I bid them be quiet, now that they saw me returned, and, benumbed to my very heart, I dragged upstairs, whence, after putting on dry clothes, and pacing to and fro thirty or forty minutes, to restore the animal heat, I am adjourned to my study, feeble as a kitten, almost too much so to enjoy the cheerful fire and smoking coffee which the servant has prepared for my refreshment.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT vain weather-cocks we are! I, who had determined to hold myself independent of all social intercourse, and thanked my stars that, at length, I had lighted on a spot where it was next to impracticable—I, weak wretch, after maintaining till dusk a struggle with low spirits and solitude, was finally compelled to strike my colours; and, under pretence of gaining information concerning the necessities of my establishment, I desired Mrs. Dean, when she brought in supper, to sit down while I ate it, hoping sincerely she would prove a regular gossip, and either rouse me to animation or lull me to sleep by her talk.

“You have lived here a considerable time,” I commenced; “did you not say sixteen years?”

“Eighteen, sir; I came, when the mistress was married, to wait on her; after she died, the master retained me for his housekeeper.”

“Indeed.”

There ensued a pause. She was not a gossip, I feared, unless about her own affairs, and those could hardly interest me.

However, having studied for an interval, with a fist on either knee, and a cloud of meditation over her ruddy countenance, she ejaculated—

“Ah, times are greatly changed since then!”

“Yes,” I remarked, “you’ve seen a good many alterations, I suppose?”

“I have: and troubles too,” she said.

“Oh, I’ll turn the talk on my landlord’s family!” I thought to myself. “A good subject to start—and that pretty girl-widow, I should like to know her history; whether she be a native of the country, or, as is more probable, an exotic that the surly indigenae will not recognise for kin.”

With this intention I asked Mrs. Dean why Heathcliff let Thrushcross Grange, and preferred living in a situation and residence so much inferior.

“Is he not rich enough to keep the estate in good order?” I enquired.

“Rich, sir!” she returned. “He has, nobody knows what money, and every year it increases. Yes, yes, he’s rich enough to live in a finer house than this; but he’s very near—close-handed; and, if he had meant to flit to Thrushcross Grange, as soon as he heard of a good tenant, he could not have borne to miss the chance of getting a few hundreds more. It is strange people should be so greedy, when they are alone in the world!”

“He had a son, it seems?”

“Yes, he had one—he is dead.”

“And that young lady, Mrs. Heathcliff, is his widow?”

“Yes.”

“Where did she come from originally?”

“Why, sir, she is my late master’s daughter; Catherine Linton was her maiden name. I nursed her, poor thing! I did wish Mr. Heathcliff would remove here, and then we might have been together again.”

“What, Catherine Linton!” I exclaimed, astonished. But a minute’s reflection convinced me it was not my ghostly Catherine.

“Then,” I continued, “my predecessor’s name was Linton?”

“It was.”

“And who is that Earnshaw, Hareton Earnshaw, who lives with Mr. Heathcliff? are they relations?”

“No; he is the late Mrs. Linton’s nephew.”

“The young lady’s cousin, then?”

“Yes; and her husband was her cousin also—one, on the mother’s—the other, on the father’s side—Heathcliff married Mr. Linton’s sister:”