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# Jane Eyre

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

6

OXFORD BOOKWORMS

# Jane Eyre



Jane Eyre is alone in the world. Disliked by her aunt's family, she is sent away to school. Here she learns that a young girl, with neither money nor family to support her, can expect little from the world. She

survives, but she wants more from life than simply to survive: she wants respect, and love. When she goes to work for Mr Rochester, she hopes she has found both at once. But the sound of strange laughter, late at night, behind a locked door, warns her that her troubles are only beginning.

[Word count 31,360]



◀ STAGE 6

◀ STAGE 5

◀ STAGE 4

◀ STAGE 3

◀ STAGE 2

◀ STAGE 1

◀ STARTER



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## JANE EYRE

### *Stage 6*

Jane Eyre begins life with all the disadvantages that nature and society can give her: she has no parents, no money, she is a girl (in a man's world), and, to make matters worse, she is not beautiful. She is made even more unattractive, in the eyes of the world, by having a strong character: she will not do what she is told to do.

She does not sound like the heroine of one of the great love stories of the world, and yet she behaves like one. The world looks at her, with all her disadvantages, and tells her to expect little from life. But Jane Eyre refuses to listen; she refuses to accept the unimportant place that the world offers to her. She demands that the world accept her as she is: not important, but the heroine of her own life; not beautiful, but deserving of love.

Charlotte Brontë (1816–55) is one of the great English novelists. Her own life, in Yorkshire in the north of England, was narrow and restricted, but her novels are justly famous for their passion and imagination.



OXFORD BOOKWORMS

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## People in this Story

### Jane Eyre

#### At Gateshead

Mrs Reed, Jane Eyre's aunt  
Eliza Reed )  
Georgiana Reed ) Jane Eyre's cousins  
John Reed )  
Bessie, the nursemaid  
Miss Abbott, Mrs Reed's maid  
Dr Lloyd  
Robert, the coachman

#### At Lowood School

Mr Brocklehurst, the school's financial manager  
Miss Temple, the headmistress  
Miss Miller )  
Miss Scatcherd ) teachers  
Helen Burns, a pupil

#### At Thornfield

Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper  
Adèle, daughter of Mr Rochester's French mistress  
Edward Rochester, the owner of Thornfield Hall  
Blanche Ingram )  
Mary Ingram ) sisters  
Lady Ingram, their mother  
Grace Poole  
Dick Mason  
Mr Briggs, lawyer to Mr Eyre of Madeira  
Bertha Mason

#### At Moor House

Diana Rivers )  
Mary Rivers ) sisters  
St John Rivers, brother of Diana and Mary, and vicar of Morton  
Hannah, his housekeeper  
Rosamund Oliver, daughter of a rich factory-owner

#### At Ferndean Manor

John )  
Mary, his wife ) Mr Rochester's servants

## Part One – A child at Gateshead

## 1

## The red room

We could not go for a walk that afternoon. There was such a freezing cold wind, and such heavy rain, that we all stayed indoors. I was glad of it. I never liked long walks, especially in winter. I used to hate coming home when it was almost dark, with ice-cold fingers and toes, feeling miserable because Bessie, the nursemaid, was always scolding me. All the time I knew I was different from my cousins, Eliza, John and Georgiana Reed. They were taller and stronger than me, and they were loved.

These three usually spent their time crying and quarrelling, but today they were sitting quietly around their mother in the sitting-room. I wanted to join the family circle, but Mrs Reed, my aunt, refused. Bessie had complained about me.

'No, I'm sorry, Jane. Until I hear from Bessie, or see for myself, that you are really trying to behave better, you cannot be treated as a good, happy child, like *my* children.'

'What does Bessie say I have done?' I asked.

'Jane, it is not polite to question me in that way. If you cannot speak pleasantly, be quiet.'

I crept out of the sitting-room and into the small room next door, where I chose a book full of pictures from the bookcase. I climbed on to the window-seat and drew the curtains, so that I was completely hidden. I sat there for a while. Sometimes I looked out of the window at the grey November afternoon, and saw the rain pouring down on the leafless garden. But most of the time I studied the book and stared, fascinated, at the pictures. Lost in the world of imagination, I forgot my sad, lonely existence for a while, and

was happy. I was only afraid that my secret hiding-place might be discovered.

Suddenly the door of the room opened. John Reed rushed in.

'Where are you, rat?' he shouted. He did not see me behind the curtain. 'Eliza! Georgy! Jane isn't here! Tell Mamma she's run out into the rain – what a bad animal she is!'

'How lucky I drew the curtain,' I thought. He would never have found me, because he was not very intelligent. But Eliza guessed at once where I was.

'She's in the window-seat, John,' she called from the sitting-room. So I came out immediately, as I did not want him to pull me out.

'What do you want?' I asked him.

'Say, "What do you want, *Master Reed*",' he answered, sitting in an armchair. 'I want you to come here.'

John Reed was fourteen and I was only ten. He was large and rather fat. He usually ate too much at meals, which made him ill. He should have been at boarding school, but his mother, who loved him very much, had brought him home for a month or two, because she thought his health was delicate.

John did not love his mother or his sisters, and he hated me. He bullied and punished me, not two or three times a week, not once or twice a day, but all the time. My whole body trembled when he came near. Sometimes he hit me, sometimes he just threatened me, and I lived in terrible fear of him. I had no idea how to stop him. The servants did not want to offend their young master, and Mrs Reed could see no fault in her dear boy.

So I obeyed John's order and approached his armchair, thinking how very ugly his face was. Perhaps he understood what I was thinking, for he hit me hard on the face.

'That is for your rudeness to Mamma just now,' he said, 'and for your wickedness in hiding, and for looking at me like that, you rat!'

I was so used to his bullying that I never thought of hitting him back.

'What were you doing behind that curtain?' he asked.

'I was reading,' I answered.

'Show me the book.' I gave it to him.

'You have no right to take our books,' he continued. 'You have no money and your father left you none. You ought to beg in the streets, not live here in comfort with a gentleman's family. Anyway, all these books are mine, and so is the whole house, or will be in a few years' time. I'll teach you not to borrow my books again.' He lifted the heavy book and threw it hard at me.

It hit me and I fell, cutting my head on the door. I was in great pain, and suddenly for the first time in my life, I forgot my fear of John Reed.

'You wicked, cruel boy!' I cried. 'You are a bully! You are as bad as a murderer!'

'What! What!' he cried. 'Did she say that to me? Did you hear, Eliza and Georgiana? I'll tell Mamma, but first . . .'

He rushed to attack me, but now he was fighting with a desperate girl. I really saw him as a wicked murderer. I felt the blood running down my face, and the pain gave me strength. I fought back as hard as I could. My resistance surprised him, and he shouted for help. His sisters ran for Mrs Reed, who called her maid, Miss Abbott, and Bessie. They pulled us apart and I heard them say, 'What a wicked girl! She attacked Master John!'

Mrs Reed said calmly, 'Take her away to the red room and lock her in there.' And so I was carried upstairs, arms waving and legs kicking.

As soon as we arrived in the red room, I became quiet again, and the two servants both started scolding me.

'Really, Miss Eyre,' said Miss Abbott, 'how could you hit him? He's your young master!'

'How can he be my master? I am not a servant!' I cried.

'No, Miss Eyre, you are less than a servant, because you do not work,' replied Miss Abbott. They both looked at me as if they strongly disapproved of me.

'You should remember, miss,' said Bessie, 'that your aunt pays for your food and clothes, and you should be grateful. You have no other relations or friends.'

All my short life I had been told this, and I had no answer to it. I stayed silent, listening to these painful reminders.

'And if you are angry and rude, Mrs Reed may send you away,' added Bessie.

'Anyway,' said Miss Abbott, 'God will punish you, Jane Eyre, for your wicked heart. Pray to God, and say you're sorry.' They left the room, locking the door carefully behind them.

The red room was a cold, silent room, hardly ever used, although it was one of the largest bedrooms in the house. Nine years ago my uncle, Mr Reed, had died in this room, and since then nobody had wanted to sleep in it.

Now that I was alone I thought bitterly of the people I lived with. John Reed, his sisters, his mother, the servants – they all accused me, scolded me, hated me. Why could I never please them? Eliza was selfish, but was respected. Georgiana had a bad temper, but she was popular with everybody because she was beautiful. John was rude, cruel and violent, but nobody punished him. I tried to make no mistakes, but they called me naughty every moment of the day. Now that I had turned against John to protect myself, everybody blamed me.

And so I spent that whole long afternoon in the red room asking myself why I had to suffer and why life was so unfair. Perhaps I would run away, or starve myself to death.

Gradually it became dark outside. The rain was still beating on the windows, and I could hear the wind in the trees. Now I was no longer angry, and I began to think the Reeds might be right. Perhaps

I *was* wicked. Did I deserve to die, and be buried in the churchyard like my uncle Reed? I could not remember him, but knew he was my mother's brother, who had taken me to his house when my parents both died. On his death bed he had made his wife, aunt Reed, promise to look after me like her own children. I supposed she now regretted her promise.

A strange idea came to me. I felt sure that if Mr Reed had lived he would have treated me kindly, and now, as I looked round at the dark furniture and the walls in shadow, I began to fear that his ghost might come back to punish his wife for not keeping her promise. He might rise from the grave in the churchyard and appear in this room! I was so frightened by this thought that I hardly dared to breathe. Suddenly in the darkness I saw a light moving on the ceiling. It may have been from a lamp outside, but in my nervous state I did not think of that. I felt sure it must be a ghost, a visitor from another world. My head was hot, my heart beat fast. Was that the sound of wings in my ears? Was that something moving near me? Screaming wildly, I rushed to the door and shook it. Miss Abbott and Bessie came running to open it.

'Miss Eyre, are you ill?' asked Bessie.

'Take me out of here!' I screamed.

'Why? What's the matter?' she asked.

'I saw a light, and I thought it was a ghost,' I cried, holding tightly on to Bessie's hand.

'She's not even hurt,' said Miss Abbott in disgust. 'She screamed just to bring us here. I know all her little tricks.'

'What is all this?' demanded an angry voice. Mrs Reed appeared at the door of the room. 'Abbott and Bessie, I think I told you to leave Jane Eyre in this room till I came.'

'She screamed so loudly, ma'am,' said Bessie softly.

'Let go of her hands, Bessie,' was Mrs Reed's only answer. 'Jane Eyre, you need not think you can succeed in getting out of the room

like this. Your naughty tricks will not work with me. You will stay here an hour longer as a punishment for trying to deceive us.'

'Oh aunt, please forgive me! I can't bear it! I shall die if you keep me here . . .' I screamed and kicked as she held me.

'Silence! Control yourself!' She pushed me, resisting wildly, back into the red room and locked me in. There I was in the darkness again, with the silence and the ghosts. I must have fainted. I cannot remember anything more.

## 2



## Leaving Gateshead



I woke up to find the doctor lifting me very carefully into my own bed. It was good to be back in my familiar bedroom, with a warm fire and candle-light. It was also a great relief to recognize Dr Lloyd, who Mrs Reed called in for her servants (she always called a specialist for herself and the children). He was looking after me so kindly. I felt he would protect me from Mrs Reed. He talked to me a little, then gave Bessie orders to take good care of me. When he left, I felt very lonely again.

But I was surprised to find that Bessie did not scold me at all. In fact she was so kind to me that I became brave enough to ask a question.

'Bessie, what's happened? Am I ill?'

'Yes, you became ill in the red room; but you'll get better, don't worry, Miss Jane,' she answered. Then she went next door to fetch another servant. I could hear her whispers.

'Sarah, come in here and sleep with me and that poor child tonight. I daren't stay alone with her, she might die. She was so ill last night! Do you think she saw a ghost? Mrs Reed was too hard

on her, I think.' So the two servants slept in my room, while I lay awake all night, trembling with fear, and eyes wide open in horror, imagining ghosts in every corner.

Fortunately I suffered no serious illness as a result of my terrible experience in the red room, although I shall never forget that night. But the shock left me nervous and depressed for the next few days. I cried all day long and although Bessie tried hard to tempt me with nice things to eat or my favourite books, I took no pleasure in eating or even in reading. I knew I had no one to love me and nothing to look forward to.

When the doctor came again, he seemed a little surprised to find me looking so miserable.

'Perhaps she's crying because she couldn't go out with Mrs Reed in the carriage this morning,' suggested Bessie.

'Surely she's more sensible than that,' said the doctor, smiling at me. 'She's a big girl now.'

'I'm not crying about that. I hate going out in the carriage,' I said quickly. 'I'm crying because I'm miserable.'

'Oh really, Miss!' said Bessie.

The doctor looked at me thoughtfully. He had small, grey, intelligent eyes. Just then a bell rang for the servants' dinner.

'You can go, Bessie,' he said. 'I'll stay here talking to Miss Jane till you come back.'

After Bessie had left, he asked, 'What really made you ill?'

'I was locked up in a room with a ghost, in the dark.'

'Afraid of ghosts, are you?' he smiled.

'Of Mr Reed's ghost, yes. He died in that room, you know. Nobody even goes in there any more. It was cruel to lock me in there alone without a candle. I shall never forget it!'

'But you aren't afraid now. There must be another reason why you are so sad,' he said, looking kindly at me.

How could I tell him all the reasons for my unhappiness!

'I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters,' I began.

'But you have a kind aunt and cousins.'

'But John Reed knocked me down and my aunt locked me in the red room,' I cried. There was a pause.

'Don't you like living at Gateshead, in such a beautiful house?' he asked.

'I would be glad to leave it, but I have nowhere else to go.'

'You have no relations apart from Mrs Reed?'

'I think I may have some, who are very poor, but I know nothing about them,' I answered.

'Would you like to go to school?' he asked finally. I thought for a moment. I knew very little about school, but at least it would be a change, the start of a new life.

'Yes, I *would* like to go,' I replied in the end.

'Well, well,' said the doctor to himself as he got up, 'we'll see. The child is delicate, she ought to have a change of air.'

I heard later from the servants that he had spoken to Mrs Reed about me, and that she had agreed immediately to send me to school. Abbott said Mrs Reed would be glad to get rid of me. In this conversation I also learned for the first time that my father had been a poor vicar. When he married my mother, Miss Jane Reed of Gateshead, the Reed family were so angry that they disinherited her. I also heard that my parents both died of an illness only a year after their wedding.

But days and weeks passed, and Mrs Reed still said nothing about sending me to school. One day, as she was scolding me, I suddenly threw a question at her. The words just came out without my planning to say them.

'What would uncle Reed say to you if he were alive?' I asked.

'What?' cried Mrs Reed, her cold grey eyes full of fear, staring at me as if I were a ghost. I had to continue.

'My uncle Reed is now in heaven, and can see all you think and

do, and so can my parents. They know how you hate me, and are cruel to me.'

Mrs Reed smacked my face and left me without a word. I was scolded for an hour by Bessie as the most ungrateful child in the world, and indeed with so much hate in my heart I did feel wicked.

Christmas passed by, with no presents or new clothes for me. Every evening I watched Eliza and Georgiana putting on their new dresses and going out to parties. Sometimes Bessie would come up to me in my lonely bedroom, bringing a piece of cake, sometimes she would tell me a story, and sometimes she would kiss me good night. When she was kind to me I thought she was the best person in the world, but she did not always have time for me.

On the morning of the fifteenth of January, Bessie rushed up to my room, to tell me a visitor wanted to see me. Who could it be? I knew Mrs Reed would be there too and I was frightened of seeing her again. When I nervously entered the breakfast-room I looked up at – a black column! At least that is what he looked like to me. He was a tall, thin man dressed all in black, with a cold, stony face at the top of the column.

'This is the little girl I wrote to you about,' said Mrs Reed to the stony stranger.

'Well, Jane Eyre,' said the stranger heavily, 'and are you a good child?'

It was impossible to say yes, with Mrs Reed sitting there, so I was silent.

'Perhaps the less said about that, the better, Mr Brocklehurst,' said Mrs Reed, shaking her head.

'I'm sorry to hear it,' he answered. 'Come here, Jane Eyre, and answer my questions. Where do the wicked go after death?'

'They go to hell,' I answered.

'And what must you do to avoid going there?' he asked.

I thought for a moment, but could not find the right answer.

'I must keep in good health, and not die,' I replied.

'Wrong! Children younger than you die all the time. Another question. Do you enjoy reading the Bible?'

'Yes, sometimes,' I replied, hesitating.

'That is not enough. Your answers show me you have a wicked heart. You must pray to God to change it, if you ever want to go to heaven.'

'Mr Brocklehurst,' interrupted Mrs Reed, 'I mentioned to you in my letter that this little girl has in fact a very bad character. If you accept her at Lowood school, please make sure that the headmistress and teachers know how dishonest she is. She will try to lie to them of course. You see, Jane, you cannot try your tricks on Mr Brocklehurst.'

However hard I had tried to please Mrs Reed in the past, she always thought the worst of me. It was not surprising that I had come to hate her. Now she was accusing me in front of a stranger. My hopes of starting a new life at school began to fade.

'Do not worry, madam,' Mr Brocklehurst said, 'the teachers will watch her carefully. Life at Lowood will do her good. We believe in hard work, plain food, simple clothes and no luxury of any kind.'

'I will send her as soon as possible then, Mr Brocklehurst. I hope she will be taught according to her low position in life.'

'Indeed she will, madam. I hope she will be grateful for this opportunity to improve her character. Little girl, read this book. It tells the story of the sudden death of a young girl who was a liar. Read and pray.'

After Mr Brocklehurst had given me the book and left, I felt I had to speak. Anger was boiling up inside me. I walked up to Mrs Reed and looked straight into her eyes.

'I do *not* deceive people! If I told lies, I would say I loved you! But I don't, I hate you! I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. If anyone asks how you treated me, I will tell them the truth,

that you were very cruel to me. People think you are a good woman, but *you* are lying to *them*!'

Even before I had finished I began to experience a great feeling of freedom and relief. At last I had said what I felt! Mrs Reed looked frightened and unhappy.

'Jane, I want to be your friend. You don't know what you're saying. You are too excited. Go to your room and lie down.'

'I won't lie down. I'm quite calm. Send me to school soon, Mrs Reed. I hate living here.'

'I will indeed send her soon,' murmured Mrs Reed to herself.

*Part Two – A girl at Lowood*

3

❖ My first impressions of school ❖

**M**rs Reed arranged for me to leave on the nineteenth of January. I had to get up very early to catch the coach, but Bessie helped me to get ready.

‘Will you say goodbye to Mrs Reed, Jane?’ she asked.

‘No, she said I shouldn’t disturb her so early. Anyway, I don’t want to say anything to her. She’s always hated me.’

‘Oh, Miss Jane, don’t say that!’

‘Goodbye to Gateshead!’ I shouted wildly, as we walked together out of the front door, to wait for the coach in the road. It arrived, pulled by four horses, and full of passengers. The coachman took my luggage and called me to hurry up. Bessie kissed me for the last time as I held tightly to her.

She shouted up to the coachman, ‘Make sure you take care of her! Fifty miles is a long way for a young child to go alone.’

‘I will!’ he answered. The door was closed, and the coach rolled off. What a strange feeling to be leaving Gateshead, my home for the whole of my childhood! Although I was sad to say goodbye to Bessie, I was both excited and nervous about the new places I would see, and the new people I would meet.

I do not remember much about the journey, except that it seemed far too long. We stopped for lunch, to change the horses. Then in the afternoon I realized we were driving through countryside. I slept for a short time but was woken when the coach stopped. The door opened and a servant called in,

‘Is there a little girl called Jane Eyre here?’

‘Yes,’ I answered, and was helped out of the coach with my

luggage. Tired and confused after the journey, I followed the servant into a large building, where she left me in a sitting-room. In came a tall lady, with dark hair and eyes, and a large, pale forehead. I discovered that she was Miss Temple, the headmistress of Lowood school. She looked at me carefully.

‘You are very young to be sent alone. You look tired. Are you?’ she asked, putting her hand kindly on my shoulder.

‘A little, ma’am,’ I replied.

‘How old are you, and what is your name?’

‘I’m Jane Eyre, ma’am, and I’m ten years old.’

‘Well, I hope you will be a good child at school,’ she said, touching my cheek gently with her finger.

I was taken by a teacher, Miss Miller, through the silent corridors of the large school, to the long, wide schoolroom. There about eighty girls, aged from nine to twenty, sat doing their homework. I sat on a bench near the door, with my slate.

‘Put away the lesson-books and fetch the supper-trays!’ called Miss Miller. Four tall girls removed all the books, then went out and returned with trays which were handed round. Each child could have a drink of water out of the shared cup, and could take a small piece of biscuit. Then we all went quietly upstairs to the long, crowded bedroom, where two children shared every bed. I had to share Miss Miller’s, but I was so tired that I fell asleep immediately.

In the morning the ringing of a bell woke me, although it was still dark. I got dressed quickly in the bitter cold of the room, and washed when I could. There was only one basin for six girls. When the bell rang again, we all went downstairs, two by two, and silently entered the cold, badly lit schoolroom for prayers. As the bell rang a third time to indicate the beginning of lessons, the girls moved into four groups around four tables, and the teachers came into the room to start the Bible class. I was put in the bottom class. How glad I was when it was time for breakfast! I had hardly eaten anything the

## ACTIVITIES

### *Before Reading*

1 According to the story introduction, Jane Eyre begins life with many disadvantages. Which of these problems do you think will be hardest for her to deal with? Put them in order, 1 to 6 (1 for the worst problem).

- having no parents or loving relations
- having very few friends
- being a girl in a man's world
- not being good-looking
- having no money of her own
- having a strong character

2 This story is set over a hundred years ago. What was life like in those days? Discuss these questions.

- 1 What sort of job opportunities were available for women with no family or money?
- 2 What was the main aim in life for most women in those days?
- 3 What kind of wife would many men have been looking for?

3 What do you think will happen to Jane in the story?

- 1 At first Jane will dislike school, but later she'll come to enjoy it.
- 2 She'll always be top of her class at school.
- 3 She'll find a worthwhile job, helping people as poor as she is.
- 4 She'll lead a sad life, living alone and making very few friends.
- 5 She'll discover some relations she didn't know she had.
- 6 Mr Rochester will give her the respect and love she wants.

## ACTIVITIES

### *While Reading*

Read Part One, *A child at Gateshead*, and answer these questions.

- 1 How did Jane feel about her Reed cousins?
- 2 Why did nobody want to sleep in the red room?
- 3 Why did Jane become ill when she was locked in the red room?
- 4 Who suggested sending Jane to school, and why?
- 5 What did Mrs Reed tell Mr Brocklehurst about Jane?

Before reading Part Two, *A girl at Lowood*, can you guess the answers to these questions?

- 1 Will Jane be able to start a new and happier life at school?
- 2 What effect will school have on her character?

Read Part Two. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Rewrite the false sentences with the correct information.

- 1 Lowood school had poor food and bad living conditions.
- 2 Miss Temple said that Jane was a wicked child and a liar.
- 3 Helen Burns was quieter and more obedient than Jane.
- 4 Mr Brocklehurst wanted the pupils to be fashionably dressed.

Before reading Part Three, *A governess at Thornfield*, can you predict what will happen to Jane?

- 1 She'll have to work very hard for very little money.
- 2 She'll fall in love with someone at Thornfield.
- 3 She'll never forgive Mrs Reed for her cruelty.