

Chapter 1 – The first day of the rest of my life



So, it was done.

This morning, my dear Edward and I were finally joined in holy matrimony.

After all the suffering we endured, after all the waiting we survived, we were married before the community of the little church nearby the manor-house of Ferndean, Edward's residence after the fire at Thornfield Hall.

This time, nothing disrupted the ceremony of our wedding.

No messenger came barging in to shout out that there was an impediment for our marriage.

However, I saw Edward blanch when it was my turn to give my answer to him as if he feared for some disruption. Only the soft pressure of my hand on his made the colour return to his features.

I was rich now, I, Jane Eyre, little grey mouse, had turned into a proper gentlewoman.

The money my uncle John Eyre left me was secured in a safe trust fund and provided me with an annual income of some five hundred pound. In our marriage contract Edward had granted me the use of this money entirely as I wished to. It was his wedding present to me.

When he told me the previous night, I had wept with happiness because I knew he had done it for me to feel free and independent, even after I'd become his wife. Only Edward knew how much independence meant to me.

And speaking of independence, of course, I had not forgotten Adèle. How could I? She would need me more than ever now, she was changing from a girl into a young woman. My plans for her were not yet fully drawn up but I was determined to take it up with Edward in the days to come.

Edward ... my husband ...

While I stood by his side in the great entrance hall of Ferndean for the reception of our guests, I had a chance to study him at my leisure before the wedding guests would arrive.

My heart sang with unmitigated joy, as it always did when I feasted my eyes on him.

Tall, upright and proud, Edward stood without the help of his rosewood cane, although I knew that he wouldn't be able to maintain enough strength in his injured left leg for the length of the day. His left hand, maimed by the fire which destroyed Thornfield, was covered with a white cotton glove, so that people would not be confronted with the absence of the ring finger and little finger.

Edward was very prim about that hand, he wanted nobody to see what he called his "horror". Even I had not been permitted to see it and he never touched me with it.

His face had also been damaged in the fire. The skin on the left cheek was shrivelled and red and his left eye was blind while his right eye had lost all ability of sharp vision. The ugly scars, however, could

not blur the beauty of those strong bones or mask the strength in the lines of his jaw. His straight nose and beautiful mouth were still untouched and his eyes, though blind, were still a rare green-blue. Since the day we found each other again, those eyes sometimes regained a sparkle of bright pure joy but ... only sometimes, and not often enough.

I was determined not to let him slip away in gloom but I knew it would be difficult. Edward's body was not the only thing damaged in the fire that killed his wife Bertha.

As though he felt that I was watching him, Edward turned to me, his eyes almost sky blue when a ray of sunshine illuminated his face. My breath caught in my throat and I swallowed the huge lump of emotion with considerable effort. Keep a head onto your shoulders, I admonished myself, you've got a long day ahead of you!

"Jane ..."

The love in his slightly hoarse voice overwhelmed me with a longing that burned deep within my breast. I came to stand beside him and took his right hand in mine.

"Jane, hold me close ... sometimes I cannot feel you near enough and I cannot bear that, Jane!"

"I'm here, Edward, I will always be here ..."

With a groan he pulled me close and his right arm hugged me to his chest, so forcefully that it hurt! While I listened to the racing beat of his heart where my cheek rested against the soft skin in his neck, I heard him whisper:

"Will you, my lovely swallow, will you indeed?"

I did not answer for it was a question that came from fear settled deep inside him.

"You left me once before, remember?", he said hoarsely.

"Oh ... Edward ..."

So doubt was strong in Edward's soul and mere words could not ease it. Instead I pressed harder against his chest and kissed his cheek which had already a stubble though it was not yet five in the afternoon.

He would need a proper manservant, I reminded myself, since his valet had not been taken on again after the fire.

The next moment Mrs. Fairfax bustled in, her gentle face with its myriad of wrinkles red from excitement.

"Jane ... erm, I mean, Mrs. Rochester, ma'am, the guests have arrived and I ..."

"Please, Mrs. Fairfax, do calm yourself! You and I know that everything is in the best of order to receive them properly. Make sure the staff is in attendance and all will go well!"

I straightened my shoulders and took my place in front of the table in front of the large window. Edward came to stand beside me.

"Here we go, Jane! Are you up to facing the hyenas?", he chuckled mischievously.

I suppressed a laugh and forced my face into dignity.

Gradually the hall was filling with Edward's tenants and their wives, all in their Sunday best.

Although the Hall didn't exist anymore, the Thornfield estate was still very much in business and thriving. It still boasted of eighty farms, all largely successful and providing Edward with a considerable income.

All these people came to wish us well in honour of our marriage and many had brought simple but endearing presents which a footman stowed away upon the table behind us.

Our few servants were next to pay us honour.

There was, of course, Mrs. Fairfax, our housekeeper, and Grace Pool, once a nurse to Edward's first wife Bertha. She was now employed as lady's maid to me and Adèle, taking care of our wardrobe.

A few footmen from Thornfield Hall had come with Edward when he took house at Ferndean and dear old George, the old butler, had them firmly under his thumb. He was training Roberts, a young man related to Mrs. Fairfax, as the future butler in our household.

All wished us the very best of happiness in our marriage.

After that, it was time for more serious work. Our neighbours, many of them local gentry, were arriving. There was Squire and Mrs. Withers, from Waverly Court, a modest little estate north of Thornfield Hall, with their four young daughters and one son, Master William, a nineteen year old youth. Mrs. Withers was a kind, homely lady and Squire Wilfred was a short rotund man of cheerful disposition.

The Vicar, Reverend Geoffrey Tovey and his wife Gwendolyne and their twin sons, Charles and Henry, fifteen years old, were next. Gwendolyne Tovey was more than twenty years younger than her husband and the three of them, young and impulsive as they were, managed to keep the Reverend on his toes. I embraced Gwendolyne as affectionately as I could for, in the few weeks that I'd made her acquaintance, she had become a real friend to me.

Finally the most important of our guests entered the hall and people stepped out of their way for fear of causing offense.

*Dressed in a magnificent gown of vivid blue silk Blanche Ingram strode through the double doors like a queen entering Winchester Cathedral on Coronation Day! Her golden locks were gathered in an intricate chignon on top of her head from where several heavy curls fell beside her heart shaped face. She looked so perfectly gorgeous that my breath caught in my throat. The look in her cornflower blue eyes was challenging, to say the least!*

Chapter 2 – Jane, I want a wife



‘Edward!’

Blanche Ingram’s voice cut through the hum of voices in the hall and made my husband turn his head in astonishment. A smile appeared on his face and his eyes shone with pleasure.

“Blanche, you sly little thing, is that you? Well, I never! So you’ve come to admit defeat then, have you?”

I gasped in surprise at Edward’s mischief but Blanche’s silvery laugh showed that she wasn’t going to be insulted!

“Now what made you think I have ever been interested in you, you dreadful man? You’ve never been handsome and now, now you’re too hideous to be attractive to me! I’ll gladly abandon you to Miss Eyre here, she’s the one who had a crush on you, not me!”

Edward laughed with genuine pleasure and took her into his arms, kissing her on both cheeks with his usual enthusiasm. Blanche Ingram cast me a knowing little smile which brought fire into my face!

“Dear Blanche,” Edward said affectionately, “I’m so pleased that you’re here and so is Jane! But ... she is Mrs. Rochester now, don’t you forget that!”

“Of course!”

Blanche turned to me and offered me her hand. We curtsied. I could very well remember the first time I set eyes on her. It was at the house party Edward hosted shortly after Bertha’s attempt to burn him alive in his bed. I was still hurting at the time, because he’d left the house the day after I had lost my heart to him. Blanche had seemed like an angel from heaven to Adèle’s young impressionable mind and, I recalled, to me too. I could still see her in my mind’s eye in the white silk dress she wore that night, she made me think of a fairy, so light, so lovely, so beautiful, so much more suitable than me to a man of Edward’s station ...

I shook myself. All that was behind me now and of no importance.

Only then did I see the young woman behind her and, recalling my duties as a hostess, I smiled at her.

“Allow me to present Miss Edwina Blackthorn, my companion and friend. Her mother was a dear friend of Mama’s and she came to live with us after Mrs. Blackthorn’s death last year,” Blanche said. We greeted each other and I studied the young woman more closely.

She was very tall, at least 5.9, and thin but not skinny. She had womanly curves in all the right places. Her hair was a raven black and her eyes were green-blue. She was a stunning beauty!

“May I congratulate you on your marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Rochester, and thank you for inviting me. I wish you all the happiness in the world.”

A voice like a siren’s! Deep, smooth and seductive ... I could see how Edward was savouring the sound of it. Her face looked somehow familiar to me but I couldn’t recall where I’d seen her. My thoughts were distracted when Roberts, looking dashing in his Thornfield livery, presented us all with champagne and Edward bade a welcome to our guests. The party began.

It was a fine party altogether. The food had been excellent and abundant, the wine of the finest quality. Mrs. Fairfax and I had made sure no efforts had been spared. Now the last of our guests had left and the servants were already tidying up. I told Adèle that it was her bedtime and she sulked a little, as was her habit.

“Come, Adèle!”, Edward admonished her, “Don’t make me sorry to have you stay up that late! Do as Miss Eyre tells you!”

“Oh, Monsieur Rochester!”, she giggled, “you are mistaken! She is not Miss Eyre any more but Mrs. Rochester! Can I not call you “Maman” now, Mrs. Rochester?”

I smiled affectionately at her, she was such a cheerful child!

“Yes, Adèle,” I answered, “you can call me whatever you like.”

“No!”, Edward shouted, “I absolutely forbid you to call my wife “Maman”, Adèle! She’s not your mother!”

I found this a little harsh of him. Adèle, her eyes full of tears, turned and ran away.

“Edward, that was cruel of you. She’s only a child, she means no offense.”

He sighed and reached for my hand.

“You’re right, Jane, as always. But, when I think of what her mother was like, I cannot bear to have you compared by her!”

“Still, dearest, I think you should apologise to her. She’s becoming a young woman and it frightens her when you lose your temper like that. Her feelings are easily hurt.”

Edward chuckled.

“All right, I’ll do it, when it pleases you! But now, my precious little witch, we have other things to attend to, much more important ones than the feelings of a teenager! Lead the way to our bedchamber, Mrs. Rochester!”



When the bedroom door closed behind us, I abruptly halted, causing Edward to bump into me.

“What is it, Jane?... Are you afraid? Of me ...?”

He stood behind me and wrapped his arms around me, burying his mouth in my hair. I caught his scent, a mixture of sandalwood and musk, and my heart leaped at the closeness of him. My blood pounded in my ears and I clasped his hands on my waist.

“I cannot see you, Jane ... I can only rely on my memory of you ... I remember the way you feel under my hands ... I recognize the way you breathe ... my body recalls the way you touch me, Jane ...”

He kissed me softly above my ear and his breath was warm on my skin.

I took one step towards our bed, two steps and he followed me, hands on my waist, stroking my hips, sending shivers down my spine.

My legs bumped against the bed and he slowly turned me, opening the buttons of my gown. His eyes were a sparkling green and his breath came in shallow gasps. Mine too ... as I began undoing his cravat, his waistcoat ... Oh God! His hands were on my bare flesh now, pushing my gown from my shoulders, hard and fast! The feeling of his left hand, the one in the white cotton glove, was no less exciting than the one that bore no glove!

I helped him shrug off his coat and waistcoat, undid his shirt buttons with trembling hands.

Suddenly, he grabbed both of my hands and held them hard.

“Jane ... Jane, you might not ... like to see what’s under there ...I don’t want you to be horrified by my injuries ...”

I freed my hands and cupped his face.

“Edward, dear precious Edward, I love you ... I want to feel you, to love you, to be with you, completely, without boundaries ... “

I slid his shirt from his shoulders. Yes, he was damaged ... the left side of his chest was shrivelled and red, his left arm badly bruised where the flames had gnawed at him. I didn’t care ... he was magnificent! Broad, hard shoulders, strong muscled arms, flat stomach and slim waist ...

My fingers fumbled with the buttons of his trousers and Edward gasped.

“You wicked little witch ...”, he breathed but did not interrupt me. Instead his hands were pushing my gown down along my legs and then went up to my stays. In seconds he had unhooked them, leaving me in my chemise and drawers.

“Jane ... will you do something for me?”

“Yes ... Edward ...”

*“Get rid of those stupid clothes and wait for me in bed with your eyes closed. I’ll undress and I’ll join you. I want our first contact to be completely naked, Jane ... my flesh must find yours ... please, Jane ... we must touch without you seeing me ...”*



Edward was still in our bathroom when I slid under the covers of our bed and gasped at the cool, caressing smoothness of the silken sheets. I closed my eyes as he wished me to and revelled in the sensation of silk on my skin.

In rapt anticipation I lay listening to the noises from the bathroom and I pictured what Edward was doing. Fumbling with his shirt, undoing the laces of his shoes, stepping out of his trousers ... all of which was difficult with only one good hand.

I heard him opening the door and my heart picked up pace. Bare feet were padding towards me and the covers were lifted. The bed creaked a little when the mattress dipped under Edward's weight.

His hand was touching me now ... oh, sweet Jesus!

"My Jane, shhh, do not move! Stay as you are ... hmm, ah! Just as I imagined ..."

"What did you imagine ...", I breathed, whimpering when his hand travelled from my face downwards.

"A slender throat ... round shoulders leading to slim but perfect arms and tiny adorable hands."

Oh! That sensual, slightly hoarse voice!

One of my hands was lifted and I could feel his lips upon it. First on the back, then on the palm ... Each one of my fingers was taken into his mouth and his teeth slightly gripped them, which made me shiver again. I bit my lips as his mouth travelled all the way up my arm, past my shoulder and to my breasts.

"Oh, this is just sheer beauty! My Jane's little apples are exactly how I imagined them ... Small but firm, the right size for my palm ..."

I gasped when he cupped one breast and rubbed his thumb over my aching, hard nipple. My pelvis jerked upwards when he took it into his mouth and teased it with his teeth!

"Shhh, my impatient little witch, not too hasty ... just enjoy ...", he whispered, his voice now low and wavering.

"Edward ...", I moaned, almost drowning in a heated sensation of pleasure rippling through every part of my trembling body.

Not in the least distracted, he did the same thing with my other breast until a sweet aching feeling began to blossom deep within my womb. How was it possible that I had lived for so long and not known this? It was heaven ... sweet, torturing bliss ...

I cried out when I suddenly felt his hand on my secret place while his mouth was still torturing my nipple! With slow circling strokes he drove the breath out of my lungs and I lifted my hips to meet his touch when his fingers ... oh God! His fingers entered me ...

“Edward ... Edward ... please ... faster, deeper, please, Edward ...”

My whole body was now an aching, sweating, trembling mass and I cried, begged, pleaded, sobbed him to give me more! I burned, I was on fire! His hands were everywhere, his mouth was caressing every part of me ... my blood was pounding in my ears and my breathing harsh and painful when, all of a sudden, I shattered into myriads of pieces and drowned in a wave of blazing flames ...

I must have gone deaf and blind ... only the rushing of my own blood still thundered in my head.

“My gorgeous little witch ... please, don’t cry ... I meant no harm, please, Jane, I’m so sorry if I hurt you ...”

Edward was holding me close to his body, stroking my back in soothing gestures, and it took me a second to understand what he was saying. My face was wet with tears of pure happiness while he thought he had given me pain ...

“You didn’t, Edward, by God, you didn’t ... it was the most beautiful feeling I’ve ever been given.”

For a few seconds he said nothing but then his low rumbling chuckle shook my body against his.

“So you enjoyed it? I gave you pleasure, then?”

“Yes ... as you well know, Edward Rochester ...”

Suddenly he kissed me, so tight, so hard, that my lips were crushed against my teeth. His mouth didn’t move away when he whispered:

“Well, my precious witch, try not to cry out so loud the next time! You were screaming like a newborn baby when it is slapped on his bottom right after birth!”

Shame washed over me and I wanted to withdraw from him but he gave me no solace.

Instead he began kissing me again, deeper, slower and infinitively more demanding. His body shifted and came to rest upon my own. The aching sensation of desire returned and I arched my body up to him, anxious to make as much contact with his as possible.

“Jane, don’t be afraid of what comes next ... trust me ... do you trust me, Jane?”

“Yes ...”, I moaned, “oh, yes ...”

My legs were parted by his knees and ... I startled when I felt him entering me. He was hurting me a little but I could not spare the time to notice it. Long, slow movements inside me were lifting me, guiding me, pushing me up towards the same, bright flames again. He kissed me over and over again. He kissed me on both places ... my mouth and my womb ...

When my world exploded again in a million of stars, it was not me who cried out.

I had the infinite satisfaction of hearing my Edward’s loud scream of release and the sheer force of it left him prostrated upon my chest, panting for breath. Heavy and warm his body covered mine and I pulled the covers up, wrapping us both in a world of our own.

Chapter 4 – Ghosts from the past



A stray ray of sunshine through a gap in the curtains woke me up at dawn and first, I was disorientated by my surroundings. A most peculiar sound, one I was not accustomed to, startled me; cuddled up against me, my Edward, though still sleeping, had taken full possession of me. One arm and one leg, both naked, were wrapped around me and he was softly snoring.

My heart leapt at the sight of him; he had thrown away the covers, allowing me to admire the view of his magnificent bare chest. The burn marks were clearly visible in the harsh light of dawn, yet it did not lessen his appearance. They only enhanced the tone of his muscles and the width of his shoulders. My gaze wandered towards his firm buttocks, over his mighty thighs and reached his awesome manhood, still impressive even in repose.

I felt the heated stirrings coming to life deep in my body; desire, lush and tangible, washed over me so violently, that I suddenly trembled. Carefully, for I did not want to wake him, I slipped from under Edward's body and propped myself up on one elbow. He shifted and his leg moved from mine, displaying the whole of his body to me now. My breath caught.

What, I wondered, must a woman do when the sight of her naked husband arouses her?

Was I to keep quiet and suffer in immobility? Must I try and seek sleep again, secretly hoping for him to wake? Or, must I try and waken him, seduce him out of sleep with light yet urgent caresses?

Unable to keep myself from touching him, I slid a trembling hand over his heavy, dark curls. His left cheek rested upon the pillow and I could only see the unharmed side of his face. I brushed his brow and jaw with feathery fingers and let my hand slide down to his shoulder and arm, revelling in the feeling of the hard muscles. Over the length of his back my hand travelled down to his buttocks and thighs, venturing towards his manhood. Its smoothness astonished me deeply; the velvety skin was like silk under my fingers.

Suddenly I jumped! The object of my admiration suddenly changed in appearance and Edward's baritone voice murmured:

"Give me a second, Jane, and I will soon be ready for you ..."

All of a sudden he slipped an arm under me, gripped my waist in both hands and lifted me onto his body. I found myself straddling him and gasped at the wonderful excitement this induced.

"Look what you do to me, you adorable little witch!"

Without a warning he heaved me onto his splendid arousal. It was like nothing I had ever experienced before! Being placed on top of him seemed to heighten the sensitivity of my womanly places to the extreme! I closed my eyes so I could savour this new and very agreeable feeling.

"Do you like this, Jane?," Edward's husky voice interrupted, "And this, my love, how do you like this?" His hands cupped my breasts and his thumbs rubbed the hard peaks!

A flame of sudden desire overwhelmed me and instinctively I started to move my pelvis up and down his manhood. Oh God! Oh sweet Lord! My breath seemed to be cut off and my heart stopped!

“Jane ... oh, Jane, do not stop! Whatever you do, do not stop!”

My own arousal was now increasing so rapidly I could not have stopped for the life of me! Along with my rising pleasure I was immensely thrilled by the knowledge of my own power over my husband. He wanted me to continue, he liked what I was doing!

His hands travelled quickly up and down my body, from my tingling breasts and nipples to my stomach and thighs. I staggered and had to steady myself by gripping his shoulders. This position only strengthened the already powerful sensations, now rippling through me like a fever! I toppled over into delight so violently I thought my heart would never recover!

Edward’s loud cry of release was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. His hands were buried in the soft flesh of my waist and he was shaking uncontrollably in the aftershocks of his climax.

“Oh Jane, look what you do to me, you wicked, sensual, sweet witch ... my own ... my very own witch ...”



It was early afternoon when we finally woke up.

Never in my whole life had this happened to me and I sat up with a gasp when I saw the hour on the little Ormolu clock on my nightstand. Two strong arms pulled me back and Edward mischievously chuckled in my ear:

“Where do you think you’re going, Jane?”

“Edward, it’s three o’clock! I can’t imagine what people will think of us and ...”

“People can go to hell as far as I am concerned, my little swallow! I must have you shackled onto me at all times or you might escape me once again.”

Mirth and mayhem were so evident in his rumbling voice that I couldn't help myself bursting into laughter.

"If you think of keeping me under your thumb, Edward Rochester, then you can think again! I refuse to be at your beck and call all day, I've a household to run and ..."

All at once I was captured fast and hard and pinned on top of him.

"Jane, Jane, how good it is to hear you laugh, to hold you, to ... to love you, dearest, sweetest Jane! I knew you'd do me good, I knew it from the first time I set eyes on you!"

We kissed ... and made love again.

When we finally got up and dressed, Edward had a few things in store for me.

"Jane, put on your ... coat, bonnet, or whatever it is you females wear and come with me."

I did so, curious about what he was up to, and found myself dragged away to the stables. Edward must know his way around Ferndean very well for he managed to reach the back of the house solely by searching his way with his cane. His groom was waiting for us, beaming with pride and some secret pleasure. I soon saw why.

An adorable little curricle, brand-new and shining, awaited me.

"Oh! Edward, you bought us a new carriage?"

"Not "us", darling, this is your own, personal curricle! I want you to master the art of driving it, so we can go on trips around the country side together. I can't ride any more, remember? Now, tell me, do you like it?"

I was overwhelmed and tears pricked but I swallowed them quickly. It would not do should I disgrace myself in front of the groom.

"Yes, of course, Edward, I simply adore it! It's so beautiful, thank you!"

And then I did disgrace myself and flung my arms around him, hugging him fiercely!

"Yes, yes, I know, I'm the best!", he mocked, "Now, come on, Keithley here will drive us. I want you to do something!"

We were driven to the ruin of Thornfield Hall and the sight of its ragged remains, its blackened stones and hollow, empty windows tore at my very heart. This was the place where I had been the happiest woman on earth!

"Now, Jane," Edward said, while we alighted, "I want you to take me inside and describe what you see to me. I have to know what can be done to restore it. This is my ancestral home and the place where my children will be born and raised. Keithley, take the horse for a drive and come back to collect us in an hour!"

"Very good, sir!", the groom answered and left with the curricle.

My heart pounded with fear of what I might discover within the poor burned wreck of a house as I guided my husband inside. As we went on through the remains of the hall, the drawing room and library, the dining room and kitchens, I did as Edward wanted; I recounted what I was seeing.

The place was thoroughly damaged.

"Edward, I'm no expert on this! Surely you need an architect to establish the right appraisal of the building?"

He squeezed my hand in an affectionate manner.

"I will, Jane, rested assured. I wanted you to talk about what you see because I know you'll be telling the truth. Impressions, Jane, feelings, thoughts, that's what I wanted and you did well."

He kissed me lightly on the cheek and we were about to proceed when suddenly the figure of a man blocked our way-out effectively.

*"So it is true what people say about murderers after all! They do tend to return to the place of their crimes!"*

Chapter 5 – In dire straits



“Mr. Mason!”, I exclaimed, shocked by the vicious tone of the words uttered by Bertha’s brother Richard.

“Ah! The faithful yet wayward governess has finally found her match! You always were his most ardent supporter, were you not, Miss Eyre? You obeyed his tiniest command and worked yourself into exhaustion covering up his wicked deeds.”

Mason came nearer to where we stood, hand in hand. Only now I took notice of Edward when his hand pressed mine like a vice! His face was ashen, his lips were grey and in his eyes I saw an expression of the fiercest horror!

“Dearest, what is it?”, I urged, turning towards him, “Are you unwell? Shall I go and ...”

“You, *Mrs. Rochester*, are not going anywhere!”, rasped the angry voice of Mason, putting a stress on my name that sent shivers of fear down my spine. Before I could do anything, he grasped my wrist and tore me away from Edward who did not seem to notice. His blind gaze was staring into nothing and had the same horrified expression as before. What was wrong with him? Never had I seen him like this!

Mason’s arm came up around my neck and the cold barrel of a firearm was pressed against my temple.

“The time has come, Rochester, for you to atone for what you have done. Ha! Is it not cruel irony that you should return to the very place of your crime, only to suffer the same fate as Bertha in just a moment of time? Here you are, triumphantly showing your new whore around where your wife, my precious sister, came to her end when you pushed her to her death? How relieved you must have felt when, finally, you had a chance of ridding yourself of her, poor, lost soul that she was? All your troubles over and you free to marry again, was that what you were thinking, when, instead of pulling Bertha back to safety, you gave her the last shove over the edge?”

“There was nobody to see! You were not here! You can’t ...”, Edward shouted, his voice giving way with despair.

In growing horror I heard this words and realised what they meant! Edward had thought himself alone at Thornfield Hall when Bertha died!

“Ah, yes! You thought yourself clever, sending the servants away, didn’t you? First you set fire to the Hall and then you dragged Bertha out of her room onto the roof and pushed her over the edge! I know, Rochester, because I saw you!”

Edward staggered back as if he’d received a blow. His cane fell to the ruined tiles of the hall and rolled away to disappear into a crack where the floor had caved in. Underneath the hall lay the vast cellars, as I recalled. In rising alarm I noticed that Edward was disorientated. Without his cane he was unable to feel his whereabouts. I saw him venture a few paces to the left but he stumbled when his feet encountered debris.

“Edward, stay where you are! There’s a ...”

I couldn’t finish my sentence because Mason suddenly wrung my arm up behind my back. A sharp shot of fierce pain raked my shoulder and it was all I could do not to cry out.

“Jane? Jane, where are you? I ... come back to me ...”, Edward pleaded, trying to feel his surroundings with both arms outstretched.

“I have her, you murderer! She has my gun to her head and if you take another step, I’ll kill her!”

Edward swung round towards where Mason’s voice had come from.

“Edward, no!”, I shouted, when he swiftly approached us.

I was too late in warning him! To my abhorrence Mason fired his gun and Edward reeled under the impact. He fell backwards, the floor collapsed under him and he disappeared into the hole. A loud crush reached my shocked ears and, as I knew the cellar bottom was at least five meters below ground level, I feared for Edward’s very life! An unknown force made me wrench myself out of Mason’s grasp and I flung myself onto my stomach and peered over the hole’s edge. Edward lay on his back, arms and legs sprawled, covered by bricks and wood, and a large stain of blood was spreading over his chest in the buff coloured coat!

“Edward! Edward, talk to me! Please, my love, please?”

I was now frantically looking for a way to get down there, I had to help him! The thought of losing him was unbearable! My heart was pounding so painfully, deep within my chest, that it felt like being stabbed by a spear! In despair I glanced around and ... to my astonishment, I was alone, Mason had gone.

Somehow that made me come to my senses again.

In the hole where my wounded husband lay, there was an kind of slope, formed by the falling of the debris. Still shaky in the legs, I ventured to climb down on it, careful as not to twist my foot and fall. My breath now working painfully in my lungs, I began examining Edward.

The bullet had struck him in the left upper arm but it had damaged an artery, from which the blood spurted onto his chest in pulsing jets. As quickly as I could, I attempted to apply a tourniquet made from one of my stockings and a piece of wood. To my immense relief I succeeded in diminishing the blood spurt into a trickle and I bandaged it as firmly as I could with my handkerchief and my other stocking.

“Sir ... Ma’am ... are you there? Sir, the hour upon which we agreed has passed and ...”

The groom! Thank God!

“Mister Keithley, down here! We’re in the cellars! Come quickly! The master is hurt!”

Never had I been more relieved to see the benign face of the man peer over the edge of the hole.

“Madam! What ...”

“Please, Mr. Keithley, go back to Ferndean and get help! My husband is badly wounded. I’ll stay here, with him. Fast, Mr. Keithley?”

“Aye, Ma’am, don’t fret, I’ll be back soon!”

The following hours passed dreamlike and unreal to me.

Our servants and a few of our tenants came and between them they managed to get Edward out of the cellar. On the way home in our curricle I held his head on my lap. He was unconscious and very pale and by times, he shivered in spasms, although I had him tightly tucked in blankets. All the time my anxiety grew stronger and stronger that he might be seriously hurt.

At the house they carried him to our bedchamber where I washed and nursed him with the help of our doctor, Philip Woodhouse. The lines of worry on the face of the good doctor were deep.

“I do not like this deep unconsciousness, Mrs. Rochester,” he said, “he has suffered a severe concussion but he should have become awake by now. His arm wound is serious but I managed to bind off the damaged artery and it should heal in time. You must keep him warm and try to give him some water from time to time. It is possible that he goes into fever so when that happens, call for me immediately. I shall return twice each day to check on him.”

*Dr. Woodhouse left and there I was, married for one day, and my dear Edward in the clutches of death!*

Chapter 6 – Torn by doubt



I could scarcely believe it!

There I was sitting beside my husband's sick bed, staring at his prostrated body; Edward was still deeply sunk in unconsciousness. We were married for only one day ...

During the long hours of my watch I relived the terrifying events at the Hall. I was not shaken by Mason's behaviour, not at all. In fact, I pitied the man; he'd lost a beloved sister in a most atrocious way and he obviously was still in shock over it. Not for a moment had I thought myself in danger, not even when the gun was held against my head. I was convinced that, given the opportunity, I could have talked him out of hurting us.

No, my fears and worries originated from the very strange reaction of Edward.

My husband, when again confronted with Bertha's death, had been horrified and more specifically when Mason had accused him of murdering his sister. I knew I could never forget the look of strong abhorrence on Edward's face, nor the frozen bearing his body took, as if a part of him was dying on the spot!

I only knew what had taken place on that dreadful night from what Edward had told me. From what the servants whispered when they thought themselves unobserved. Edward did not speak much of his wife's death; although his love for Bertha had died long before he knew me, he'd always done the best he could for her and he had never harmed her, not even when Bertha attacked him on numerous occasions. So, in view of all this, I did not think he wanted her to die. If he told me the truth, then he had done all he could to save her. If he told the truth ...

My hands flew to my face, in disgust over my own thoughts!

I loved Edward to distraction, he was my husband, for God's sake! How could I even think such horrendous things!

But I did! At the time of Bertha's death, Edward had been deeply in love with me. I had run away from him, abhorring the thought of committing bigamy or becoming his mistress! The only person standing between the two of us had been Bertha! The temptation of doing away with her must have been enormous for him! Had he? Or had he not helped her in that final moment where she stood on the edge? Or ... had he pushed her?

When Sophie entered and took over my watch, I went to look for Mrs. Fairfax. It was near dawn and I knew I would find her in the kitchen, readying herself for the tasks of the new day.

“Mrs. Fairfax,” I asked, when we were seated at the large oak table enjoying a cup of tea, “do you know what happened on the night Thornfield Hall burned down?”

I had startled her. She looked at me with huge eyes in a dead white face.

“What? What is it, Mrs. Fairfax?”, I urged, suddenly very much concerned about her. However, she had already recovered and shook her head.

“I don’t really know, Jane, I’m sorry. The master had given us leave for a few days and I went to visit my sister in the village. She’d just become a grandmother by her daughter and I hadn’t seen the baby yet ... but ...”

“Yes, Mrs. Fairfax, but ... what?”

I could see she was now very upset and I took her hand in mine. If I was to go to the bottom of this, I needed her to be my ally.

“Dear Mrs. Fairfax, Alice ... my husband was very badly wounded yesterday by the hand of Richard Mason, brother to the first Mrs. Rochester. What little I know of Mr. Mason, is that he is a kind man. I cannot imagine why he would want to harm the master. They used to be good friends! Mr. Mason must think the master has done something terrible to his sister but I cannot think of such a thing! My husband cannot be a murderer, Alice, I refuse to think him one! So I must contrive to find out what really happened that night when Mrs. Rochester died.”

Mrs. Fairfax looked me in the eye now, her face still very pale and her eyes haunted.

“Oh, Jane ... there is some talk amongst the country folk about the master. Some believe him to have pushed his wife to death from the battlements.” Her voice broke with misery and I felt my heart grow cold!

“Were there any witnesses? Has anyone seen anything?”, I asked softly.

“No! There was an inquest, of course. The coroner asked for witnesses to come forward but none came! The master was acquitted from every suspicion.”

“Acquitted? Was there a trial, then?”

“No, of course not! For a powerful landlord to be imprisoned and put to trial, a coroner needs to have impeccable proof of foul playing and there wasn’t any, only talk and gossip!”

Yes, of course, I thought, the rich and powerful answered to different laws than the poor did.

Later, when I’d returned to my husband’s bedside, I pondered over all the facts I’d been given. One question stood out clearly in my mind: how was it that people were gossiping about Edward being his wife’s murderer when there had been no witnesses that night? Could it be true that Mason had indeed witnessed something? Why had he not come forward at the inquest if that were true? Someone must have started these rumours. Why? Who?

Edward suddenly stirred and moaned. Thank God! He was coming round! I sprang to my feet and took his hand.

“Edward ...”, was all I managed to say before my voice gave way. It was enough. His eyes fluttered open and I saw he’d recognized my voice and smiled.

“Hey, my dearest witch ... ouch! My head ... how come I have such a splitting headache? What’s happened?”

“You were injured, yesterday. Do you remember our encounter with Richard Mason at the Hall?”

“Yes ... yes, I do now ...”, he croaked and tried to sit up.

“No, Edward, you must stay down, the doctor says you have concussion,” I urged him.

“Right he is! Why do I feel so weak, Jane?”

“You were shot. You’ve lost a fair amount of blood but Edward ...”

I hesitated, afraid of having to upset him. My conscience, however, was not to be silenced.

“Edward, please, you must tell me about the night Bertha died”, I said softly, “I think that, as your wife, I have a right to know ...”

He turned his blind gaze to me and I saw tears coming into his eyes.

“Jane, I swear I did not kill her! Say you believe me, Jane, I beg you, please, say it!”

I swallowed back my own tears now.

“Dearest, I cannot for the life of me think of you as a murderer! But Mason said he saw you pushing Bertha over the edge and ...”

“He’s lying! He’s bloody lying, Jane!”

This outburst of rage cost him a fit of coughing and I had to steady him because I was afraid he might cause his arm wound to bleed.

“Shhh! Shhh! Calm yourself, Edward, please?”

I gave him some water to drink and then I settled him against the pillow.

*“Now, tell me everything, from the very first beginning.”*

*Taking a deep breath Edward began recounting the events of that wretched night.*

Chapter 7 – Edward's tale



“After you left, I was a wreck, Jane.”

Edward paused to draw breath and grasped for my hand which he clutched hard.

“I lived like someone who was clubbed on the head, numb, lethargic, utterly miserable. I roamed the Hall and the lands around it for hours and hours. I yelled at everyone that dared speak to me! I didn't eat, couldn't sleep, found no rest or solace. My heart seemed to have died within my breast, my mind to have fled from my head.”

“Edward ...”, I whispered but he silenced me with a small hand gesture.

“After a time it slowly got better. I found I could sleep for a couple of hours after I drank myself into oblivion. Mrs. Fairfax, dear soul that she was, kept forcing food on me and at some point I began taking it in again. It was not a moment too soon for I had lost some twenty pounds by then. When my strength came back I began noticing my surroundings again and also, Adèle. The poor mite was as lost as I was, Jane, and I, great, big, selfish lout had not seen it.”

He leaned back, somewhat tired and I offered him a glass of water, which he drank avidly.

“So Adèle and I comforted each other. In the evenings she came to sit with me in the drawing room and told me what she'd done with her day. It seems that she had been keeping up with her lessons as if you were still there. At that point it occurred to me I ought to take over her education and I busied myself in teaching her. I read several books with her, I took her on a visit of England's most famous landmarks. Through her young and unbiased eyes I, blind as I was, experienced a new understanding of those places. As a result, Jane, I found myself healed by her youthful enthusiasm, so much that my heartache didn't burn so fiercely anymore. I came to be in some kind of peace, a truce after the onslaught of my most deep emotions.”

“Edward, I'm so sorry for all that has happened ...”

“You are not to blame, Jane, you of all people are certainly not at fault! But let me continue. Adèle wished to go to a boarding school in Newcastle and I arranged for her to go. She was happy there and made good progress with her learning. I was alone once more, however, and it was even harder to bear than before. Bertha had become even more difficult to handle and Grace Poole, her keeper and servant, was at the end of her wits. Bertha attacked her one night, stabbing her in the chest, and we had to transfer her to the physician's house in a nearby town. Poor woman nearly died, Jane. Nobody wanted to attend to Bertha from then on, they were all scared to death, so it was up to me.”

By now I watched with fear that he was exhausting himself rapidly!

“Edward, you must stop now and rest. I shall hear the rest after you've slept ...”

“No, dearest!”, he cried and gripped my hand even more powerful.

“No, Jane, listen! Bertha, realizing I was her keeper now, began clinging to me almost in an unbearable manner. She refused to eat, to sleep, to be quiet and she would howl whenever I came into her room. Whenever I let my guard down, even for a second, she tried to attack me, using

everything she could get her hands on as a weapon. I was forced, finally, to tie her onto her bed by hands and feet, there was no other way of handling her. Then one night, she managed to escape her room, how, I do not know for she was bound as usual. She had been howling for days and nights by then and the staff was not getting any rest. I had granted them a week's leave to recuperate so that night I was alone in the Hall. I was lying on my bed, I had fallen asleep, thoroughly exhausted after I'd tried and failed feeding Bertha. It was just like before, on the night you found me in my burning bedroom. This time I awoke coughing and choking from the smoke and when I managed to get out of my room, the whole North wing was already in flames! I had to cover myself with my wetted cloak to pass through the fire into the tower where Bertha was. When I burst into her room, she wasn't there. She was outside, on the battlements, standing on the edge, barefoot and in her nightgown, her arms stretched out as if she wanted to fly away. I jumped outside but between her and me flames were already leaping out of the roof. I called her name, pleaded her to step away from the edge but she just stood there, rocking and flapping her arms, a strange, insane smile on her face. I managed to jump over the fire, at some point, and edged my way to her, dodging flames, and ... suddenly she leapt from the wall like a huge white bird. I saw her crash onto the stones of the courtyard ...” Edward gasped and I saw to my abhorrence that he was shaking like a leaf! Tears were running down his face and it seemed as if he couldn't draw breath!

“Dearest, stop, please?”, I begged him. My heart was crying for him and the poor wretched creature that had been his wife. I stroked his face, dried his tears, kissed him. I raked my brain as how to ease his pain. When I leaned over to him, he flung his good left arm about me and buried his face against my breast, gasping in sheer misery. My trembling hands smoothed his tousled curls and I whispered sweet little nothings into his hair until he seemed to calm down a little.

“So you see, Jane, I finally paid for what I did, all those years ago by marrying her without taking the precautions of looking into her family. I was young and stupid and I paid for it.”

Suddenly he scoffed harshly.

“Seemed I didn't pay it to the full! After she'd jumped, I endeavoured to get out of that inferno as quick as I could, numbed by what I'd seen. When I reached the great wooden staircase in the hall, it collapsed and I crashed into a sea of flames. I have been unconscious for two whole weeks, they tell me. The left side of my body was burned and I lost two fingers on that hand. I was blind. The doctors told me I must have had a vicious blow to the head because I was found buried under a pile of rubbish in the cellars. That must have saved my life, a large beam had fallen onto my body and protected me from being buried alive. There had been enough air for me to survive until they came searching for me.”

“I cannot thank the Lord enough for sparing your life, Edward! I only wish I had been there for you. It was wrong of me to run away, I know that now.”

“No, sweetheart, you were right to do so. I was selfish enough wanting to take you as my mistress without a thought for your reputation. I will never forgive myself for that.”

By now Edward was breathing very hard with sheer exhaustion.

I hastened to give him some laudanum and a drink of water. Then I undressed to nothing but my chemise and went to lie beside him under the covers. After a while he fell asleep, his head on my chest. I on the other hand lay awake for a long, long time.

I slept very late, the following morning and I woke to find Edward was still immersed in a comatose-like sleep. As quietly as possible I rose and dressed, determined to make sure no more disturbances befell upon our budding marriage.

Descending the stairs I noticed the great pile of mail George had put on the salver and I eagerly ruffled through it. One letter instantly captured my attention because the soft, lilac colour of the paper and the round, graciously formed handwriting suggested a female hand.

*My curiosity, however, was raised when I read the name of the sender, Miss Edwina Blackthorn, and the addressee, Mr. Edward Rochester of Ferndean Manor!*

Chapter 8 – Sins of the father



Immediately I knew this letter was meant to be trouble! It was extremely improper for an unmarried young woman to be writing to a married man as propriety dictated that she should write to his wife instead. I quickly propped the letter into my skirt pocket and went looking for Alice Fairfax.

Our excellent housekeeper was overseeing the kitchen activities of preparing lunch, cleaning silver ware, readying fire places and tending to household linen, all these tasks performed by a small staff of five maids. It occurred to me that we would need a larger number of servants, especially when Edward was planning to restore Thornfield Hall to its former glory.

“Alice,” I said, “please, make sure that Master is always watched during his sickness. Send Leah or one of the others to sit by his bedside.”

“Yes, of course, Jane, I will attend to that instantly. Are you in need of breakfast? I’ll have lunch ready in no time.”

I shook my head and thanked her, eating was now the last of my concerns. Instead I retired to the parlour and sat down at my small escritoire. There I retrieved the intriguing letter from my pocket, took one deep breath and opened it.

The content was prone to shock me to the very core.

*Mr. Rochester, sir,*

*Please allow me to beg for your presence at the meeting my solicitors have planned, a meeting to which you will by now have been invited by the said gentlemen in an official document.*

*It is of the uttermost importance that the affairs of the past should be resolved in the most satisfactory way, as you will no doubt understand when you read their missive.*

*I am, however, prepared in meeting you previously at Miss Ingram’s family estate, Ingram Park, on Wednesday next at two pm, to make sure we can come to a mutual point of view in this matter.*

*It was my mother’s most fervent wish that you and I be on the best of terms, following the nature of your acquaintance with her.*

*Most sincerely,*

*Miss Edwina Blackthorn*

Harbouring the most dire forebodings, I tucked the letter back in my pocket and rushed back to the hall. On the salver I found the said missive of Mss Wakefield, Mortimer and Shaw, solicitors in Newcastle. Not bothering to return into the parlour I ripped it open and devoured its content with eager eyes.

In a neat clerk's handwriting the presence of Mr. Edward Fairfax Rochester of Ferndean Manor, formerly of Thornfield Hall, was requested in the offices of the solicitors on Thursday next at eleven a.m. to be made part of the will of the late Adelaide Blackthorn, née Eshton, of Wolverlair Abbey in the county of North Yorkshire.

No more information was offered but I was certain something really compromising for my husband was afoot. The name Eshton made it abundantly clear that it could prove to be even nasty, for John Eshton, Edward's best friend, had inherited of the family estate of Eshton Hall the previous year. Eshton Hall was situated, as I soon discovered when I went to consult an atlas in the library, near Wolverlair Abbey, they were neighbours. I daren't formulate my thoughts as yet; I wanted to hear what Edward had to say on the matter. For now, there was nothing to be done, since my wounded husband was still asleep and would need to rest. I busied myself with household matters for the rest of the day, banishing the troubling thoughts to the back of my mind.

In the course of the afternoon Edward became worse. By 7 pm he'd developed a fairly high fever and by the time Dr. Woodhouse arrived, my husband was tossing restlessly on his bed, shivering and sweating. Alice and I, helped by the doctor and assisted by Johnson, who acted as a temporary valet to my husband, made efforts to lower the fever by bathing Edward in lukewarm water. The doctor administered him a dose of laudanum and we had him back in bed with the fever considerably lessened. He had not yet calmed down so I sent everybody away and went to lie down beside him on the bed. I took his head upon me shoulder and talked quietly to him until he fell asleep.

I drifted in and out a fitful sleep all night, being called to attention every time Edward stirred or mumbled. At the break of dawn I quietly slipped from the bed and dressed myself to go downstairs to a still empty kitchen. Even Alice was not yet up.

Although I was bone-tired, I knew I wouldn't have any rest until these disturbing matters would be cleared. First there was Mason and his threats against Edward and on top of that there was the letters and what they implied.

I knew very well that Edward had been no saint in the years before I met him. Yet the thought he might have had sexual intercourse with someone related to his friend Eshton was utterly revolting to me. The letter of Miss Blackthorn clearly implied that she very possibly could be Edward's daughter. If there was only a remote possibility of this being true, I would need to know before Edward did. I wanted to become familiar with the knowledge in order to process it. It was vital in nursing my bruised self-respect rising from the proof of my husband's philandering.

So I wasn't going to tell him about the letters and deal with the matter myself.

Edward had a fever for three days. It rose to high temperatures in the afternoon with a peak around ten p.m. Alice and I had our hands full trying to lower it in which we usually succeeded around midnight. After that Edward sank into a restless sleep until around six in the morning at which time his sleep became nearly comatose. I was thankful for that, for it allowed me a few hours of much needed sleep myself before the day began. During the morning he was usually well enough to sit up in bed and consume some broth or porridge, though he seemed never to be fully awake. After the meal he'd drift away into light sleep until the fever came up again.

Then, on the next Tuesday, the fever slackened considerably. He slept through the afternoon and by nightfall he was fast asleep for the first time in days. So was I, finally, a fact which made me get up on Wednesday in a refreshed state of heart and mind. I meticulously prepared myself for the visit at two p.m. and ordered Keithley, our groom, to take me to Ingram Park in the curricle. I had, of course, never been invited into the majestic Georgian palace-like building, set in its beautiful grounds, that was Blanche Ingram's home. A governess had no place there, not even when she was married to Edward Rochester, whose wealth largely exceeded that of the impoverished Ingrams.

*When I was ushered in by a stately walking statue of a butler and let into a majestic drawing room to wait for Miss Blackthorn, I experienced some doubts about the whole business for the first time since receiving her letter. What if she wouldn't care dealing with me and demand to see my husband instead?*

Chapter 9 – True colours



I was cooling my heels for more than a quarter of an hour when the drawing door opened to let Blanche Ingram and Edwina Blackthorn in and the former instantly exclaimed:

“You? What are you doing here? Where’s Edward?”

Her companion turned to her in something of a panic.

“Blanche, we can’t ... we mustn’t ...”

“Hold your tongue, Edwina! I will do the talking as I am in charge of this!”

In a few strides she was upon me and savagely took my arm, her long nails digging into my flesh.

“You paltry little mouse of an upstart governess, why have you come here? Had I known you would turn up, I’d asked the footmen to throw you out at once! Where’s Edward, answer me!”

She shook my arm and a stab of pain shot through my shoulder, still not recovered from Mason’s manhandling. By now I was furious and I wrestled free of Blanche’s hold.

“You will have to do with me, Miss Ingram! Edward is indisposed and ...”

“Indisposed?”, she said in a threatening voice, “How so? What’s happened to him?”

“I’m sure that is none of ...”

With a shrill cry she slapped me across the face and shoved me so hard that I fell onto one of the settees and violently hit my head.

“Tell me!”, she shouted and as she did so, she didn’t resemble the least of the sophisticated young lady she was supposed to be.

“Edward is in bed with a fever,” I replied, unwilling to give her more information than necessary.

Miss Blackthorn seemed to have regained some kind of composure by now and laid an imploring hand on Blanche’s arm.

“Please, dear Blanche, recollect yourself. Mrs. Rochester was kind enough to come here and inform us of Mr. Rochester’s illness. We should be thankful for that. Let’s reconsider what is to be done.”

Blanche Ingram looked at her and then, after a few moments, nodded.

“Mrs. Rochester, allow me to present my humblest apologies to you. I don’t know what came over me. Please find it in your heart to forgive me and accept a restoring cup of tea before you leave?”

While she went to the wall and pulled the bell cord to summon a footman, I studied her covertly.

What a turn of mood! Had I not felt my stinging jaw where she’d hit me, I wouldn’t have believed it had actually happened!

The next half hour passed like in a dream. I drank tea with the pair of them and I was glad to take off afterwards and climb into my waiting curricle. Keithley drove off and we had soon left the premises of Ingram Park to ride homeward through the moors. My head swam with everything that had transpired in that drawing room. I felt strangely dazed as if I was very tired. The usual warm rays of

the spring sunshine were like balm to the skin of my upturned face. Lulled by the gentle rocking of the curricle, I dozed off.

Almighty God, have mercy on me ...

I must still be on the Moors for it was very cold. It was night ... oh, sweet Lord, I'm begging you, let Death come quickly so that I suffer no more...

Edward ... I had fled from Edward because I had no right to be his wife ... the memory shot through me like the stab of a spear! Edward was forbidden to me, we would never be together ...

Please, Lord, give me rest ... let me die now ...



A splash of freezing cold water startled me right back into life and I gasped and spluttered to get my breath. Blanche Ingram's bored voice drawled somewhere above my head:

"Come on, you lazy bastard, wake up! You there, man, drag her upright! I want her to see me when I talk to her!"

A ruthless hand hauled me onto my feet and propped me against the wall in a not so gentle manner. My already sore shoulders suffered a fresh stab of pain and I winced. Then I opened my eyes.

I was in some kind of wooden shed or outhouse with an earthen floor and a straw roof. All kinds of rubbish lay across the room and the smell of rotten hay indicated that it had been used as a stable at some point. My arms were bound behind my back and before me, all elegance and beauty, stood Blanche, a handkerchief pressed against her nose and mouth. My body ached and I was cold to the bone but I straightened my back and looked her in the eye.

"You troublesome, interfering, lowborn busybody, have you any idea of how much I loathe and hate you? First you thwart my prospects in marrying Rochester and now you prevent me of taking revenge on him, it is too outrageous! It is insufferable and you will pay for this, you miserable nobody of a governess! You will pay the highest price possible, your life! You will die here today, Jane Eyre, I must have my revenge, I demand it!"

"Blanche ..."

Only now I saw the lithe figure of Miss Edwina Blackthorn in the background. She laid her hand on Blanche's arm in a gesture of supplication.

"Blanche, please, we cannot do this! We must set Mrs. Rochester free and make our apologies to her and Mr. Rochester. There's already done too much damage and ..."

"Shut up, you little coward! I am in charge here and I will have what I want! She dies this instant!"

Chapter 10 – Poor, plain, obscure and little



It dawned to me that this pretty little doll, this daughter of aristocracy, Blanche Ingram, must be deranged, possibly even mad. The glint in her eyes made run shivers down my spine and I knew that, if I wanted to survive this, I had to be clever. Nobody had any inkling as to my whereabouts because they thought me on an errand. I had not even told Alice Fairfax and she would not be worried before dinner time. Edward was still lying prostrated with fever, he would not miss me for several hours. And where was Keithley, the groom? Had he be part of the conspiracy or had he been captured like me? If I wanted answers, my only hope would be to get them from Blanche and she would not tell me willingly. So I opted for a little subterfuge.

With a moan I let myself drop onto my knees which was not difficult since my legs were shaky enough.

“Please, Miss Ingram, I beg of you, please forgive me if I have insulted you in my ignorance. I know I have gone far above my station in marrying Mr. Rochester. I was arrogant where I ought to have been modest. I wanted to become rich because I could no longer bear to be poor. I was a nobody, as you said, and I resented that, so I accepted Mr. Rochester’s proposal.”

I dared to glance at her face after I’d kept my eyes low during my supplication.

She was glowing with smug satisfaction and I knew I was doing well. It was vital to keep her occupied.

“Miss Ingram, I know it is too late for me but what of Mr. Rochester’s groom? Is he injured? It is Mr. Rochester’s favourite man, he will not want to lose him.”

Blanche Ingram scoffed in a very unladylike manner.

“Ha, I’m afraid he’s lost him for good, governess! Beaver, my helper, had to shoot him after he put up such a vicious struggle! He seems to be rather attached to you, didn’t want anybody to touch you. Unfortunately for him, Beaver had his firearm with him and used it, too.”

Only now I noticed the big heavy figure in the back, a real scarecrow of a man, with long, apelike arms, a chest like a beer barrel and muscles like steel cords. His big, shorn head and blunt, mean features did nothing to ease my mind, especially when he started to sneer at me with a yellow-teethed grin. He must have entered just now because I hadn’t seen him before.

Blanche did not look at him when she asked in a very level voice:

“Well? Have you buried the groom and disposed of the curricle, as I ordered?”

The henchman took off his greasy cap and stammered:

“No, milady, I haven’t. He’s gone, nowhere to be seen!”

“What? What did you say, you stupid sod?” Blanche barked and again she didn’t resemble a lady by far!

Beaver became more nervous by the second and I wondered what hold Blanche had over this giant of a man to install such fear in him. His stammering increased significantly and the look in his eyes became almost terrified.

“I ... I said ... well, milady, ... the man has gone ... and so has the curricle! There was nothing I could do, milady, please ...”

From the now distorted lips of Blanche now escaped a howl of rage, so full of sheer madness that she looked like a wild animal instead of a fine-bred lady! Everyone present, Miss Blackthorn, Beaver and I, we all shivered with genuine fear at the sight of that usually lovely face now contorted by insanity. “You idiot! You pathetic lunatic! I’ll have you pay for this! Come with me, this instant! We must cover our tracks immediately!”

She turned one last time to me and spat:

“Don’t think yourself off the hook, governess! When I’ll send Beaver back to you, he can do what he likes with you, as long as he kills you in the end!”

Then, a cruel smile curled her mouth and she said dangerously softly:

“He’s taken a fancy to you, you know? I think I’m going to permit him some liberties before he kills you. I might even stay and watch, I’ve always been curious as to how the lower classes satisfy their needs!”

My stomach heaved and bile rose into my mouth which I barely managed to swallow!

“Make sure she’s tied onto the wall, Beaver!”, Blanche ordered.

The stinking breath of the man wafted over me when he grabbed me and shackled my left foot onto the wall by means of a chain I had failed to notice before. After that they all left the shed and I was alone.

What now? What was there to be done? My brain seemed paralyzed, numbed, and my body was in an even worse state. I was cold, wet, dirty and extremely hungry. My limbs were trembling from exhaustion. I tried the bonds of my hands but they would not yield.

One small flame of hope was burning in my heart; Keithley had escaped with the curricle. He would surely raise the alarm but would the search party manage to find me? Where was I, for that matter? *Another thought added to my growing despair. How did Edward fare? Had his fever abated? Or not? I was weeping now, not able to retain my tears of dejection. Would I ever see him again?*

Chapter 11 – Peril and predicament

I had to get away before that man Beaver returned!

My bonds were not that tight but they were behind my back. I tried to wriggle them more loose but it only gave me more pain in my shoulders. After a while I gave up and looked about me. Outside it was dark so I guessed it must be later than five in the afternoon but I had no inkling how late it really was. I had been unconscious and there was no way of knowing how long. Blanche must have drugged me when she served tea earlier on.

In the shed there was a lot of clutter lying around. What if I attempted to find something that could sever my bonds? Unfortunately my leg was shackled onto the wall and the chain was but a good three or four feet long. I ventured in the direction of a heap of rubbish nearby, relieved to find the chain long enough to investigate its possibilities, using my foot to rummage through the debris. Chips of wood and iron, nothing, however, with a sharp enough edge to cut the rope that bound my hands. Ah, a shard of glass! I managed to lie down, roll myself onto my back and, after a few miscalculations, was able to grab the chip of glass firmly into my fingers. Sitting upright again I endeavoured trying to saw through the rope.

It was hard and painful labour. I cut myself in the wrists and it was a wonder I didn't slice them, I don't know how I managed avoiding that. After a long, long time I had freed my hands but my wrists were bleeding so I tried binding them with stripes of fabric I tore from my petticoat. It diminished the bleeding a little but not entirely.

My most difficult problem, though, was the leg chain. It bore a padlock the size of a fist and there was nothing at my disposal to deal with that. Discouraged and tired I indulged in a few moments of despair. I wept, it is a woman's ultimate way of coping with the cruel ordeals of life.

How many times in my life had I been desperate and miserable?

Since I was a small child, since the first awareness beyond babyhood, I had experienced cruelty, first by my aunt Reed and secondly by the teachers of Lowood School. I had shed many a tear in my life and always, I had found solace in them. It lifted the heavy feeling of desperation and misery and it restored the mind and heart. It did then, too.

I felt refreshed and ready to tackle the next hurdle.

The vital thing to do was to free my leg and I could not do so by unlocking or breaking the lock. But I could try and ease my foot out of the steel band. I've very thin ankles and feet and I'm fairly lithe so I would give it a try. First I took my kid boot off, it was very dirty and scraped after all I'd been through. What a pity, I thought, these boots were brand new and now they were as good as ruined! Secondly I bent my ankle in a way that I was able to wriggle my heel through the steel ring. It was much harder than I'd anticipated but I succeeded. My foot, hurting from the usual stretching movements it had gone through, was free at last. I massaged it thoroughly to improve the blood stream.

Taking a deep breath of relief I stood and headed for the door. Next problem, I thought, and gritted my teeth. Of course, it was firmly locked. Swallowing down my disappointment, I looked around. It was night but there was a full moon and the wooden shed's walls were made out of uneven boards with many gaps between them. A small window was visible just under the rafters of the roof which was approximately at a distance of seven feet from the floor. This was way too high for me, for I am not at all tall. Moreover, there was nothing lying around that I could use as a step-up. Nevertheless, I attempted to reach the window by means of a broken chair upon which I placed a wooden bucket upside down. It was a rickety construction but it held my weight just long enough for me to push open the window and hoist myself up. I was now balancing on my stomach on the narrow windowsill wondering how on earth I was to land outside without braking any bones.

Two seconds later these wonderings were no longer a concern for I was grabbed around my waist by two large hands, pulled down and placed upon my feet rather forcibly. The man Beaver had returned without me noticing and he was holding my wrists so firmly that I feared he would break them.



He was a ghastly sight!

Well over six feet, broad and barrel-like, he growled and gasped and the foul smell of his mouth wafted over me. I had to keep myself from gagging at the beastly features of this ... creature while he shook me like a ragdoll.

“Bad ... that was bad ... you should not have done that! Milady will be cross with me now and she will do vengeance on me! She has said so, she will do it! If you run away, Beaver will have to pay for it! That’s what she said and she will do it!”

Although a heavy fear was threatening to paralyse me, I fought to keep my wits about me. How incredible it may seem, this giant of a man was, for some reason, intensively scared of Blanche Ingram.

“Mr. Beaver,” I asked in what I hoped was a gentle voice, “Mr. Beaver, please? Will you please tell me what milady will do to you? Maybe I can help you?”

My teeth were rattling from his shaking me and I had great difficulty in speaking those words. At least I had some result, for he stopped his movements and looked at me in disbelief.

“You? What can you do? You are small and little and milady wants you dead! You are lying, you cannot help me!”

“Yes, I can, Mr. Beaver, I promise! My husband is Mr. Rochester from Thornfield Hall and he will stop lady Blanche!”

Beaver’s eyes grew round with panic now and he growled:

“Rochester? He’s a murderer! He murdered his poor wife, milady said so, he’s the devil! You’re lying, he will kill me, he’s the devil, the devil from hell!”

With a mighty shove he threw me down and I slid across the floor, bumping painfully into the wall. My head swam and all little light there seemed to vanish entirely.

*When my consciousness returned, I felt Beaver’s big hands around my throat.*

*“I must kill you! Milady commanded me to kill you and I must obey her!”*

Chapter 12 – Hope against hope



I struggled.

With all my strength, with all the resolve I could muster, I drew deep into my reserves to fight the pressure of Beaver's murdering hands. I clawed at him, I scratched his hands, his face, I kicked him in the stomach and the underbelly, but, of course, it was all to no avail. Slowly but inevitably, the breath was driven out of me. My thoughts, weakening but stubborn, seemed to float towards the one person of genuine importance in my life, Edward, my husband. Far more horrible than to die was the notion that I would never, ever, see my darling Edward again. My body, awakened by his touch, would never savour pleasure again. My heart, bursting with love for him, would never meet his again in blissful union. Drifting into total blackness, my last coherent thought was for him, my darling Edward.

The sound of an infernal racket dragged me back into this life and I managed to open my eyes. Someone had brought a lamp into the shed and in its flickering light I saw shadows dancing and whirling whilst I heard grunts and thumps, consistent with fighting. Two men seemed to be engaged in wrestling, punching and rolling from one end of the shed to the other.

I found I could breathe again though my throat was throbbing painfully and every heavenly intake of air was full of ache. My rasping, laboured breathing was deafening to my own ears and my lungs burned within my chest. My vision, however, was rapidly clearing and, at first, I couldn't believe my eyes. I must be dreaming; how was it possible that one of the fighters was Edward?

But it was him!

It was my Edward, sitting astride upon Beaver and showering him with hard blows. Beaver was a big man, though, and grabbing Edward by the lapels of his coat he managed in overturning him. Edward did not stop striking at him for a second yet he was now at the receiving end of Beaver's beefy fists. How had he managed to get here in the first place? He was blind, it was virtually impossible for him to find his way in unknown surroundings!

Oh, merciful God! Edward was bleeding in the face! I must help him, he was weakening under the heavy blows! I crawled on hands and feet towards the heap of rubbish in one of the shed's corners. Groping rather than seeing, my fingers found a piece of wood that seemed heavy enough to knock a person unconscious. However, to do that, I had to be on my feet and that was very difficult since the world was tilting from time to time. Therefore I concentrated on my breathing and, seeking support

against the wall, I slowly stood. My heart nearly stopped when I saw Beaver's hands around Edward's throat, squeezing hard! In two steps I was upon him, hitting the back of his head with the wood as hard as I could! Without a sound he collapsed on top of Edward, who grunted when the wind was driven out of him by the fellow's weight. With both hands I managed to roll Beaver off him and then I was showering Edward's face with kisses and stroking him and uttering nonsense until he pulled me into his arms and kissed me so fervently on the mouth that tears sprang into my eyes. I didn't move, though, I couldn't for the life of me. I was too happy to be in his arms again, to feel him, to be alive and to be his!

A flutter of movement reached the corner of my eye!

I broke our kiss and was on my feet in seconds, only to see the slender figure of Miss Edwina Blackthorn who fell onto her knees beside Beaver's motionless form.

"Oh, Timothy, I'm so sorry. Mr. Rochester, I think he's dead! He doesn't move! Oh, somebody help me, please?"

The misery in her voice made me rush by her side and feel for the man's pulse. He was alive and I told her so. Edward was there too, now, feeling the man's head.

"Don't worry, Miss Blackthorn, he's only unconscious, but we have to put him to bed. Now, Jane, my love, is there something here that could serve as a cart, a wheelbarrow, maybe?"

I looked around but saw nothing.

"There's one outside, Mr. Rochester, I'll get it!", Miss Blackthorn exclaimed and ran away.

"How on earth did you come here, Edward? And with her? I don't understand."

Edward chuckled and pulled me back into his arms again.

"She came to Ferndean, last night, and told me everything. By then I was nearly out of my mind with worry for you, witch! What business did you have, I ask you, to go traipsing around the countryside alone and without me? Keithley came back with the curricle by dusk, shot through the shoulder and with no idea of your whereabouts. He only knew about your visit to Blanche Ingram and told us about the attack while he was driving you home. It seems that he was ambushed and shot without him seeing his attacker. When he came to his senses again, you were gone. I had search parties to find you but I had no inkling as to where to start looking!"

"Blanche Ingram ... oh, Edward, she's behind all this! She ... "

"Shhh! I know, Miss Blackthorn told me. But ..."

"Mr. Rochester, sir, I have the cart but I don't think it fits through the door!", came Miss Blackthorn's voice from outside.

"Come, Jane, give me a hand. We must get this fellow here to Ferndean. I want to interrogate him thoroughly once he wakes up."

Between the three of us we managed to get Beaver onto the cart after I bound his hands onto his back. Miss Blackthorn was begging me not to do it but Edward was anxious that he might get violent again, should he wake up before we reached home. We then wheeled the cart through the moorland to the road where Edward had left the curricle. With Beaver tight up at our feet and the three of us cramped together on the seat, Miss Blackthorn drove us to Ferndean. She was the only one who could actually drive the contraption, me being ignorant still of how to do it and Edward being blind. Once we reached the manor, Edward's loud orders sprang the house into life immediately! Beaver was carried away to the stables where he was to be fastened on a makeshift bed and his head wound bound. Miss Blackthorn was whisked away by an agitated Alice to a guest room and I was grabbed firmly by my husband and marched up the stairs and into our bedchamber. *Edward kicked the door shut and I had barely the chance of putting my lamp down before he seized both of my arms and, in a fit of rage, barked at me: "You, Jane Rochester, have some serious explaining to do! What were you thinking of, opening my letters and acting in my place without notifying me?"*

Chapter 13 – The reckoning



I was, of course, not frightened at all!

Edward, for all his brooding and hot temper, would never frighten me, he was all bark and no bite. Even so, standing tall and ramrod straight, his blind grey-green eyes blazing with ... something which was not fury, he was an impressive sight and just by looking at him my heart rose sky-high!

“Well?”, he asked, in a low voice, which made my pulse race. I didn’t reply but started undressing as silently as I could. In a couple of moment I was only wearing my shoes and stockings.

“Well? Are you going to give an answer, Mrs. Rochester?”

His voice was really threatening now but when I saw the beginning of a smile dancing at the corner of his mouth, I decided to play along with the game he had in mind.

“Edward ...”, I said plaintively, “I’m am so very exhausted. I will give you an answer but not now. I really need to get some rest, please?”

His face was suddenly full of concern.

“Jane, are you hurt? I’m so sorry, darling, I ...”

“No, Edward, please, leave me be and let’s go to bed. It’s the middle of the night.”

I carefully opened the bed and sat down. Edward began to take of his coat and dropped it in the middle of the room. My pulse started beating erratically now. Then followed his shirt and I had to smother a gasp of anticipation. When he took a few steps towards the bed, I drawled in a tired voice:

“Will you not help me with my shoes, please, Edward? My whole body is aching with fatigue ...”

“Christ, Jane, sweetheart, why did you not say so? Why did you let me be so ghastly?”

He reached the bed and I stuck out my feet, which he took into his hands, easing off my boots. His hands glided upwards along my stockings now, sending heat waves up to the centre of my core!

“Jane, ... where are your skirts?”, he smiled, finally understanding. I had already loosened his breeches and my hands were roaming over his chest and stomach, pushing down his clothes.

With a groan from deep within his chest he gathered me up and lifted me away from the bed.

Suddenly my back was pinned against the wall and he pushed into me hard. After one heartbeat I was over the edge, my body throbbing with immense pleasure. I clung to my husband’s body,

anxious to widen the distance between us and felt the muscles of his back and legs straining up like steel cords when he cried out his release!

For the length of an eternity we remained there against the wall, clinging to each other like two lost souls. Then, with his head buried between my breasts, Edward’s low voice reached my ears.

“Jane, you wicked witch, if you ever do that disappearing act on me again, I swear to God I will ... smother you with pleasure so that you might never recover!”

I looked down sideways and chuckled.

“Well, my Lord and Master, coming from a man who is wearing nothing but his boots and whose breeches are down on them, this does not impress me very much!”

The next moment the Master threw me onto our bed, discarded the said garments in the blink of an eye and was again upon me in no time.

When I woke up the next morning, Edward was already wide awake.

I kissed him on the mouth in an impulse and he flushed.

“What is it, my love? Am I taking you by surprise?”, I asked in a playful tone.

“No, sweet Jane of mine, that is not it. I feel suddenly ashamed because I have not told you of ... Jane, do not be cross with me but ... something wonderful has happened to me. My eyesight is improving and at this moment, I can actually see you, not sharply, but not as vaguely as before.” It was a lot to take in and I remained silent for a while.

“So, Edward, last night, you deceived me in letting me think you didn’t know I took my garments off?”

“I need more than one single lamp to see, my little witch, I need daylight. No, I didn’t know. The surprise was so intense that I could barely refrain myself long enough from ... well, you know, don’t you?”

“No, Edward, I do not know what you mean, please, oblige me and explain?”

It was impossible not to laugh when I saw he believed me for just a tiny moment.

“You ... you wicked woman! Come here!”

After our morning ablutions and a very late breakfast Edward and I retired to the parlour with a large pot of coffee. We needed to talk about many things.

“So, my Jane, tell me why you found it important to go careering around the countryside without me knowing?”

“Oh, no, Edward Rochester, you first! What can you tell me about Miss Edwina Blackthorn?”

“Now that was embarrassing! I had to ask the venerable Fairfax if she would read my letters! I don’t know who of us was most flushed but I don’t think it was me because Mrs. F. was gasping in horror when she made the same conclusion you did, Jane.”

Trust Edward to make a foolishness out of something serious!

He looked deep into my eyes, yes, he looked, something he had not done for a long time!

“Jane, upon my honour, I have never had sexual intercourse with Eshton’s sister for the very simple reason that she was already well and truly married before I was introduced to her. If she gave birth to a child that was conceived before her marriage to Blackthorn, it had nothing to do with me.”

I wanted so very much to believe him.

My heart believed him unconditionally but my rational and naturally suspicious mind told me otherwise. It was long before I knew him so it didn’t affect me much but still ... I felt uncomfortable about it.

“Are you going to see the solicitors?”, I asked him.

“Yes, that is my intention. There is more to it than meets the eye, Jane. This Blackthorn girl, whom, by the way, I’ve never met before, seems a decent enough person. Furthermore, there is Blanche’s role in all this. Blanche has disappeared from Ingram Park, did you know? Lady Ingram is beside herself with worry, or so the servant, who brought me the message, told me.”

“You will have to make a new appointment, Edward, you were supposed to meet them at eleven a.m. today.”

“No, my sweetling, Edward Rochester just barges in when he pleases and no one, not even a distinguished solicitor, is going to make objections to that!”

*A knock on the door drew our attention away from Miss Blackthorn for the moment and I summoned the knocker in. It was Johnson.*

*“Mr. Rochester, sir, Mrs. Rochester, ma’am, the stable master says that the man Beaver has regained consciousness and now would be a good time if you want to interrogate him, sir.”*

Chapter 14 – Rochester takes the matter at hand



While we hurried towards the stables Edward asked the head groom who had come to meet us:

“Ah, Norton, did you tie him up like I asked?”

“Yes, sir!”, the man answered, “an’ a good thing ‘t was too! He’s been trying to get away all the time since he opened his eyes!”

“Edward!”, I exclaimed, “Was that necessary? The man is injured and by my hand too!”

My husband laughed out loud but didn’t reply. Instead he grabbed my hand and pulled me with him inside. How sure his footing had become, I noticed in astonishment. His eyesight must indeed be coming back.

We found poor Beaver in the stable shed at the back, firmly tied upon a narrow cot and frantically trying to break his bonds. Someone had put a bandage around his head and he looked ghastly.

“Oh, Mr. Beaver! I’m so sorry!”, I said gently and kneeled beside the cot. I touched his forehead with the back of my hand and found it a little feverish. Beaver seemed surprised but calmed down at my touch.

“Ma’am, I ...”, he stammered but I silenced him at once.

“Shhh, Mr. Beaver, keep still. You’re hurt and it was my doing and ...”

“Jane!”

Edward’s most thundering voice startled us both and I turned to my husband, only to find him scowling at me in his most impressive manner. I was, of course, not impressed and nothing Edward did, could ever frighten me.

“Yes?”, I asked in a calm voice.

His green-grey eyes were definitively looking into mine and he said briskly:

“You seem to have forgotten that this man is Blanche Ingram’s henchman who has kidnapped, imprisoned and harmed you! It is my intention to interrogate him thoroughly and retrieve all information about the wretched wench, so step aside and let me!”

I rose to my feet to give way to my husband when an anguished cry from the stable entrance made us turn our heads. Miss Edwina Blackthorn flew to Beaver’s cot, took his hand in hers and cried:

“Oh, dear Timothy, I’m so sorry it has come to this! We were both submitted to Miss Ingram’s wickedness and neither of us had a choice!”

She turned a tear-streaked face towards Edward.

“Mr. Rochester, please, I know you have a kind heart. I beg you to take care of poor Timothy who has been a servant in my family as was his mother before him. He has no fault in this, I assure you! We were both victims of Miss Ingram’s doings.”

Edward studied her pensively before he replied evenly:

“First, Miss Blackthorn, you will explain to me how you came to think that I was your father.”

She nodded and rose.

“Yes, sir, I will but I cannot leave Timothy’s bedside when he is injured so.”

“I’ve sent for the physician and I give you my word he will be taken care of. So you may leave him in my groom’s capable hands and follow me and Mrs. Rochester back to the house.”

We retired in the parlour where a tray of tea was being served by our capable Alice. I poured us all a cup of the genial beverage and we sat down in the chairs before the fireplace.

Edwina Blackthorn began her story.

“My mother, who was sister to Mr. Eshton of the estate adjacent to Blackthorn Manor, married Thomas Blackthorn at the age of seventeen. She was, by then, four months pregnant with me but Mr. Blackthorn was not the father. On several occasions have I asked my mother who my father was but she has always denied me the knowledge of it. Thomas Blackthorn was a cruel and violent man and my mother has suffered for many years under his harsh treatment before she was finally forced to flee with me when ... when he ...”

She was weeping now, her slim shoulders shaking with the effort. Edward looked at me with genuine distress in his eyes and I took the girl in my arms.

“Dear Edwina,” I whispered, “do not upset yourself so. Did he try to seduce you, defile you?”

“Yes,” she choked, “my mother and I ran away after he had beaten her so harshly that she had bleeding wounds in her face and on her body. She came to my defence when, one night, Blackthorn tried to rape me. We fled to the only place where he would not come looking for us, Ingram Park. Lady Ingram and my grandmother Eshton were childhood friends and she welcomed us most heartily. My mother died a few days later of internal bleedings and I stayed as Blanche’s companion ever since.”

“And Timothy?”, I inquired gently, “How does he come in all this?”

“His mother came into my grandmother’s service when she was pregnant of Timothy. She was an orphan who had been raped. Grandmother took her on as a scullery maid and later as a nursery maid. Timothy was working in my uncle Eshton’s stables when my mother married Blackthorn but he followed her to Blackthorn Manor to find work there. His own mother is living in a cottage that was sold to the Ingram estate a couple of years ago and Blanche threatened to turn her out if Timothy did not obey her. She ordered Mrs. Rochester to be abducted and imprisoned.”

She paused to draw breath and Edward asked:

“But why? Why would Blanche do such a thing?”

“Mr. Rochester, she was furious when you married! She said you had betrayed her, you had promised her marriage and then cast her aside to marry Mrs. Rochester.”

Edward’s voice was raw with rage when he uttered:

“But that is not true! I have never offered for her!”

“Of course not, my love!”, I hastened to say, “How could you when you were already ...”

Aghast by my own stupid mistake I shut my mouth! How could I be so rude as to refer to Bertha!

Edwina went on, unaware of my discomfort.

“She conceived this plan of letting you think you were my father. I refused at first but she threatened to turn me on the streets and to drive poor Timothy’s mother out of her cottage if we didn’t do her bidding. She said she has irrevocable proof of you being my father.”

Edward raked a hand through his dark curls in a desperate gesture.

“But ... that is impossible! I have never, ever touched Adelaide Eshton in my life! Besides, I have been out of the country for years and at the time of your conception I was living in the West Indies, I was already married to Bertha!”

“Shhh, I know, my love, calm yourself!”, I soothed him.

*He rose so abruptly that both me and Edwina were startled at the vehemence of it.*

*“Well, that settles it! I want Miss Blanche Ingram searched for and found for she has some serious explaining to do!”*

Chapter 15 – An organized programme of everyday life



After all this disturbance in our tenderly young marriage Edward and I firmly banished all diversion from the really important matters concerning our life together. We had work on our hands; we needed to get started on the restoration of Thornfield Hall, Edward's ancestral home. The next six weeks we were diligently working, talking to architects and craftsmen, laying out plans for the rebuilding and refurbishment. We settled in a nice enough routine, hard working in pleasurable companionship by day, sweet indulgence in each other's bodies by night. I dedicated myself to organising my household. This proved to be a gigantic task, even with Alice's help. We hired five new maids, two upstairs and two downstairs and one scullery maid. It also took me the whole of three weeks of interviewing possible candidates for a gentleman's gentleman or valet for Edward. They were all, without exception, very reluctant to be examined by a lady and I had to stand firm at times but eventually, I succeeded in hiring Thomas Devereaux who came with excellent references from the service of a duke's younger son killed at Waterloo. The most important was that Edward approved of him, which he did.

Miss Blackthorn and Beaver stayed with us, of course. The former became good friends with our dear Adèle, now quite a young lady of fourteen going on fifteen.

Ah, yes, Adèle ...

Edward wanted to send her to some institute for the education of young women in London but that was not at all what Adèle wished.

Adèle wanted to go to Paris.

As I had too many issues demanding my attention, I could not accompany her and she was too young to travel alone. Edward was strongly against her going, even though he knew how much she longed for it. So we were in an impasse, Adèle pouting, Edward grumbling and me at a loss as how to remediate this.

Six weeks later matters stood as follows.

Thornfield Hall had a roof and glazed windows again. The plumbing was installed so that there was water in every bedroom. There was a storage room for wood on every floor so that the maids wouldn't have to go all the way downstairs to get wood for the fires. The servant's work would surely be a great deal easier in the Hall when it was finished.

Edward had made inquiries about the whereabouts of Blanche Ingram.

She had disappeared from Ingram Park the very night of my escape from the shed. It seemed that she had taken only a few personal possessions and all her jewellery, stolen some money from her brother's strongbox and ridden off on her spirited bay mare to destinations unknown. Lady Ingram, so Edward was told when he went to interrogate her, was indisposed and had taken to her bed. Philip Ingram, the new baronet after his father's death the previous year, refused to speak to Edward about his sister. It appeared he was still harbouring some disgruntled feelings over Edward's behaviour towards Blanche. To me it seemed that Blanche Ingram had been indulging herself in wishful thinking as to Edward's involvement with her!

We did, however, puzzle our heads about where she might have gone to and to whom. An unmarried woman of gentle birth had few places to hide. She could take refuge with a relative, like an aunt or a married sister, or go to a boarding house of good reputation, which was only a temporary solution because someone would sooner or later find out who she was and tell her family or a magistrate.

Timothy Beaver healed more slowly than expected. He developed a fever which weakened him so badly he lost over thirty pounds. After the above-mentioned six weeks he was, however, able to resume a task as a stable hand. He was a very hardworking, quiet sort of fellow and Norton, the head groom, was pleased with him. It was no luxury to have him, especially now that Keithley was injured. Keithley's shoulder was healing well but slowly as the bullet had damaged his collarbone. Miss Blackthorn spent a lot of time with him when he was off duty. I suspected she harboured some remorse. It had been Miss Blackthorn who shot Keithley the day I was abducted. She had received shooting lessons from Blanche's brother while she stayed at Ingram Park.

Soon thereafter, Beaver came to ask Edward for a favour. My husband received him in the drawing room after luncheon where we were drinking our coffee.

"Ah, Beaver!", Edward cheerfully exclaimed when the big man entered, "What can I do for you? I trust you're back to your old self?"

"Yes, Mr. Rochester, sir, thank you, I'm well enough. But ..." He stopped speaking and bowed his head, as in great embarrassment.

"Come, Mr. Beaver," I encouraged him gently, "what is it that you want?"

My soft words seemed to ease him and he ventured:

"It's my mother, Mrs. Rochester. She's old and she's not well. It's been months since I went to see her and I'm worried. I came to ask a leave of absence to visit her."

"Of course, man!", Edward answered, "Take a horse and all the time you need."

"You will also take a basket of food with you, Mr. Beaver, as a present from us to your mother. I'll tell Cook to prepare one. When do you plan on leaving?"

The next day we had a visitor. It was John Eshton who'd been in London for some time and only now heard what had befallen Edward. He was even more upset when he listened to our story about Blanche Ingram and how she smeared Edward's name by bestowing Miss Edwina Blackthorn as his daughter upon him.

"My goodness, Edward!", he exclaimed, "She must be gone mad! My poor sister and you? How could that ever be possible? Adelaide was already married to Blackthorn when I introduced her to you at a house party."

"Exactly so!", Edward chimed in, "It was nothing but Blanche's viciousness with the intention of disturbing our marriage."

At that exact moment Miss Edwina entered the room and, on seeing her uncle, rushed forward to throw herself into his waiting arms.

"Edie, my sweet! Oh, how wonderful to see you again! Dear girl, you have no idea how sorry I am I was not here when all this happened. I thought you were safe at Ingram Park!"

"I was, Uncle!", Edwina said, "Until Mr. Rochester's marriage, I was! It's only since then that Blanche grew all awkward and set up her plan to ruin Mr. Rochester's marriage. But, Uncle, you do know that Blackthorn was not my father?"

“Well,” Eshton said, “to say I knew is perhaps a little farfetched but I suspected it though never a word has been said about it. I don’t, however, have any inkling of who was your father, dear girl. Addie never said anything, not even to our mother, with whom she was pretty close.”

*A noise from the direction of the hall made us turn our heads.*

*“Sir, sir, you cannot ...”*

*Alice’s alarmed voice was heard just seconds before the door was thrown open to let a man about whom we’d banned out of our minds.*

*“Rochester, I demand to speak with you! Immediately! It bears no delay, sir!”, the agitated voice of Charles Mason barked at my stunned husband.*

Chapter 16 – One obstacle after another



Charles Mason crossed the distance between him and Edward in three long strides. In one smooth gesture he hit my baffled husband in the face, so hard that the latter staggered backwards and ended on the floor with a muffled cry of pain. Something snapped in me. I drew myself up to my unfortunately inadequate height and slapped Mason's jaw as hard as I could.

"Mr. Mason!", I exclaimed angrily, "Will you kindly refrain from hitting my husband? He has barely recovered from the injuries you inflicted on him during our last encounter. Besides, if you'd care to use your brain before acting instead of your temperament, you'd know Edward once loved your sister dearly. He has never, do you hear me, never ill-treated Bertha during all those long years that she stayed at Thornfield Hall. On the contrary, he has done ample more than his duty towards her, caring for her with deep concern for her safety and well-being. Bertha jumped to her death, that night, Mr. Mason; it is as simple as that. Edward tried to save her, to lure her back inside, but she was beyond his reach, both physically and mentally. It was Fate, Mr. Mason. You will leave Bertha's ghost to rest from now on or you will have to answer to me."

By now I had run out of breath and I turned towards my husband who was still lying sprawled upon the carpet. I put out my hand, which he took, a strange look in his eyes. When he was on his feet again, Edward held my hand in his and, to my surprise, kissed it in a deferential way.

"My God, Jane! What a speech!", he whispered, looking deep into my eyes, "What a beautiful sight you are ... oh, my darling!"

Suddenly I was in the circle of his arms and he kissed me, right then and there, so ardently that I felt a wave of sweet burning desire running through me. My knees buckled under the intensity of it and I returned his kiss with all the strength I could muster. I don't know how long we went on with this somewhat improper behaviour but eventually, an unfamiliar noise brought us back to our senses. Charles Mason's hands were covering his face and he was weeping in a disconsolate way. Edward and I had the same reaction. We took Mason by the arm and made him sit down. I called for a fresh pot of tea but Edward poured him a stiff brandy which he gratefully accepted. A few awkward moments passed in which I filled a couple of cups of tea and me and Edward waited until Mason had regained his composure.

Eshton, who had witnessed the whole scene, was as white as a sheet but refrained from giving a comment. He swiftly excused himself and left us.

“Look here, Charles ...”, Edward said gently, “Let’s say no more about this whole wretched business. Let’s be friends again, like we used to be in the past.”

He offered his hand to Mason who took it. The two former brothers-in-law embraced each other and laughed, both now with tears in their eyes. I turned away, wishing to hide my own.

From that day on, Charles Mason stayed with us as a friend. Edwina Blackthorn took him under her wing and the two of them passed long hours of walking in the gardens during the day and playing chess at night.

A few days of relative peace and quiet passed in which I had no greater challenges than to keep myself busy with my household tasks, for which I was thankful. The events of the first two months of our marriage had certainly been tiresome, to say the least. They were, of course, also the most happy ones in my entire life.

Then, one day, I was accosted by Edwina when I came back from the garden where I had been cutting daffodils for the dinner table.

“Mrs. Rochester, I am very worried. It’s been so long since Timothy went to see his mother and he should be back by now. I sincerely hope he has not met with an accident. I know where his mother’s cottage is and I was hoping I could take the curricle and drive there?”

She was right, it must have been five days since Beaver left. We went to look for Edward who was working through the estate books in his library with his steward.

“Yes, this is odd, to say the least,” Edward mused, as soon as we had explained it all to him, “you know what, Jane, we will all go to Mrs. Beaver’s cottage in the carriage. That way you can take food and linen with you as a present to her.”

So we did, me and Edwina in the carriage, with Norton as our coachman and Edward riding his horse alongside us. It was not so very far, as Edwina told us. Once we passed Ingram Park, it was but fifteen miles to the east of it. Mrs. Beaver’s cottage lay at the outskirts of Ingram Home Wood, in a hollow providing a nice shelter from the winds blowing off the moors. There was no access from the main road, not even a trace of some path or other, so we were forced to leave the carriage there. Edward, Edwina and me went on foot through the meadow towards the low house with its thatched roof. When we came within a distance of some 100 meters of the cottage, Edward suddenly held out his arm and stopped us.

“Jane, ...”

He seemed to listen and so did I but there was nothing to hear. The silence in this secluded spot was absolute. My husband obviously thought otherwise.

“Jane, and you too, Edwina, quickly, go back to Norton! There’s something not quite right here and I want to go see what that is. If I don’t return in ten minutes, I want you to ride back to Ferndean and raise the alarm.”

“What? I’ll do no such thing! Edwina, you go back and do as my husband says, but I’m going with you, Edward!”

“Damn it, Jane! Will you do as I ask? The loss of my eyesight has enhanced my hearing. There’s a horse hidden somewhere near that cottage. Tell me, what would a poor widow do with a horse? Now, go! I will not tolerate ...”

“No, Edward! You’ve nothing to tolerate! I’m staying with you, like it or not!”

He pulled out his most dark scowl and Edwina paled, grabbed her skirts and ran back to the carriage. I did not. I returned his stare with one of my own, determined to have my own way.

*I don’t know how long we stood there and if our eyes would have been pistols, we’d both been dead twice over. All of a sudden, the crack of a gunshot almost made me jump out of my skin. Then, before my horrified eyes, Edward collapsed face forward onto the grass and a dark stain began spreading beneath him!*

Chapter 17 – Hell hath no fury



My heart stopped!

I sank onto my knees and carefully turned Edward onto his back. A large bloodstain had spread right in the middle of his chest. I put a trembling hand on his cheek; how cold it was! This could not be true, surely not? He could not be dead, could he? His eyes were shut and his face was deadly pale but surely he was not dead?

Someone grabbed me and a sack was pulled over my head. I didn't care, I could not think, I could not feel. Edward! Edward! I screamed his name as loudly as I could!

"Please, let me take care of him! He's hurt, he will die if I cannot tend to his wound! Please ..."

Nobody listened to me. I was lifted and thrown upon someone's shoulder and carried away from the deadly wounded body of my husband. That's when I fainted.

"Come on, man! Wake her up! Throw some water into her face or something!"

I knew that voice. It was ... no, it couldn't be! A splash of ice-cold water brought me to my senses and I gasped for breath. But there she was! Lady Ingram, dressed in black, a man's breeches, skirt, coat and boots! Next to her stood her daughter, clothed the same way as her mother and scowling at me in a most ominous manner.

"Where is my husband?", I demanded haughtily, determined not to let them get the better of me.

Lady Ingram's eyes smouldered with loathing contempt and she said in a low, menacing voice:

"Hold your tongue, you miserable piece of filth! You do not speak before I give you permission to!

Oh, I know what sort of creature you are, governess ... you are like all the others of your wretched profession! Your type of commonplace whores just creeps into a woman's home under the pretext of teaching her children and then you are praying upon her husband! What business was it of yours to come and take Rochester away from my beautiful Blanche? He loved her! Before you showed up, he was in love with her! But you, with your humble, subdued ways, you lured him away from my child!"

During her monologue I recovered enough to make me looking about me and finding out where I was. I was, of course, in the cottage. The room was low and dark with the only light coming from two very small windows. The whole place spoke of extreme poverty but also, of endearing cleanness and caring. The earthen floor was covered with freshly cut herbs and the few pieces of furniture were scrubbed until they shone. Where was the inhabitant of this house, Beaver's old mother? And where was Beaver?

"Oh, pray, madam governess, do not seek for help!"

Lady Ingram laughed and the sound of it was so eerie I felt shivers running over my spine. Blanche laughed too and it dawned to me that they must be mad, both of them!

Blanche bent over me and grabbed my hair, pulling it out of its pins. It hurt so much that tears sprang into my eyes.

“Look, you commoner, you’re quite alone here! There’s three corpses and you. We had to shoot that stupid Beaver fellow because he wouldn’t finish you off, not even when we killed his old crone of a mother!”

I followed her gaze and my blood ran cold in my veins! She was right! Next to the body of a little old lady lay Beaver’s heavy form, his eyes staring blindly towards the ceiling. And, next to him ... my poor brain could not comprehend what I saw; the tall, inert figure of Edward, sprawled on his back, with the ugly, huge, red stain of blood covering his chest like a giant flower. His eyes were closed and his face was smooth, even under the scars of the burning. Edward ... was dead.

I must have screamed for my tormenters were laughing even more now. I didn’t care; I wanted to be next to Edward and I wriggled and struggled as hard as I could but I was firmly bound on hands and feet and could not move an inch.

“Ah! Isn’t this sweet? Look, Blanche, she wants to be closer to her loving husband. Well, let’s help her!”

Lady Ingram put one booted foot in the small of my back and shoved me very hard. I rolled over the floor but not close enough so she repeated the movement until I was lying on my stomach with my face against Edward’s side. The irony smell of his blood filled my nose and I couldn’t keep myself from weeping. All was lost now, Edward was dead and I would follow soon.

As if she could read my mind, Lady Ingram sneered:

“Yes, governess, you’re right. You are about to die and it will be very atrocious, I promise you!”

She went to a cupboard and retrieved a can of lamp oil from it. Floating about the room like a giant black moth, she spilled the oil onto the furniture, the cupboard, the table, the few chairs and over the bodies on the floor. Soon enough I was drenched in the sharply reeking substance.

*Blanche, in the meantime, had shredded a few rags and propped them into the cupboard. Her mother, again sneering her blood-chilling madwoman laughter at me, pulled a tinderbox out of her coat pocket and set the rags on fire. The flame leapt up and grew higher and higher until the wood of the cupboard caught fire and began to burn steadily.*

*“Farewell, miss governess! May your death be long and painful!”*

*They left and the door fell close behind them.*

Chapter 18 – Burn the witch



A choking smoke was rapidly filling the small low-ceilinged room of the cottage and I knew I should try and get out. I did not move. My courage failed me for without Edward, lying dead beside me, nothing mattered to me anymore.

Why? Why was he taken from me? I could not understand why we were not allowed to enjoy a happy life together. Sobs were raking my chest as I realized only one thing: Edward was dead! They had shot him through the heart and I was left alone to die a horrible death.

Lying on my stomach, unable to move, I felt the fabric of Edward's wet coat under my cheek. At least I was grateful for that; I would die with my head close to Edward's heart. I closed my eyes and tried to breathe. Smoke was choking me and causing me to cough but the coughing brought me no solace. My eyes were stinging now and a sudden impulse to fight made me move my head higher upon Edward's chest. It only made me cough harder.

The heat from the flames was reaching a dangerous level now. The fire had set the thatched roof alight and pieces of it were falling down. I was now so terrified that I crept closer to Edward as if searching for protection. I was screaming in horror and sobbing and coughing in sheer panic!

"Damn it, Jane! Will you give me some space here? It's hard enough to breathe in this vile smoke without you burying me with your body, no matter how lovely a prospect that may be!"

Violent coughing accompanied this outburst of Edward's and I lifted my head. He was alive!

"Edward ... how ...?" A fit of coughing cut my words.

"Not now, Jane! Move over!"

He grunted and tried to sit up and only now I noticed that he too was bound hands and feet.

All I could see just then was the ugly red stain on his chest and the next second I was retching uncontrollably. The contempt of my stomach forced its way up into my throat and I was violently vomiting ... water, for I had not eaten since breakfast. I gasped for breath and vomited again. Panting and heaving I lay with my face in the dust, sick and miserable.

"Sweetheart, Jane, darling, come on, we have go get out of here ..."

I wanted to move, I wanted to follow Edward's coaxing voice but the strength failed me. There was no air left in the room, only smothering smoke.

My husband turned his back to me and shouted between coughs:

"Give me your hands, darling! Alright, that's it! Just cling to my hands, never let go!"

He grasped my bound hands with his and squeezed them tight. With a grunt of effort he then shoved himself forward, first thrusting his legs in the direction of the door, then pulling his buttocks towards his feet, and dragging me along with him in the process. I was a dead weight but could do nothing about it. I was so ill and weak I barely managed to stay conscious and the coughing was raking my body even more. The fact that he had to take my weight with him with every shove was considerably and quickly draining Edward. His laboured breathing became heavier by the minute.

“Jane ... sweetheart ... you have to help me, we’re not going to make it!”

“I ... I ... cannot ... breathe ...”

“Yes, you can! Take shallow breaths, come on, you can do it!”

I did as he asked and it helped ... a little.

“Come on, my brave witch, we have to get on our feet now. Hold on to my hands. Good girl! Now put your back firmly against mine, yes, that’s it! Pull your feet up and ... now push upwards!”

I failed, my legs were numb and my lungs ached from the lack of oxygen.

“Jane, will you please stop being such a weakling and do as I tell you to! Damn it, woman, I don’t want to die just yet!”

Fury rose in my chest when he spoke like that to me and well he knew it! The next time I succeeded and we were standing on our two, tightly bound legs.

*But Fate had other things planned for us. With a rumbling sound like far away thunder, the roof slowly came crashing down on us and everything went black.*

Chapter 19 – Our Father who art in Heaven



The words of the prayer whispered through my befuddled brain and I kept repeating them because it gave me mental strength.

“Our Father ... who art in Heaven ... hallowed be Thy name ...”

I could not possibly be dead!

My body ached with cuts and bruises. I was cold and wet and ... oh Heaven, I could breathe again! However, it was pitch black all around me and I was shivering. I was also still bound on hands and feet. I moaned with pain in my back and shoulders as soon as I tried to move.

“Jane ... Jane?”

“Edward ... is that you?”

Suddenly his mouth was on mine and, of all things, we kissed. We just kissed and our kiss was dear to us like life itself. After a long time we had to draw breath eventually but we lay panting against each other and laughing and kissing again.

“Where are we? What happened?”, I asked.

“We are in a cellar under the cottage, darling. I think the house has crashed above us and the floor must have collapsed. Are you alright? Can you move?”

To my astonishment I found that I could move! Now that the smoke was gone, I could again breathe properly and that seemed to have restored at least part of my strength.

“Yes, I can move, Edward. And, if my hands were free I would slap you! I thought they shot you, I thought you were dead!”

He laughed! He just laughed that infuriating laugh of his and I screamed, overcome with helpless frustration!

“Shhh! Shhh, calm yourself, my little cat! I sensed all along that Beaver’s long absence meant something fishy was afoot so I used a little trick I learned in my West Indies days. I put a piece of armour around my chest under my shirt and a cow blather full of cow’s blood above it. That’s what you saw when the bullet hit it. However, I was knocked unconscious with the bullet’s impact and it hurts like hell.”

I kissed him again, all too happy that he was alive.

“We must find a way to get out of this.”

“We will, Jane, we will. Listen, the first thing to do is to free ourselves from these wretched bonds but I have no idea how we are to do that.”

“Wait a moment, Edward. I am going to try something.”

The way I was lying told me that I was facing Edward so I turned my back to him.

“There!”, I said, “Now try unfastening my bonds, Edward!”

My husband’s chuckle rumbled in the darkness but I could feel his fingers working on the rope around my hands. It took a lot of time but eventually my wrists loosened and I was able to wriggle them free.

“Oh, how wonderful! Give me a minute, darling. I must restore the circulation.”

“Not too long, I hope!”, Edward answered, “Untie me, Jane, my hands are tingling.”

It was not long before we had freed ourselves completely. We were even able to sit upright.

“Stay where you are, sweetheart, I’m going to make a little reconnaissance tour around this hellhole.”

I heard Edward moving about on hands and feet for a while. God! How tired I was! And hungry, thirsty, cold, damp and probably very filthy too. Then I remembered my sickness and the way I had vomited, so abruptly and so violently. I was still feeling weak and nauseated.

“Jane, come this way, please?”

When I reached Edward, he took my hand.

“Here, do you feel that? It’s a draft of fresh air. We must try and dig ourselves out. Can you help me?

But, my love, do be careful, I don’t want to be buried alive.”

We started digging, plunging our hands in the dirt at the spot where the draft was coming from. It was hard work. This is how we did it; Edward peeled away the earth, gave it into my hands and I piled it up somewhere behind me. Slowly and carefully we worked until we could feel the draft getting stronger, as the hole grew larger.

“Back away, my darling!”, Edward croaked, his throat surely as dry as mine was.

“What? What are you going to do?”, I asked, suddenly unsure.

“Worm myself through this hole! I want to know where this is leading to.”

Without giving me the chance to say more, I heard his grunt when he heaved himself upwards. A dull thud, followed by a cloud of dust into my face, told me my worst fear had come true: the hole had collapsed!

“Edward! Edward, where are you? Speak to me! Edward!”

There I was, groping around blindly in the absolute darkness and encountering nothing but damp earth! It was like moving around in a grave! My husband was there, somewhere, buried alive! I had to find him! So I shook off every other thought. I probed and brushed, desperately trying to remember where I had heard his voice the last time. It looked like ages but eventually my fingers came upon his body and it was buried from the waist up! In frantic despair I began brushing away whatever dust and earth I could, mainly searching for his face. There! That was his head!

“Edward!”

I kept on screaming his name, I wanted him to answer me, to show me that he was alive!

His mouth, his nose! I hastily wiped my hands on my blouse and handkerchief as best as I could and started freeing his mouth and nose. It was the work of a madwoman; I could see nothing, it was pitch-dark. I could only feel and all the time my prayers went up to whatever God might deign to hear them.

“Edward! Please, Edward, answer me! Please, don’t leave me, don’t leave us, please ...”

Yes, there was a chance that I might be with child. Were we to perish in this hole all three of us and was Edward never to know he was to be a father?

*So I prayed, more than I had ever done in my life ... Our Father, who art in Heaven ...”*

Chapter 20 – Jane, I knew you'd do me good



Prayers are good for mental support but they don't actually help you out when you are physically in trouble. So I concentrated on trying to revive my husband. I rubbed his chest as hard as I could and I blew into his mouth, hoping to keep him alive with my own breath. How long I kept doing this I don't recall but eventually I stopped. I was exhausted and my spirits were very low. We would die, all three of us. However, we would not be separated in death. Determined to be as close to him as I could, I positioned myself lengthwise on top of his body. I laid my head on Edward's chest and closed my eyes.

"Damn and blast, woman! What are you trying to do, choke me?"

A violent fit of coughing sent me sliding off Edward's body. He sat up abruptly, I could feel it, and shook himself like a wet dog, sprinkling me with a shower of dirt.

"Stop, Edward, stop!"

Then I was laughing and throwing myself against him and kissing him, I was so extremely happy!

He kissed me back and chuckled:

"And I love you too, Jane, don't worry!"

We laughed and kissed like there was no tomorrow. That's why we didn't hear the shouting voice above us at first.

"Sir? Sir, are you there? Mr. Rochester, sir, is that you?"

Norton! They found us! A stream of earth was raining upon us and we hastily crawled away.

"Damn it, Norton! You're burying us alive, would you please take care?"

"Sorry, sir!"

Light! Lovely yellow light from a lamp, no, from many lamps!

"Seems like we're not yet in St. Peter's book just now, my little witch! You'd probably scare the wits out of him anyway!", my rake of a husband said and I swear I could see him smirking, even in the feeble light from above.

A few days later we were all gathered in the drawing room of Ferndean Manor.

There was me and Edward, Adèle, Edwina, Charles Mason and John Eshton, Alice, Keithley and Norton. Also present was Special Constable Jeremiah Jones, acting on behalf of Mr. Justice of the Peace Lord Brackenberry of the Newcastle Royal Court. He had a story to tell.

As soon as Edward had made a formal complaint of the attack of the Ingram women on his life, His Lordship had ordered their arrest. Edwina's testimony had provided him with sufficient ammunition to bring on a lawsuit against them. The two women, however, had made full confessions because it seemed that they were not entirely to blame for the whole miserable affair. The present baron of Ingram Park, Geoffrey Ingram, Blanche's brother, was Edwina's father. It seemed that he had raped poor Adelaide Eshton during a party at her father's estate when she was barely sixteen years old. He had threatened the innocent, unworldly girl in keeping silent over his despicable feat, convincing her that she would never be believed if she told the truth. Later, when Adelaide and her daughter fled

the Blackthorn house and came to live at Ingram Park, he had again threatened the poor woman to ravish her daughter if she breathed a word over what had happened. It had been Lady Adelaide's death. She succumbed both physically and mentally destroyed.

So, of the once so proud family Ingram, only poor young Mary remained out of His Majesty's Prison. She was to go and live with an aunt in Hampshire for the rest of her days as it was very unlikely she would make a suitable marriage now.

Edward took me by the hand after Mr. Jones had departed, claiming he was not feeling well enough to stay up too late. Ignoring my mild protests he dragged me with him to our bedchamber. Closing the door firmly behind us, he scooped me up into his arms and carried me to our bed.

"Now, Jane," he murmured, "will you be so good as to clarify something to me that I do not fully understand?"

His green-grey eyes were full of mischief and I knew where this would lead us.

"Edward," I answered, "if you want to have marital intercourse with me, just say so. You know I could never deny you."

It seemed I was wrong. He cupped my face and looked me into the eye in a very serious manner.

"I heard you say something, my adorable little wife, when we were buried in that cellar. Now, since I was in a state of semi-unconsciousness, I do not know if I heard you correctly. You said, and I quote: 'Don't leave *us*, Edward!' Us, Jane, whatever did you mean by that?"

"Well, Edward, it is all your doing, you know. You have been doing things to me that will have a result in approximately seven months from now and ..."

He silenced me with a kiss and I let him.

"Oh, my precious witch, this is the best of news! I insist on you seeing Dr. Woodhouse as soon as possible. Being buried cannot be good for my son!"

"*Your son?* Why not *my daughter?* The chances are equal, you know?"

Edward threw his head back and roared with laughter, which vexed me a bit. He seemed so confident!

"No, Jane, you are not right in this! We Rochesters do not breed daughters! After all, we are a weak and degenerated lot, we only produce males! Now, my sweet own Jane, have I already thanked you for saving my life, again? It seems that I cannot stay alive without your rescue operations, so from now on, I'm not leaving your side anymore. It might prove fatal for me one day!"

"No," I answered in a dignified manner, "you have yet to thank me, Edward."

My words had barely left my mouth before he pushed me onto our bed, pinning my arms above my head and shoving my skirts upwards with his powerful knee. Then, however, he checked himself.

Instead he laid himself down beside me and took me in his arms.

"Jane ... how long do you think I can ... thank you before ..."

"I don't know for sure, my love, but I think we still have some months full of thanking ahead of us."

That was all he needed and he applied himself in thanking me most thoroughly.

So after a considerable period of time we lay in a close embrace, resting from our exertions and Edward's chuckled:

"Jane, I knew you'd do me good. I knew you'd make an honourable man of me, eventually."

The End.