no sort of answer by this time: my heart was still.

“Because,” he said, “I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous Channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I’ve a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you,—you’d forget me.”

“That I *never* should, sir: you know—” Impossible to proceed.

“Jane, do you hear that nightingale singing in the wood? Listen!”

In listening, I sobbed convulsively; for I could repress what I endured no longer; I was obliged to yield, and I was shaken from head to foot with acute distress. When I did speak, it was only to express an impetuous wish that I had never been born, or never come to Thornfield.

“Because you are sorry to leave it?”

The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway, and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last: yes,—and to speak.

“I grieve to leave Thornfield: I love Thornfield:—I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life,—momentarily at least. I have not been trampled on. I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what is bright and energetic and high. I have talked, face to face, with what I reverence, with what I delight in,—with an original, a vigorous, an expanded mind. I have known you, Mr. Rochester; and it strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you for ever. I see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death.”

“Where do you see the necessity?” he asked suddenly.

“Where? You, sir, have placed it before me.”

“In what shape?”

“In the shape of Miss Ingram; a noble and beautiful woman,—your bride.”

“My bride! What bride? I have no bride!”

“But you will have.”

“Yes;—I will!—I will!” He set his teeth.

“Then I must go:—you have said it yourself.”

“No: you must stay! I swear it—and the oath shall be kept.”

“I tell you I must go!” I retorted, roused to something like passion. “Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton?—a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are!”

“As we are!” repeated Mr. Rochester—“so,” he added, enclosing me in his arms. Gathering me to his breast, pressing his lips on my lips: “so, Jane!”

“Yes, so, sir,” I rejoined: “and yet not so; for you are a married man—or as good as a married man, and wed to one inferior to you—to one with whom you have no sympathy—whom I do not believe you truly love; for I have seen and heard you sneer at her. I would scorn such a union: therefore I am better than you—let me go!”

“Where, Jane? To Ireland?”

“Yes—to Ireland. I have spoken my mind, and can go anywhere now.”

“Jane, be still; don’t struggle so, like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation.”

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you.”

Another effort set me at liberty, and I stood erect before him.

“And your will shall decide your destiny,” he said: “I offer you my hand, my heart, and a share of all my possessions.”

“You play a farce, which I merely laugh at.”

“I ask you to pass through life at my side—to be my second self, and best earthly companion.”

“For that fate you have already made your choice, and must abide by it.”

“Jane, be still a few moments: you are over-excited: I will be still too.”

A waft of wind came sweeping down the laurel-walk, and trembled through the boughs of the chestnut: it wandered away—away—to an indefinite distance—it died. The nightingale’s song was then the only voice of the hour: in listening to it, I again wept. Mr. Rochester sat quiet, looking at me gently and seriously. Some time passed before he spoke; he at last said—

“Come to my side, Jane, and let us explain and understand one another.”

“I will never again come to your side: I am torn away now, and cannot return.”

“But, Jane, I summon you as my wife: it is you only I intend to marry.”

I was silent: I thought he mocked me.

“Come, Jane—come hither.”

“Your bride stands between us.”

He rose, and with a stride reached me.

“My bride is here,” he said, again drawing me to him, “because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?”

Still I did not answer, and still I writhed myself from his grasp: for I was still incredulous.

“Do you doubt me, Jane?”

“Entirely.”

“You have no faith in me?”

“Not a whit.”

“Am I a liar in your eyes?” he asked passionately. “Little sceptic, you shall be convinced. What love have I for Miss Ingram? None: and that you know. What love has she for me? None: as I have taken pains to prove: I caused a rumour to reach her that my fortune was not a third of what was supposed, and after that I presented myself to see the result; it was coldness both from her and her mother. I would not—I could not—marry Miss Ingram. You—you strange, you almost unearthly thing!—I love as my own flesh. You—poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are—I entreat to accept me as a husband.”

“What, me!” I ejaculated, beginning in his earnestness—and especially in his incivility—to credit his sincerity: “me who have not a friend in the world but you—if you are my friend: not a shilling but what you have given me?”

“You, Jane, I must have you for my own—entirely my own. Will you be mine? Say yes, quickly.”

“Mr. Rochester, let me look at your face: turn to the moonlight.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to read your countenance—turn!”

“There! you will find it scarcely more legible than a crumpled, scratched page. Read on: only make haste, for I suffer.”

His face was very much agitated and very much flushed, and there were strong workings in the features, and strange gleams in the eyes.

[*He asks her to call him by his given name, Edward*.]

“Are you in earnest? Do you truly love me? Do you sincerely wish me to be your wife?”

“I do; and if an oath is necessary to satisfy you, I swear it.”

“Then, sir, I will marry you.”

“Edward—my little wife!”

“Dear Edward!”

“Come to me—come to me entirely now,” said he; and added, in his deepest tone, speaking in my ear as his cheek was laid on mine, “Make my happiness—I will make yours.”