Jane Eyre

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE

Charlotte Brontë's father was a rural clergyman. She lost her mother when she was five years old. Brontë's two older sisters—Maria and Elizabeth—died from an illness that they likely contracted at their harsh boarding school. Though outwardly plain, Brontë had an active imaginative life, writing stories of an elaborate fantasy world called Angria. Brontë's first of four novels—*Jane Eyre*—was immediately and widely popular, and brought her into London literary circles. Her sisters Emily and Anne were also successful novelists. After losing all of her siblings to illness, Brontë married a clergyman she respected, but did not love. She died at 38 of complications during her first pregnancy.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Victorian period brought sweeping changes across British society, and writers like Brontë explored its crises and progress. Abroad, the British expanded into a global empire that brought wealth from colonies. With the Industrial Revolution at home, manufacturing became Britain's economic backbone. As the middle class found lucrative opportunities, a new laboring class struggled for wages, job security, and adequate working and living conditions. *Jane Eyre* includes themes of reforms that emerged from the crisis: better political representation, working conditions, and education. Few of these reforms came immediately for women, who had limited status in Victorian society. As Jane strives for economic and personal independence, she touches on the issues of class, economics, and gender roles that affected Victorian Britain at large.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The most popular literary form in the Victorian period was the novel, and *Jane Eyre* illustrates many of its defining characteristics: social relevance, plain style, and the narrative of an individual's inner thoughts. *Jane Eyre* is indebted to earlier Gothic novels, with its mysteries, supernatural events, and picturesque scenery. But as Jane matures, her autobiography likewise takes on Victorian themes and characteristics. *Jane Eyre* is a *Bildungsroman*, or a coming-of-age story, in which the protagonist's aspirations are set against the pressures and expectations of society. Victorian novels, including *Jane Eyre*, depict social panoramas with characters representing different economic and social classes, as well as gender differences. Brontë uses Jane's marriage as a metaphor for resolving England's political issues. Victorian novels with similar styles and goals include Charles Dickens' semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story, *David Copperfield* (1849-50), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*
- **When Written:** 1847
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Victorian novel. *Jane Eyre* combines Gothic mystery, a romantic marriage plot, and a coming-of-age story.
- **Setting:** Northern England in the early 1800s.
- **Climax:** Jane telepathically hears Rochester's voice calling out to her.
- **Point of View:** First person. Jane recounts her story ten years after its ending.

EXTRA CREDIT

Bells and Brontës: The Brontës became a literary powerhouse when Charlotte, Emily, and Anne all wrote successful first novels. Each sister published under a masculine-sounding pseudonym based on their initials. Charlotte Brontë became "Currer Bell"; Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1845-46) as "Ellis Bell", and Anne Brontë published *Agnes Gray* (1847) as "Acton Bell." Women could enter the marketplace as writers and novelists, but many writers, including the Brontës and Mary Anne Evans ("George Eliot"), used male pseudonyms to keep from being dismissed as unimportant.

PLOT SUMMARY

Jane Eyre is an orphaned girl living with her aunt Mrs. Reed at Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed and her children treat Jane cruelly, and look down on her as a dependent. Punishing her for a fight with her cousin that she didn't start, Mrs. Reed locks her in a red room where Jane's uncle, Mr. Reed, had died years before. His ghostly presence terrifies Jane. Soon after, Mrs. Reed sends Jane to the Lowood Institution, a charity school run by the hypocritical Mr. Brocklehurst. Lowood has terrible conditions and a harsh work ethic, though the compassionate supervisor, Maria Temple, intervenes sometimes to give the girls a break. At Lowood, Jane makes friends with another student, Helen Burns, who helps Jane learn to endure personal injustice and believe in a benevolent God. Helen, however, is sick with consumption and dies. When a typhus epidemic decimates the school's student population, new management takes over and improves Lowood's conditions. Jane flourishes under her newly

considerate teachers, and after six years, becomes a teacher herself.

Ms. Temple marries and leaves Lowood, and the eighteen-year-old Jane advertises for a job as a private tutor. She is hired to become the governess of the young Adèle Varens. Adèle is the ward of Mr. Rochester—the older, swarthy, and commanding master of Thornfield Hall. While in residence at Thornfield, Jane frequently hears strange laughter, and one night rescues Mr. Rochester from a fire in his bedroom. On another occasion, Jane helps Mr. Rochester secretly bandage and send away a man named Mr. Mason who was slashed and bitten on the third floor of the Mansion. Rochester blames a quirky servant, Grace Poole, but Jane is skeptical.

Mr. Rochester brings a party of English aristocrats to Thornfield, including the beautiful but calculating Blanche Ingram. She aims to marry him, but Mr. Rochester turns Blanche away, as he is increasingly drawn to the plain, but clever and direct Jane. Mr. Rochester soon asks Jane to marry him. Jane, who has gradually fallen in love with Rochester, accepts. Rochester hastily prepares the wedding. But during the small ceremony, a London lawyer intervenes and declares that Mr. Rochester already has a wife—Bertha Mason from the West Indies. Her brother, Mr. Mason, appears to confirm this. Mr. Rochester reluctantly admits to it, and takes everyone to the third floor, where Bertha is revealed as a raving lunatic, looked after by Grace Poole. Rochester was tricked into the marriage and he appeals to Jane to come away with him anyway, but Jane refuses to be his mistress. After a dream that warns her to flee temptation, Jane sneaks away from Thornfield at dawn.

Penniless in a region of England she does not know, Jane experiences three bitter days of begging, sleeping outside, and nearly starving. Eventually she comes upon and is taken in at Moor House—the home of Mary, Diana, and St. John Rivers, a stern local clergyman. St. John gives Jane a position teaching in a rural school. Jane discovers that an uncle she's never met has died and left her 20,000 pounds. That uncle turns out to be related to the Rivers siblings, so Jane suddenly has cousins. In her joy at finding family, she divides her fortune equally between them.

St. John has plans to go to India as a missionary, and he proposes marriage to Jane so she'll accompany and work for him. Jane feels familial affection but no love for St. John. She says she would go as St. John's sister, but he will accept no conditions. St. John's forceful personality almost convinces Jane to sacrifice herself and marry him. But in her confused emotional state, Jane experiences a telepathic flash: she hears Rochester's voice calling to her. She immediately leaves to seek out Rochester.

Jane finds Thornfield Hall destroyed from a fire that Bertha had set in Jane's old bedroom. During the blaze, Bertha had jumped from the roof and died. Rochester saved his servants, but suffered injuries that left him blind and missing a hand. Jane meets the humbled Rochester at Ferndean, his woodland retreat, and promises always to take care of him. They marry, bring back Adèle from boarding school, and have a son. Rochester eventually regains sight in one eye.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jane Eyre — The protagonist and narrator, Jane is an orphaned girl caught between class boundaries, financial situations, and her own conflicted feelings. In her youth and again as a governess, Jane must depend on others for support. Jane feels isolated, and strives for her personal freedom and meaningful connections with others—to find the loving family she never had. Jane is intelligent, imaginative, and principled. She defies many restrictive social conventions, especially those affecting women. As the novel progresses, Jane learns to temper her passions with self-control—she controls her feelings with judgment based on self-respect and Christian humility. She must reconcile her contradictory desires to be both independent and to serve a strong-willed man. Religion helps Jane to gain a mature understanding of herself as a self-respecting individual who credits her feelings, but also defers to God.

Edward Fairfax Rochester — The wealthy master of Thornfield Hall and Jane's employer and, later, her husband. Over the course of his life, he grows from a naive young man, to a bitter playboy in Europe, to a humble yet still strong man worthy of Jane. Both share similar virtues and seek their personal redemption. Yet Rochester errs in giving more rein to his feelings than his judgment and in expecting the world to submit to his will, as when he tries to marry Jane while still concealing Bertha and his secrets. In his distress after losing his eyesight, Rochester comes to accept his need of guidance and respect for God. His final strength comes from his newfound humility.

St. John Rivers — A parson with two sisters at Moor House, and Jane's cousin. Much like Jane, St. John is a restless character, searching for a place and purpose in life. Like Mr. Rochester, St. John has a commanding personality, but the two men contrast in their range of feelings. St. John relinquishes worldly happiness for a commitment to his religious principles. His stern religious faith makes him self-denying and cold.

Bertha Mason — Rochester's insane Creole wife from Jamaica who is locked away on the third floor of Thornfield. Bertha is portrayed less as a human being than as a Gothic monster or a vampire. Because of her Creole or mixed race parentage, Bertha reveals Victorian prejudices about other ethnicities. She represents Rochester's monstrous secrets.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Adèle Varens — Jane's young pupil at Thornfield, who is Mr. Rochester's ward. As Jane reforms Adèle's "French" characteristics with an English education, she symbolically restores Mr. Rochester's morality from his previous lifestyle.

Céline Varens — Adèle's mother, Céline Varens is a flirty French singer who was also Mr. Rochester's mistress. As Rochester's mistress, Céline was essentially a hired woman, submitting to the shallow status of a dependent. She represents the opposite of what Jane wants in her relationship.

Blanche Ingram — A beautiful socialite who wants to marry Mr. Rochester. Blanche embodies the shallow and class-prejudiced woman of the old aristocracy.

Rosamond Oliver — A rich and beautiful woman who supports Jane's school at Morton. She loves St. John, but marries a wealthy man when it becomes clear that St. John's focus is on his missionary work.

Diana and Mary Rivers — Jane's cousins and St. John's sisters. Similar to Jane in intellect and personality, they show Jane heartfelt compassion that contrasts with St. John's more dutiful sense of charity.

Mrs. Fairfax — The housekeeper at Thornfield Hall.

Grace Poole — The mysterious servant at Thornfield who watches over Bertha Mason. Her name suggests religious grace, which Rochester cannot find until Bertha's suicide.

Richard Mason — The timid brother of Bertha Mason, and Rochester's former business partner in Jamaica.

John Eyre — Jane and the Rivers' uncle. A successful wine merchant who leaves Jane an inheritance of 20,000 pounds.

Uncle Reed — As Jane's maternal uncle, he adopts the orphaned Jane and makes his wife promise to care for her as their own child.

Mrs. Reed — Jane's aunt by marriage, and the matron of Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed feels threatened by Jane, who has superior qualities to her own children. Mrs. Reed represents the anxiety of a wealthy and conservative social class, which acts defensively to protect itself from independent minds like Jane's.

John Reed — Mrs. Reed's son, and a bully.

Georgiana Reed — A spoiled daughter of Mrs. Reed, and later a superficial socialite.

Eliza Reed — Mrs. Reed's third child, who is more reserved and stern than her siblings.

Bessie Lee — A house servant of Mrs. Reed, Bessie is the only person at Gateshead to treat Jane with any kindness.

Mr. Lloyd — An apothecary.

Mr. Brocklehurst — The parson and hypocritical overseer of Lowood Institution. Mr. Brocklehurst advocates a severe religious program of self-improvement—denying the body to save the soul. But unlike St. John Rivers, the pampered Mr. Brocklehurst does not practice what he preaches.

Maria Temple — The headmistress of Lowood school. Ms. Temple serves as a mother figure and a model of intellectual refinement, gentle authority, and emotional sensibility for Jane and Helen. Both girls feel a deep connection to Ms. Temple.

Helen Burns — Jane's best friend at Lowood, and a model of personal strength and even temperament for Jane. Helen is a withdrawn intellectual with an optimistic religious view of universal salvation that contrasts with St. John's beliefs.

Miss Scatcherd — A cruel teacher at Lowood school.

Miss Abbot — A servant at Gateshead.

Mr. Briggs – The lawyer who, during Jane's first wedding ceremony with Rochester, reveals that Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LOVE, FAMILY, AND INDEPENDENCE

As an orphan at Gateshead, Jane is oppressed and dependent. For Jane to discover herself, she must break out of these restrictive conditions and find love and independence. Jane must have the freedom to think and feel, and she seeks out other independent-minded people as the loving family she craves. Jane, Helen Burns, and Ms. Temple enjoy a deep mutual respect, and form emotional bonds that anticipate the actual family Jane finds in Mary and Diana Rivers. Yet Jane also has a natural instinct toward submission. When she leaves Lowood to find new experiences, she describes herself as seeking a "new servitude." In her relationship with men, she has the inclination toward making first Rochester and then St. John her "master."

Over the course of the novel, Jane strives to find a balance between service and mastery. Jane blends her freedom with her commitments to love, virtue, and self-respect. At the end, Jane is both guide and servant to Rochester. She finds and creates her own family, and their love grows out of the mutual respect of free minds.

SOCIAL CLASS AND SOCIAL RULES

Life in 19th-century Britain was governed by social class, and people typically stayed in the class into which they were born. Both as an orphan at Gateshead and as a governess at Thornfield, Jane holds a

position that is *between* classes, and interacts with people of every level, from working-class servants to aristocrats. Jane's social mobility lets Brontë create a vast social landscape in her novel in which she examines the sources and consequences of class boundaries. For instance, class differences cause many problems in the love between Jane and Rochester. Jane must break through class prejudices about her standing, and make people recognize and respect her personal qualities. Brontë tries to illustrate how personal virtues are better indicators of character than class.

Yet the novel doesn't entirely endorse breaking every social rule. Jane refuses, for instance, to become Rochester's mistress despite the fact that he was tricked into a loveless marriage. Jane recognizes that how she sees herself arises at least partly out of how society sees her, and is unwilling to make herself a powerless outcast for love.

GENDER ROLES

In 19th-century England, gender roles strongly influenced people's behavior and identities, and women endured condescending attitudes about a woman's place, intelligence, and voice. Jane has an uphill battle to become independent and recognized for her personal qualities. She faces off with a series of men who do not respect women as their equals. Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John all attempt to command or master women. Brontë uses marriage in the novel to portray the struggle for power between the sexes. Even though Bertha Mason is insane, she is a provocative symbol of how married women can be repressed and controlled. Jane fends off marriage proposals that would squash her identity, and strives for equality in her relationships. For its depiction of Jane's struggle for gender equality, *Jane Eyre* was considered a radical book in its day.

RELIGION

Religion and spirituality are key factors in how characters develop in the novel. Jane matures partly because she learns to follow Christian lessons and resist temptation. Helen Burns introduces Jane to the New Testament, which becomes a moral guidepost for Jane throughout her life. As Jane develops her relationship with God, Mr. Rochester must also reform his pride, learn to pray, and become humble. Brontë depicts different forms of religion: Helen trusts in salvation; Eliza Reed becomes a French Catholic nun; and St. John preaches a gloomy Calvinist faith. The novel attempts to steer a middle course. In Jane, Brontë sketches a virtuous faith that does not consume her individual personality. Jane is self-respecting and religious, but also exercises her freedom to love and feel.

FEELING VS. JUDGMENT

Just as *Jane Eyre* can be described as Jane's quest to balance her contradictory natural instincts toward independence and submission, it can also be described as her quest to find a balance between passionate feeling on the one had and judgment, or repression of those feelings, on the other. Through the examples of other characters in the novel, such as Eliza and Georgiana, Rochester and St. John—or Bertha, who has no control over her emotions at all—*Jane Eyre* shows that it's best to avoid either extreme. Passion makes a person silly, frivolous or even dangerous, while repression makes a person cold. Over the course of the novel, Jane learns how to create a balance between her feelings and her judgment, and to create a life of love that is also a life of serious purpose.

THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Brontë uses many themes of Gothic novels to add drama and suspense to *Jane Eyre*. But the novel isn't just a ghost story because Brontë also reveals the *reasons* behind supernatural events. For instance, Mr. Reed's ghost in the red-room is a figment of Jane's stressed-out mind, while Bertha is the "demon" in Thornfield. In *Jane Eyre*, the effects of the supernatural matter more than the causes. The supernatural allows Brontë to explore her characters' psyches, especially Jane's inner fears. The climactic supernatural moment in the novel occurs when Jane and Rochester have a telepathic connection. In the text, Jane makes it clear that the connection was not supernatural to her. Instead, she considers that moment a mysterious spiritual connection. Brontë makes their telepathy part of her conceptions of love and religion.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE RED-ROOM

The red-room symbolizes how society traps Jane by limiting her freedom due to her class, gender, and independent streak.

FIRE AND ICE

Fire is a symbol of emotion in the novel. Mr. Rochester has a fiery personality, while St. John is associated with ice and snow, symbolizing his dispassionate character. Jane draws arctic scenes in her portfolio that symbolize death. She wants the vitality that fire brings, but also

to keep it under control. On the other hand, Bertha Mason, who has no control over her feelings, is a pyromaniac. The inferno at Thornfield illustrates the danger of letting the passions run wild.

EYES

The eyes are the windows to the soul in *Jane Eyre*. Jane is especially attracted to Mr. Rochester's black and brilliant eyes, which symbolize his temper and power. After Mr. Rochester loses his eyesight in the fire, Jane *becomes* his eyes: metaphorically, Jane now holds the position of mastery. Bertha has bloodshot eyes that match her violent nature. The novel also emphasizes the mind's eye—an active imagination.

FOOD

In *Jane Eyre*, food symbolizes generosity, nourishment, and bounty, and hunger symbolizes cruelty and a lack of nourishment. Brontë uses food and hunger to reveal how people treat each other—who is charitable, and who isn't. For instance, the lack of food at Lowood reveals the school's cruelty and religious hypocrisy. Ms. Temple, on the other hand, provides food and is compassionate and generous. Food has religious significance in the novel as well—physical hunger represents a deeper spiritual craving.

PORTRAITS AND PICTURES

Through dreams and drawings, Jane visualizes her deepest feelings. Jane's portfolio contains pictures that symbolize her life. Portraits can also stand in for people's characters. Jane compares her portraits of herself and Blanche Ingram, which mirror the differences in the two women's personalities and social class. Jane's portrait of Rosamond Oliver is the closest that St. John ever gets to happiness on earth. In each case, the visual picture takes on a new reality. Brontë, making her own picture of society in *Jane Eyre*, likewise wanted to give her novel real relevance.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Jane Eyre* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us.

Related Characters: John Reed (speaker), Jane Eyre

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has sought refuge from her aunt and cousins in a book, when her cousin John Reed barges in and insults her. Jane was orphaned several years earlier, and now it's only a few months since her uncle - the only member of the Reed family who was kind to her - also died, and the rest of the family feels free to share their scorn and disdain for Jane. Here John belittles Jane's presumption in taking a book to read from among the family collection, for she could not be further from being a member of the family.

Though John's words are cruel, his actions are those of a child, and he seems to be buoyed and his opinions confirmed by those of his mother. Indeed, he repeats his mother's words in calling Jane a "dependent," and in assuming that this is such a negative term. The family's official line underlines several widespread beliefs at this time: that social classes were to be kept separate for a reason, for instance, and that those who are poor or vulnerable are justifiably so, and should remain in that position.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Returning, I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: ... the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Locked in the red-room after her outburst against John Reed, Jane Eyre looks into the mirror and thinks about the dire straits in which she finds herself, now that her kindly uncle has died and she is a ward of a family that hates her. Here Jane looks at herself as if at a stranger - and, what's

more, as if at a ghost. In some ways, this effect of estrangement, or making the familiar strange, underlines how isolated and alone Jane feels. She cannot feel herself a part of this family, but has nowhere else to turn, no one else to love her; and as a child, she must continue to rely on others.

This passage also sets up an interest in the otherworldly that will characterize the rest of the book. Even the most realistic, bodily characters can slip into and out of a feeling of grounded reality - one that can easily feel not so real when the circumstances become strange enough.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

During an interview between Jane, Mrs. Reed, and the headmaster of the Lowood school, Mr. Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed warns Mr. Brocklehurst that Jane is a compulsive liar. Jane, almost in spite of herself, exclaims that Mrs. Reed is the real liar, and a despicable person besides. Up until this point, Jane has largely retained control of her feelings, keeping her despair and unhappiness inside (except, perhaps, for the one time she lashed out at John). Now she does not feel guilty for letting her feelings override her sense of propriety, but rather relieved and exuberant.

The rest of the book will take a more measured tone on the proper balance between feeling and judgment. Indeed, since Jane is a girl in nineteenth-century England, such shows of passion are to be considered shocking if not dangerous.Here, though, Jane is shown to be so repressed and so unhappy that a rude outburst is really her only chance to express herself, to regain some sense of her own person above and beyond the cruel way she's been treated. Her declaration of the truth about Mrs. Reed is the first time that she senses that things may not always remain as they were, and that she might be able to set her own standards for what is right, outside the confines of the Reed family.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate ... I told her all the story of my sad childhood. Exhausted by emotion, my language was more subdued than it generally was when it developed that sad theme; and mindful of Helen's warnings against the indulgence of resentment, I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible: I felt as I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Maria Temple, Helen Burns

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Jane, along with Helen Burns, has been invited into Miss Temple's office, where Jane is prompted to share her life story with her friend and their teacher. No one has ever asked her to do such a thing before, and in a way Jane's tentative narrative serves as a rehearsal for the story she is now sharing with us, a far larger audience of readers. But even as she is eager to share what has happened to her already in her short life, she is wary of offending yet another adult, or of "indulging" in resentment. Miss Temple and Helen are among the few people that have shown Jane kindness and the kind of love that usually comes from family, and she is worried that they may not believe her tale, and thus that she'll lose this cherished connection. It is by keeping track of her feelings, and being careful not to lose her temper, that Jane realizes she has the best chance of keeping these two women in her life.

❝ The refreshing meal, the brilliant fire, the presence and kindness of her beloved instructress, or, perhaps, more than all these, something in her own unique mind, had roused her powers within her ... [Helen] suddenly acquired a beauty more singular than that of Miss Temple's—a beauty neither of fine color nor long eyelash, nor pencilled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Maria Temple, Helen Burns

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Helen and Ms. Temple have reacted to Jane's story with grace and goodness, and after the shame of Mr. Brocklehurst's visit, Jane begins to recover. Even the tea and cakes given to her by Miss Temple are a sign of generosity until now largely absent in Jane's life. Now, she begins to feel that this particularly female bond is actually giving her the strength to carry on - a strength that has something mystical or spiritual about it, as Jane connects it to a sense of her budding "powers."

Although Jane has long been an admirer of Miss Temple's beauty, she now starts to realize as well that there can be an even more striking beauty that comes from inner, rather than external, attractiveness. Helen is the most devout person she's ever met, and her religion seems to give her a kind of physical as well as spiritual glow. As she further develops her friendship with both Helen and with Miss Temple, Jane learns certain lessons and chooses certain role models that were simply not available to her in the Reed family's home.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: "Then," I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!"

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has graduated first in her class at school, and has decided to stay on in order to become a teacher herself. Soon, though, Miss Temple leaves for a distant land. For a long time, Jane has felt somewhat restless, trapped in an oppressive school because she is without family, poor, and female, and thus opportunities to support herself are scarce. Until now, Jane has not rebelled against these strictures: instead, she has chosen to work within them, carving out a place for herself that is tolerable mainly because of her adoration of Miss Temple. With her mentor gone, though, suddenly Jane sees no reason to continue at the school.

However, even in the midst of "gasping" for freedom, Jane is both realistic and humble enough to recognize that she cannot yearn for an entirely different lifestyle. She does pray to God, but little by little adapts her prayer so as to fit her circumstances. As she does so, nonetheless, she recognizes that because of her social position, and because of her current circumstances, there are few things she could do that would actually give her greater liberty. Finally, she accepts that she may continue to feel oppressed wherever she may goes - but she insists that even that would be preferable to staying in the same place, where she knows all too well the exact outlines of her "servitude."

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Bertha Mason

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Jane is attempting to settle into her new life at Thornfield, but as Mrs. Fairfax finishes up her tour, Jane hears something entirely unexpected in such a quiet, gloomy house: laughter. Here the supernatural quality of the scene is, paradoxically, described in careful, measured detail. Jane attempts to determine the exact qualities of the laugh, the exact properties of its pitch and location. Indeed, she is soon able to fix her judgment on the exact spot from which the sound is coming.

For now, Brontë keeps the reader, as well as Jane, in the dark regarding this mysterious element of Thornfield. Rather than showing the laugh to be a figment of Jane's imagination, this passage stresses her careful capacity of judgment, underlining the book's understanding of the supernatural and the real as not opposites but as mutually productive.

Chapter 12 Quotes

I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen—that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Although Jane has found things to enjoy about her new life in Thornfield, and in her occupation as Adèle's tutor, she has not entirely shaken off the restlessness that encouraged her to leave her former school in the first place. Here, as Jane climbs to the highest point in the mansion, her physical steps mimic her more emotional desire to float up and away from the day-to-day duties and humdrum life to which she is condemned, largely because of her social class and gender, of course.

Jane is portrayed as eager, curious, and fascinated about the wide world around her. She is clear-headed in that she recognizes how little she knows about this world, despite feeling naturally attracted to it. Indeed, Jane is deeply frustrated by the disconnect between her desire to see more and learn more, and her understanding that such knowledge lies beyond her grasp. As her eyes survey the vast landscape before her, this vision serves as her only and partial means of truly experiencing something beyond her small reality.

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do ... It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

As Jane continues to muse on the subject of her own position in society, she broadens her perspective to consider the lot of oppressed and marginalized groups in general. Jane recognizes that many other people are in worse situations than herself, but for her this fact only underlines the unfairness and despair to which an entire segment of the population is subjected. Indeed, Jane makes an analogy between those who are oppressed and rebel through political revolution, and those who struggle in more individual ways, through family and community structures that are smaller than those of a nation.

Jane also points to a paradox about the way that women's roles are defined at the time. In some ways, they are considered weak and fragile, and therefore unable to support themselves or to take on the same kinds of responsibilities or to show the same kind of independence as men. They would let their feelings overwhelm them, the argument goes. Yet at the same time, women are expected to curb outbursts of feeling - something they can only do if they use their full capacities of rational judgment. This paradox is one that Jane increasingly seeks to condemn, and that Bronte more broadly points out in this very prescient passage.

Chapter 14 Quotes

I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Over the course of the first long conversation between Jane and Rochester, Jane's feelings towards the man quickly become complicated. On the one hand, she does feel a real connection to him, and admires the fact that he is largely willing to chat with her as an equal. Here, though, Jane uses the opportunity that Rochester has given to her to stress that, for her, equality is not just something that can be parceled out here and there, as a sign of good will. If Rochester really wants to treat Jane as an equal, he will have to hear what she has to say on the subject of anything that comes up - including, here, gender relations themselves.

Jane dismisses typical assumptions made about the reasons why men should be considered superior to women. Of course Rochester has seen more of the world than she has, Jane says - she would never, as a woman, be permitted to travel around the world by herself, and even if she could, her financial circumstances would prevent her. Independence, for Jane, is thus not necessarily only a personal character attribute: it is also a function of luck and circumstance, and it has little bearing on true moral equality.

Chapter 17 Quotes

"He is not to them what he is to me," I thought: "he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;—I am sure he is—I feel akin to him—I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him ... I must, then, repeat continually that we are for ever sundered:—and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him."

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has been relegated to a corner of the room at the party, where she can observe all that is going on between Rochester and his guests. Jane feels alienated from the wealthy, privileged women at the event. But as she observes Rochester with them, she realizes that she does in fact feel a profound kinship with Rochester, so profound that she believes he belongs with her far more than with people of his own class and social strata.

Jane's affinity with Rochester is not one of rational, detached judgment, in which similarities and differences, appropriate distinctions and parallels, might be carefully considered. Instead it is something she feels emotionally. At the same time, Jane herself is careful to study and identify this blossoming feeling of love for Rochester; she doesn't get carried away by her feelings but rather respects their reality as she tries to figure out what it is that she feels, and what must be the result.

Chapter 18 Quotes

I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons, because her rank and connections suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point—this was where the nerve was touched and teased—this was where the fever was sustained and fed: *she could not charm him.*

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester, Blanche Ingram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

As a member of the servants, Jane is considered largely invisible by many of the guests to Thornfield, including Blanche Ingram, which gives her the opportunity to observe the woman and Rochester from a distance. Jane isn't certain why Rochester is going to marry Blanche. The reasons she imagines are vague and uncertain: this is too distant a reality for Jane for her be able to understand the motivations driving the upper classes. What she does know, however - and what surely is the one known factor that she can take solace in, now that she herself is in love with Rochester - is that he does not truly love Blanche, nor will he ever. Here Jane resigns herself to losing Rochester based on the social norms of upper-class marriage, but she does not resign herself to failing to win his heart.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ What crime was this that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?—what mystery, that broke out now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey?

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Bertha Mason

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has accompanied Rochester to Grace Poole's upper-floor room, where they have found Mr. Mason bleeding and writhing. While Rochester goes to fetch a doctor, Jane is left alone with Mr. Mason and with her own thoughts. This chapter had begun with a frightening scream that had echoed through the mansion, and Jane now wildly begins to wonder what might be the source of such a cry.

In a series of questions, posed far more out of anxiety and fear than out of a scientific desire to get to the bottom of the mystery, Jane becomes progressively more eloquent and descriptive, even if morbidly so. She calls the source of the scream a "mystery," "creature," and "voice," thus underlining how she has only the vaguest sense of what has taken place. The book leaves us, too, in suspense: will the novel now turn even more to the assumptions of Gothic fiction, and embrace the supernatural, or will it remain within the realm of realistic prose?

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home—my only home.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

Jane is on her way back to Thornfield after remaining at her aunt's deathbed, and she happens to cross paths with Rochester, who has bought a carriage, presumably for himself and Blanche. However, Jane is relieved to be leaving the still-oppressive walls of her childhood home with the Reeds, and she admits to Rochester that she is happy to return to Thornfield. Jane's statement would have been considered quite frank, even perhaps a little shocking, to readers at the time. To permit herself to share her own opinions, especially ones of a vulnerable nature, Jane pushes aside the notions of gender and social roles that require a female servant to remain meek and quiet, not speaking unless spoken to. For Jane, though, the realization that Thornfield has, strangely, become a kind of home for her is so remarkable that she feels the need to share that development with someone she cares about.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame.

Related Characters: Edward Fairfax Rochester (speaker), Jane Eyre

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

Rochester has told Jane that he is to marry Blanche, and that he has found a governess job for her in Ireland. Soon, though, it becomes clear that Rochester's motivations in telling this to Jane are different. He seems to be attempting to determine what her feelings for him are, before he shares his own. If Jane doesn't share them, he has a ready-made solution and can send her away - thus ensuring that his social superiority over her escapes unscathed. Here, though, Rochester does make tentative steps towards suggesting that he loves Jane.

Though not exactly eloquently, he tries to do justice to the feeling he has around Jane, a feeling that proves to be almost too difficult for words. In general, this sentiment is one of profound unity between two people: Rochester feels such so closely tied to Jane that it is as if a truly physical bond united them. The book accepts that such unity can exist, and indeed describes it in terms of spiritual communion, which gives Rochester and Jane a religious analogy for the love they feel for each other.

Chapter 24 Quotes

He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

At first, Jane is thrilled by the prospect of marrying Rochester, with whom she is so in love. But little by little, the gaps between their social stations and their assumptions about proper gender roles begin to grow clearer. Here, another problem arises: the fact that Jane so adores Rochester that he begins to take on the nature of an idol, someone to be worshipped instead of God.

As narrator, Jane is looking back on her earlier self, and in passages like this, narrator-Jane shows a disapproval and even regret towards character-Jane. According to her Christian beliefs, only God can be worshipped and idolized: idolizing anyone else, indeed, is a great sin. In addition, putting Rochester on such a pedestal will prevent Jane from embracing her own independence, a value that she has held dear for so long. This disconnect between what narrator-Jane knows to be true and what character-Jane cannot help from doing and thinking will inevitably have to be resolved.

Chapter 25 Quotes

I faced the wreck of the chestnut-tree; it stood up black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gaped ghastly ... their great boughs on each side were dead, and next winter's tempests would be sure to fell one or both to earth: as yet, however, they might be said to form one tree—a ruin, but an entire ruin.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 318

Explanation and Analysis

On the day of the wedding, Jane wanders outside and sees a chestnut tree that has been struck by lightning. Turning all her powers of observation on the tree, Jane finds it to be a powerful image, though at the same time ominous and troubling. The tree is in a vulnerable, delicate state at the moment: its many boughs are dead, but have not yet fallen to earth, though it is inevitable that they will do so. Trees struck by lightning are sometimes used in the Bible as a sign for the power and will of God. Jane, cognizant of this history, most likely is troubled by the thought that, on a day that should be joyful and carefree, there is such a frightening symbol of what may lie ahead. The "ruin" of the tree, for a reader who has finished *Jane Eyre*, also foreshadows the ruin of the place that she and Rochester call home. Although the novel ends up revealing certain supernatural-seeming elements as based in reality (though still disturbing), in other ways it continues to stress the possibility of connecting natural, supernatural, and social affairs symbolically.

Chapter 26 Quotes

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Bertha Mason

Related Themes:

Page Number: 338

Explanation and Analysis

Finally, for the first time, Jane lays eyes on the source of all the strange happenings and mysterious sounds that have seemed to haunt Thornfield. But this first sight fails to substantially clarify the situation, or help Jane understand who this person is - even though she knows intellectually that it must be Bertha Mason, Rochester's legal wife.

Bertha is described not in human but in animal terms. Indeed, it is the inability to describe her as a woman that locates the source of her insanity. Jane may have pressed at the borders of what is permitted and is not among women, especially of a particular social class, but she now witnesses someone who has thrown all those strictures out entirely. As Bertha fails to act as a proper woman, as a proper wife to her husband, the book has no way left to describe her other than by considering her non-human, making an analogy to the animal world.

Chapter 27 Quotes

"Who in the world cares for *you*? Or who will be injured by what you do?" Still indomitable was the reply—"*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 365

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has learned the truth about Rochester and his existing wife, and she realizes that she must leave Thornfield. The prospect is daunting, even terrifying: Jane does not know where she'll go or what she'll do, and of course she is still in love with Rochester despite his deceit. Here, she mounts an internal debate between the part of herself that would despair about her lack of ties to the world, and the part of herself that - rather than insisting that those ties *do* exist - embraces her isolation. Jane comes to recognize that her independence is a virtue rather than a fault. It ensures that she answers only to the laws of God, rather than to the more transient desires of other people, or even of herself.

Chapter 28 Quotes

This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering—a throe of true despair—rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned—I wrung my hands—I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour, approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation—this banishment from my kind!

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 385

Explanation and Analysis

After wandering in the wilderness, weak from exhaustion and hunger, Jane finally follows a distant light to its source: but when she arrives at the door of the home, the servant refuses to let her in, and locks her out. Although Jane has tried to remain stoic until now, this show of unkindness is the last straw. She breaks down, finally allowing her feelings to overwhelm her careful poise and judgment as she weeps and groans.

The wanderer in the wilderness is a trope - an often-repeated literary device - that can be found in both Old and New Testaments of the Bible: both Job and Jesus are sent into the wilderness at one point to battle temptation. Jane's time in the wilderness is similarly her moment of greatest struggle, when her embrace of independence no longer is characterized by an exhilarating sense of freedom but actually threatens to destroy her. As Jane, narrating, recalls her thoughts at her darkest moment, the use of repeated exclamations and dashes highlights the tone of acute despair.

Chapter 32 Quotes

St. John, no doubt, would have given the world to follow, recall, retain her, when she thus left him; but he would not give one chance of heaven, nor relinquish, for the elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), St. John Rivers, Rosamond Oliver

Related Themes:

Page Number: 424

Explanation and Analysis

Jane and St. John have begun to speak frankly about St. John's feelings for Rosamond Oliver. Jane has guessed that St. John is in love with her, and he admits that this is true. However, he cannot imagine Rosamond accompanying him far away as the wife of a missionary. St. John's faith is such that he cannot consider giving up his livelihood as missionary even on account of his love for another human being: for him this kind of love is not as significant as the love he finds in serving God. At the same time, St. John's admission reflects his assumptions about the proper role of women in marriage: Rosamond's role would be to serve him as he is serving God, and he cannot imagine any other way.

Again the surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined that a woman would dare to speak so to a man. For me, I felt at home in this sort of discourse. I could never rest in communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, whether male or female, till I had passed the outworks of conventional reserve, and crossed the threshold of confidence, and won a place by their heart's very hearthstone.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), St. John Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 432

Explanation and Analysis

As Jane and St. John speak of the latter's love for Rosamond, St. John grows surprised that Jane would presume to speak to him so frankly of such private matters. St. John is not used to women speaking to him in such a manner: indeed, propriety and social custom make it nearly certain that very few women will broach such private topics with a man, even one with whom they are close. While Jane has acted somewhat ashamed of her propensity for frankness and openness before, here she wholeheartedly embraces this attitude, and in addition claims that there is little she can do about it: it is just part of her nature. Jane even claims a positive ethical status for such openness, arguing that convention can often mask what is real and true, while speaking frankly honors each person much more.

Chapter 33 Quotes

I looked at the blank wall: it seemed a sky thick with ascending stars,—every one lit me to a purpose or delight. Those who had saved my life, whom, till this hour, I had loved barrenly, I could now benefit. They were under a yoke,—I could free them: they were scattered,—I could reunite them: the independence, the affluence which was mine, might be theirs too.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), St. John Rivers, Diana and Mary Rivers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 445

Explanation and Analysis

Jane has learned that she is heir to an enormous fortune, and in addition that the Rivers are her cousins, so that she now has a larger family than she ever realized. Jane has long sought independence by choosing her own way in life and by insisting on her own rights and her own, individual life, apart from all others. Now she realizes that independence need not entail isolation. Indeed, her financial independence is wrapped up in the revelation of a true family.

As a result, Jane comes to consider independence as a value that can take place within the structure of a family, and even within the limitations and responsibilities that being part of a family entails. By helping her new cousins with her inheritance, Jane will be able to ensure that they escape the kind of "yoke" under which she herself struggled; but she also will tie their life to her own in a way that she had scarcely thought possible earlier in her life.

Chapter 37 Quotes

I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 502

Explanation and Analysis

As Jane reunites with Rochester, she exhibits a complex and nuanced, if not ambivalent, understanding of the relationship between love and independence - one that has been affected by her time at Thornfield but also by the revelation that she is now financially independent. Here, Jane calls Rochester her master, as she was accustomed to do when she served as his daughter's governess. As she vows to be his "nurse" and "housekeeper," she also seems to accede to proper gender roles and even embrace this role of subservience.

However, other ways that Jane characterizes this relationship transform her vow into one of a relationship between equals. To be Rochester's neighbor or companion is not to submit to him as a woman to a man, but rather to consider each person as mutually necessary and mutually fulfilling. Jane continues to rely on some of the assumptions of her time in terms of family and gender roles, but she also carves out a more unique, progressive place for herself and Rochester based on her own beliefs and desires.

Chapter 38 Quotes

Reader, I married him.

Related Characters: Jane Eyre (speaker), Edward Fairfax Rochester

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 517

Explanation and Analysis

The last chapter of the novel begins with this famous line. Of course, the most significant aspect of the passage is that it underlines how, after so many difficulties and one frustrated attempt, Jane and Rochester finally end up together. By making "I" the subject of the sentence, however, Jane underlines her agency in choosing to marry Rochester, and makes the act one of independence rather than of choosing to submit herself to a "master" in another way. The acknowledgement of the reader also reminds us that an older Jane has been narrating this story all along, looking back on her earlier self and using that opportunity to pass judgment and to point out her own self-development.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

Writing as her pseudonym "Currer Bell," the author thanks her public and her publishers, but attacks literary critics who expect authors to stick to stylistic and moral conventions. Instead, she explains that appearances and beliefs must be examined and the plain truth must be revealed.

Bell's comments offer an early suggestion of Jane's personality. Independent and inquiring, Jane breaks through conventions and gets to deeper truths about society.

She dedicates her novel to someone who she thinks does this brilliantly—William Thackeray, the Victorian satirist and author of *Vanity Fair*. She praises Thackeray for being a "social regenerator" who writes books to correct the warped social system.

This dedication shows one of the main objectives of Jane Eyre: to expose social problems and then "regenerate" or reform them.

CHAPTER 1

On a dreary afternoon in Gateshead Hall, the ten-year-old Jane Eyre, who has been forbidden by her Aunt from playing with her three cousins, finds a curtained window seat where she can read. Jane pages through a copy of the *History of British Birds*. Its many pictures inspire her to imagine mysterious stories and arctic scenes.

Jane sitting and reading by herself, not allowed to play with her cousins, establishes her odd and lonely position at Gateshead Hall. Yet her willingness to find a book to read, rather than just moping, establishes her independence.

Jane's bullying cousin John Reed barges in and insults her, calling her a penniless orphan and beggar and a servant in his house. When he knocks her down with the book, Jane fights back for the first time in her life. The two children scuffle.

Because Jane is an orphan, the wealthy Reeds treat her as a dependent—someone who relies on their support. They treat her more like a servant than a family member.

Stunned, John goes crying to Mrs. Reed: his mother and Jane's aunt. Mrs. Reed, despite Jane's protests, accuses Jane of starting the fight. As punishment, Mrs. Reed orders Jane to be locked in the red-room. The red-room is a lavishly furnished and rarely used bedroom where, nine years previous, Mrs. Reed's husband (Jane's uncle) had died.

Jane's punishment is ironic—at the moment Jane asserts her independence, her freedom is taken away. The Reeds are tyrants and hypocrites, refusing to recognize Jane's virtues and their own vices.

CHAPTER 2

Two servants, Bessie Lee and Miss Abbot, haul the wildly struggling Jane upstairs. Shocked at her violent outbreak, they scold her for disrespecting Mrs. Reed, her benefactress and master. They tell Jane that she depends on Mrs. Reed's generosity. Without it, she would have to go to the poor house.

Because of her uncertain status in the family and in the social hierarchy, Jane is a prisoner of Mrs. Reed's "generosity" as well as the red-room. Adopted children like Jane had few, if any, options of their own.

They lock Jane alone in the red-room. Jane catches sight of her gaunt reflection in the mirror and broods on the injustice of Gateshead Hall, where she is always being insulted and punished while the Reed brats enjoy every privilege. She knows that the kindly Mr. Reed would never have treated her so badly. Mr. Reed brought her to Gateshead, and it was his dying wish that Mrs. Reed raise Jane like one of her own children.

Alone with her reflection and her thoughts, Jane starts to realize what she deserves as an individual, and what was promised to her by Mr. Reed—to be treated with love and respect. Though she is powerless, she knows that she deserves better.

Jane thinks about the dead and how, when wronged, they can arise to seek revenge. Suddenly, Jane is overwhelmed with a sense of Mr. Reed's presence in the room. Convinced she sees his ghost, Jane screams in terror. The servants open the door, but Mrs. Reed refuses to believe Jane or to let her out. Locked back into the red-room again, Jane faints.

Imagined or not, the ghost sets the tone for many of the supernatural elements in the novel. Jane wants revenge, but it takes a terrifying form in Mr. Reed's spirit. Jane must learn another, more controlled way to confront injustice.

CHAPTER 3

Jane wakes up in the nursery, cared for by Bessie, and by the local apothecary, Mr. Lloyd. Bessie tells Jane that she thinks that Mrs. Reed mistreated her, nurses Jane, and even sings Jane a song, but Jane is melancholy and unreachable. Jane only feels better when she gets a book—*Gulliver's Travels*, a fanciful satire by Jonathan Swift, which she believes is a factual story of distant places.

For her own children, Mrs. Reed would have hired a real doctor rather than an apothecary. Jane takes refuge in her imagination which, as with Mr. Reed's ghost, can sometimes be too powerful and distort the truth.

As Jane recovers, Mr. Lloyd asks her about her health and her well-being. Jane confesses her unhappiness and her regrets about having no family, but says she does not want to leave and become a beggar. Even if she had family, Jane says she would not want to rejoin them if they were very poor.

Poverty has affected Jane deeply enough to challenge her desire for family. Dependents and young women on their own had it rough—they could either work for someone or hit the streets.

Mr. Lloyd asks Jane if she'd like to attend school. Jane gladly says yes. He obtains permission from Mrs. Reed, who is thrilled to get rid of her niece.

Education is necessary for an orphan girl like Jane to create a place for herself in society.

Later, Jane overhears Bessie telling Miss Abbot the story of Jane's family. Jane's father was a poor clergyman. Jane's mother, a Reed, married him against her wealthy family's wishes, and they disowned her. Just after Jane was born, Jane's father caught typhus while helping the poor, and both of Jane's parents soon died. Jane's uncle Mr. Reed adopted her. Mr. Reed also died within a year, but made his wife, Mrs. Reed, promise to raise Jane like one of their own children—John, Eliza, and Georgiana.

Jane's parents are split between the working class and the upper-class gentry (people who owned property). Jane's mother chose love and her own desires over her family's money. Jane will do the same eventually. Like her mother, Jane is determined to earn respect for herself, and for women in general.

CHAPTER 4

For two months, Jane anxiously waits for her schooling to start. She is finally interviewed by Mr. Brocklehurst—the aloof and stern headmaster of the Lowood school. He lectures Jane about religion, especially about the virtue of consistency. Mrs. Reed warns him that Jane is a liar, and Mr. Brocklehurst promises to inform her future teachers.

Another painfully ironic moment—as will become clear, Brocklehurst is hardly pious or consistent, while it is Mrs. Reed who is the liar. Once again, Mrs. Reed does harm to her niece, whom she should protect.

Jane is so hurt by Mrs. Reed's false accusation that she can't stop herself from angrily exclaiming that her aunt makes her sick and is herself a cruel and deceitful person. Mrs. Reed is dumbstruck and subdued by Jane's bold criticism. Afterwards, Jane feels a thrilling mix of victory and fear at her uncontrolled passions.

Jane's passionate nature arises. By asserting herself, she stops others from misrepresenting and taking advantage of her. But she also knows that because of her social position, her outburst is out of line. She must learn to control her passions.

The Reeds continue to shun Jane during her remaining time at Gateshead. Yet Jane makes friends with Bessie and speaks to her with a new "frank and fearless" attitude. Bessie treats her to stories and cakes and tells Jane she likes her better than the Reed kids.

Jane is beginning to mature because she sees through—and speaks out against—the hypocritical and cruel conventions that silence and repress her.

CHAPTER 5

Four days later, on a January morning, Jane leaves Gateshead. The carriage trip winds through a dreary landscape and lets Jane off at an uninviting, haunted-looking compound—the Lowood school.

The barren winter landscape resembles the lifeless and stern environment that Jane will find at Lowood school.

The Lowood school is a charity school for orphan girls, ranging in age, and all wearing drab rough uniforms. On her first day, Jane witnesses the strictly regimented routine. Teachers order the girls around in formation. Students share beds in long dormitories, and must eat sparse and sometimes inedible meals.

Brontë uses Lowood to satirize the conditions in girls' charity schools (two of her sisters died in such a school). Because it's a charity school, Mrs. Reed didn't pay anything to send Jane to school there.

The school's superintendent, Ms. Maria Temple, intervenes to provide some better food. Ms. Temple also teaches several subjects. Jane respects her for her kindness and knowledge.

Ms. Temple is a mother figure for Jane. She provides love and sustenance (physical and spiritual) that Mrs. Reed never did.

Jane spots a solitary girl reading. The girl is Helen Burns, an orphan herself. Jane is not used to talking to strangers, but she feels an immediate connection to Helen. Jane asks her a lot of questions about the school, the teachers, and Mr. Brocklehurst, which Helen answers carefully and with respect.

Helen is independent and intellectual like Jane. But she is much more restrained and refuses to say anything negative about the people running the school—though she could.

In the afternoon, a bitter teacher history teacher named Miss Scatcherd kicks Helen out of class and makes her stand in the middle of the school room for all to see. Jane cannot understand how Helen can bear the humiliation so quietly.

Helen's experience here parallels the Reeds' mistreatment of Jane, but Helen does not fight the injustice, as Jane passionately did. She endures it.

CHAPTER 6

On Jane's second day at the school, she wakes up shivering to a meager breakfast. She finds that her wash water is frozen in its pitcher.

Lowood's "discipline" is actually neglect. But the girls have no power to change anything.

In classes, Jane is overwhelmed by the lessons, but is fascinated by watching Helen Burns across the room. Even though Helen answers many difficult questions in her class, Miss Scatcherd goes out of her way to criticize and punish Helen. When she whips Helen across the neck, Jane is amazed that Helen doesn't flinch or cry.

Jane feels a connection with Helen that she never feels with anyone else. Humiliated and even physically injured, Helen is a Christ-like figure who endures unjust persecution without complaint.

Later, Jane tells Helen how she should furiously resist such unjust treatment. Helen explains to Jane her philosophy of turning the other cheek, and her belief in a beautiful afterlife that gives her hope and patience to endure suffering in this world.

Helen's religious views help her endures her suffering. Helen's optimistic faith will contrast with the stern Christianity of characters later in the book.

CHAPTER 7

Conditions at Lowood remain harsh. On weekly Sunday walks to Mr. Brocklehurst's church, the poorly-clothed girls suffer exposure to frigid weather. They are constantly cold and underfed. In sympathy, Jane gives most of her small meals to other starving girls.

Mr. Brocklehurst's type of religion is cold and lifeless. His "charity" is literally killing the girls he is supposed to teach and nourish. In contrast, Jane nourishes others even when she herself is underfed.

One day, Mr. Brocklehurst, who is rarely present at the school itself, visits Lowood with his rich, well-dressed relatives. In front of the school, he reemphasizes the rules of his harsh educational program to Ms. Temple, who had been bending the rules out of kindness to the girls. She fumes in silence. On seeing a girl's curly red hair, he demands that all the girls' hair be cut off for the sake of modesty.

Mr. Brocklehurst enjoys wealth and comforts while the girls suffer. He would "starve the body to save the soul," but doesn't practice what he preaches. The haircuts show how the girls are denied their feelings and individuality. Ms. Temple fumes silently because, as a female teacher, she has no real power.

Jane is terrified that Mr. Brocklehurst will remember his promise to Mrs. Reed to tell all the teachers that Jane is a liar. Jane is so nervous that she accidentally drops her chalk slate during his visit. Mr. Brocklehurst then makes her stand on a high stool in front of everyone, says that Jane is deceitful, and tells all the students and teachers to avoid her.

Jane is concerned that her new friends, Helen and Ms. Temple, will reject her because of Mrs. Reed's lies. She does not yet understand the deeper bonds of friendship and love.

Jane is devastated, but takes heart from Helen Burns, who smiles at Jane every time she passes by.

Drawing strength from Helen's approval, Jane learns to endure.

CHAPTER 8

After school is dismissed that evening, thinking that she is hated by everyone, Jane collapses into tears. Helen Burns reassures Jane that she is pitied, not hated, by her peers. Helen also promises that even if the whole world despised her, Jane would still find friendship and protecting love in her faith.

Almost above all things, Jane "cannot bear to be solitary and hated." She is searching for meaningful connections to others and to her own beliefs. Helen's faith appeals to orphans and the struggling poor.

Ms. Temple brings the two girls to her office and treats them to tea and cake. Jane tells Ms. Temple that she is not a liar, and relates her life story, trying hard to be moderate and humble. Ms. Temple and Helen talk of learned subjects, and Jane watches them in awe. To Jane, they seem radiant with intelligence and purity.

The three women share a sisterhood of humility, persistence, and honesty. Helen's intelligence and moral purity shine through her outward appearance. Jane hopes the same will be true for her.

Ms. Temple promises to write to Mr. Lloyd to confirm that Jane's assertion that she is not a liar. Mr. Lloyd soon writes back to exonerate Jane, and Ms. Temple announces in front of the whole school that Jane is innocent of Mr. Brocklehurst's charges.

The public clearing of Jane's reputation makes the school a friendly place again. Ms. Temple takes back some of Brocklehurst's power to shape the girls' identities.

Jane returns to her studies with new vigor and excels in French and drawing. She now prefers the impoverished Lowood to the luxuries of Gateshead.

Money isn't everything. Even at Lowood, Jane feels enriched by her friends and studies.

CHAPTER 9

Spring brings better weather, but the dampness of the school grounds results in an epidemic of typhus that infects more than half of Lowood's students. Many are sent home. Many others die. Jane, meanwhile, is encouraged to wander outside for her health, and she takes great pleasure in the lush scenery and flowers. In the midst of spring's renewal, Jane contemplates death for the first time.

The Lowood epidemic recalls Brontë's own sisters' deaths, and illustrates the plight of poor women. The contrast of spring's rebirth with death wakes Jane up to life's contradictions. Spring is a transitional time, and Jane is transitioning out of her youth.

Jane soon learns that Helen is also deathly ill. Helen suffers from consumption (tuberculosis), not typhus, and is being held in quarantine in Ms. Temple's room.

In Victorian literature, characters like Helen who are too sensitive or pure for the harsh world often died of consumption.

One night Jane sneaks to Helen's bedside. Helen assures Jane that she is not scared of dying because she will be leaving behind the suffering of the world and going to her God. They fall asleep in each other's arms. By morning, Helen is dead.

Helen's profound faith in an afterlife teaches Jane to give up on some of the petty struggles of life. The girls' bond is unbreakable, even by death.

Helen is buried in an unmarked grave. But 15 years later, someone (probably Jane) places a headstone on the grave that is carved with the word "Resurgam"—Latin for "I will rise again."

The gravestone's inscription extends the novel's comparison of Helen to Christ.

CHAPTER 10

The epidemic and deaths expose the depravity at Lowood and Mr. Brocklehurst's neglect. New management takes over and improves the school.

Mr. Brocklehurst's negligence comes back to him. He receives divine and social justice.

Eight years pass. Jane excels in her studies during that time. Driven by a wish to please her teachers, she graduates first in her class and becomes a teacher at the school herself. But when Ms. Temple marries and leaves for a distant country, Jane yearns for a change herself, to venture out into the wide world and find a "new servitude."

Marriage interferes with women's relationships, and Jane is "orphaned" again when Ms. Temple leaves. Now Jane feels isolated and restless and wants her freedom, to define herself. Yet at the same time she yearns for "servitude."

Jane posts a newspaper advertisement for her services as a tutor, and a week later is offered a job by a Mrs. Fairfax to teach a young girl at the manor of Thornfield.

Jane's ad symbolizes her entrance into independent public life, though as a poor woman she must still serve others.

Just as she's leaving Lowood, Jane gets a surprise visit from Bessie. Bessie updates Jane about the Reeds—Georgiana tried to run off with a young lord, but her jealous sister Eliza ratted her out to Mrs. Reed. John Reed is failing school, spending money wildly, and generally disappointing his mother. Bessie thinks that Jane is far more accomplished than any of the Reed children.

Through her devotion to her education, Jane has gained self-confidence, admirable skills, and a respectable social position. Mrs. Reed may have rated her children above Jane, but raised without discipline and integrity, they turned out poorly.

Bessie also notes that Jane's family (the Eyres) was poor but respected—they even owned property. In fact, seven years previous (shortly after Jane left Gateshead), Jane's uncle John, a well-to-do wine merchant, had visited Gateshead looking for her. He didn't have time to visit her at Lowood, because he was headed to the island of Madeira on business.

Jane's social position becomes a little clearer. Though poor, she is a member of the gentry. Jane's uncle is a self-made man and a solid middle-class figure. His virtues parallel Jane's.

CHAPTER 11

Jane arrives at Thornfield Hall at night, and therefore can't make out much more than the house's exterior splendor in the dark. She meets the kind old Mrs. Fairfax, who leads her through the cavernous house to a cozy and snug bedroom. To Jane's surprise, Mrs. Fairfax is not the owner of Thornfield but the head housekeeper. She learns from Mrs. Fairfax that Mr. Rochester owns the place but only shows up intermittently. Mrs. Fairfax describes Rochester as peculiar, well-traveled, and a good master.

With its dark splendor, mysterious and absent master, and suggestive name, Thornfield Hall has a Gothic feel to it. Jane, like Mrs. Fairfax, is a servant and dependent to the "master" of the house. These servants and dependents, it seems, will be her new "family."

Jane meets her new pupil, the hyperactive French girl Adèle Varens, whose mother was a French singer and dancer and who is Rochester's ward. Later, Mrs. Fairfax leads Jane on a tour of the luxuriously furnished house. The third floor is packed with old furniture, odds and ends of the past. Jane considers it strange enough for a ghost to live in.

How and why Rochester has a ward deepens the mystery surrounding him. Did he have an affair, breaking social and religious ethics? The strange third floor adds Gothic flavor to Thornfield Hall.

After they leave the third floor, strange laughter echoes above them, spooking Jane. Mrs. Fairfax blames the noise on Grace Poole, a servant and seamstress whom Mrs. Fairfax scolds and reminds to "remember directions."

Thornfield's supernatural qualities grow even more pronounced.

CHAPTER 12

Jane eases into the habits of life at Thornfield. She is comfortable and likes the bright but spoiled Adèle, but she soon starts to feel discontented, confined, and restless. She thinks that people are wrongfully constrained by their roles in society, especially women, and that all humans need stimulation. Jane finds some comfort in occasionally strolling along the third-floor passageway and allowing her imagination to wander.

Jane is a restless and curious soul who wants a purpose in life. Yet at the same time she still lets her imagination wander, and daydreams fantastical stories. Jane's thoughts about women and confinement foreshadow the appearance of Bertha, a woman who really is imprisoned.

Jane frequently hears the strange laughter on the third floor, and observes Grace Poole coming and going with her servant work. Jane is puzzled by Grace Poole, whose plain curt personality doesn't seem to match the bizarre sounds she hears from the third floor.

The scapegoating of Grace Poole reflects Brontë's belief that false appearances must be scrutinized to uncover hidden truths—the same view that Brontë presents in her Preface.

As Jane carries a letter to the post one winter evening, she hears a horse approaching. The dreary scene and the noise make her think of Bessie's ghost stories about "Gytrash," a spirit creature, sometimes horse and sometimes dog, which pursues travelers at night. Sure enough, out comes a huge intimidating dog, but it is immediately followed by a horse and rider that dispel Jane's worries about ghosts.

Here Brontë blends the Gothic style with realism. She makes it seem as if something supernatural is happening and then explains the causes behind those events. This approach is sometimes called the "explained supernatural."

The horse then slips and falls on a sheet of ice. Jane helps up the rider, a dark and stern-faced man, who questions Jane about her position at Thornfield before riding away. On returning to Thornfield, Jane discovers from the servants that the gentleman was Edward Rochester, who has returned home.

Jane and Rochester's first encounter sets the tone for much of their future relationship. Jane helps Rochester, her "master," while Rochester stays in disguise with Jane, hiding his real identity and history from her.

CHAPTER 13

The next evening, Jane and Adèle join Rochester for tea. Rochester seems distant and moody, and speaks in commands, sometimes impolitely. They talk of Adèle's progress and Jane's personal history.

Rochester's language and manner identify him as a man accustomed to having power.

When he learns that Jane can draw, Rochester is intrigued and asks to see her work. Jane's pictures show sublime and desolate scenes, including a drowning on a bleak ocean, storm clouds behind a young woman's luminous face, and a cloaked grim reaper near arctic icebergs. The viewing wraps up the evening.

The pictures are all characteristic of a Romantic interest in the visionary and the sublime. They also suggest the isolation and turmoil of Jane's mind. The coming storm image forecasts the emotional turmoil ahead.

Jane mentions to Mrs. Fairfax that she finds Rochester unpleasantly abrupt. Mrs. Fairfax explains that Rochester has a difficult personality because of his troubled past. He inherited Thornfield from his older brother nine years earlier. Before that, their father had given his entire estate to Rochester's older brother, but had wanted to set up Rochester (who's fist name is Edward) to be wealthy too, and arranged some scheme that didn't work out and continues to be problematic and painful. Mrs. Fairfax is evasive about the scheme and the matter remains a mystery.

Rochester is a product of class rules. When Jane Eyre was written, the first-born son of wealthy families usually inherited everything, while other children were set up to be rich through specific careers or lucrative marriages. Later in the novel, Jane goes against this tradition by sharing her inheritance equally with her cousins.

CHAPTER 14

Jane barely sees Rochester, until one night after dinner he calls for Jane and Adèle to join him. He gives Adèle the gift from Paris that he's been impatiently waiting for, and she goes off to play. Rochester, who seems a bit drunk, chats amiably with Jane, and she answers with all of her usual directness. Rochester asks if Jane thinks he's handsome. Jane bluntly says no, even though she secretly admires his eyes. They converse about each other's personalities, about treating people directly and on equal terms. It seems to her that Rochester sometimes speaks as if he were reading her mind.

Rochester cannot be himself around Jane yet—he needs to get drunk to converse with her at all. Yet Jane already senses a deep, almost spiritual connection with him that cuts across social boundaries. Even so, for all his talk of treating people directly and on even terms, Rochester does neither of those things with Jane. He summons her to come talk with him, and keeps secrets.

Describing himself, Rochester claims to be a man of experience and unfortunate circumstances, hardened from flesh into "Indian-rubber." He makes obscure references to his past and his plans for reforming himself, but Jane gets confused by his vagueness and she stops the conversation.

Rochester's desire to reform suggests some illicit behavior on his part that's troubling him. His desire to remake himself from "Indian-rubber" into flesh contrasts with Helen's faith in transcending the flesh.

Adèle soon returns, dressed up in a new pink gown, and dances around. Rochester says that Adèle reminds him of her French mother, Céline Varens. Rochester promises to someday explain to Jane more about how and why Adèle became his ward.

Adèle is a living symbol of Rochester's past, which he wants to reform. But he will need Jane's help, symbolized in part by her role as Adèle's tutor.

CHAPTER 15

One afternoon, Rochester takes Jane aside and explains his history with Adèle. Years ago in Paris, Rochester fell for Céline Varens, a French singer. Rochester caught Céline with another man, ended the relationship, and wounded the man in a duel. Céline claimed that Adèle was Rochester's daughter, which Rochester doubts based on her looks. Even so, when Céline abandoned Adèle, Rochester brought her back to England to insure her a good upbringing.

Rochester raises and educates Adèle as a way of trying to repent for his past. To 19-century readers, it would seem inappropriate for Rochester to walk alone with Jane and talk about his morally questionable history. Jane seems to walk a fine line between being an equal and a servant.

That night, Jane thinks over Rochester's story and realizes that she really likes speaking with him now that he no longer acts like such a haughty aristocrat around her.

The connection between Jane and Rochester deepens when Rochester abandons his secrecy and aristocratic formality.

Later, when trying to sleep, Jane is disturbed by strange noises in the hallway, a demonic laugh at her door, and footsteps retreating to the third floor. She runs into the hallway and sees smoke coming from Rochester's bedroom—Rochester is asleep, but his bed curtains are on fire. She douses the curtains with water, putting out the fire and saving his life.

The Gothic mystery in Thornfield deepens, and becomes more dangerous. A fire in the bedroom suggests that the raging passion symbolized by the fire is connected to love, sex, and marriage.

Rochester, now awake, rushes up to the third floor. He returns and asks Jane if she's ever heard the demonic laughter before. When Jane responds that she has heard Grace Poole's laugh, Rochester quickly says, "Just so. Grace Poole—you have guessed it." He makes Jane promise to keep quiet about the events of the night. Emotionally moved, Rochester confesses his deep gratitude to Jane and goes to sleep on the sofa in the library. Jane spends a wakeful night contemplating her new emotions.

Jane again saves Rochester, just as she did when his horse slipped in Chapter 12. Though deeply grateful to Jane and seemingly on the verge of telling her that he loves her, Rochester continues to keep secrets and does not treat Jane as an equal. Jane's own feelings for Rochester become passionate.

CHAPTER 16

In the morning, Jane is surprised that the servants believe that the previous night's fire started when Rochester accidentally fell asleep with a lit candle next to his bed, and that he woke just in time to extinguish the flames. Jane is astonished when Grace Poole—who seems nothing like a nervous criminal—confirms the story. When Jane asks about the laughter, Grace assures Jane that she imagined it, but that she should probably keep her bedroom door locked anyway.

Jane realizes that Rochester has lied on purpose, and is keeping her in the dark about all of the "supernatural" events taking place at Thornfield. Blaming Jane's imagination plays on the stereotype that are flighty and over-imaginative.

To Jane's dismay, Rochester soon leaves for a nearby estate to join a party of aristocrats, including the beautiful Blanche Ingram. Jane chastises herself for thinking she ever had a chance with Rochester. She draws two pictures—a homely self-portrait and a romantic image of Blanche—to remind her of their respective social positions, and to cure herself of any expectation that she might win Rochester's love.

Jane believes Rochester will be forced to marry someone in his social class, regardless of his feelings. The two styles of the portraits reinforce the unbridgeable gap that Jane senses between herself and the upper class. Her her despair reveals her growing feelings for Rochester.

CHAPTER 17

Rochester is gone for a week when Jane is upset to learn from Mrs. Fairfax that he may go to Europe for a year. But a week later, Mrs. Fairfax reports a new plan—Rochester will be returning to Thornfield in three days with a group of guests.

The prospect of Rochester's absence forces Jane to confront her feelings for him more fully.

Meanwhile, Jane keeps an eye on Grace Poole, who spends most of her time alone upstairs. Jane is amazed that Grace interacts normally with the other servants. She becomes convinced that there's something odd going on when she overhears one servant gossiping that Grace gets paid more than the other servants.

Jane begins to piece together the mystery of the "supernatural" events that have been blamed on Grace Poole.

When Rochester's party arrives, they go into the parlor. Adèle, starry eyed, wanders through an adoring crowd in a French dress while Jane, wearing a Quakerish frock, retreats to a corner to observe.

Jane's "Quakerish" dress contrasts the more flashy dress of the aristocrats. It represents her modesty and moral purity.

Blanche Ingram is the belle of the ball and looks as beautiful as Jane imagined. The flirty Blanche hones in on Rochester and, taking a crack at Jane, loudly discusses all of the dreadful governesses that she's had. She then makes Rochester sing a duet with her.

Blanche's class-based crack about governesses indicates that she senses that Jane is a potential competitor for Rochester.

Watching Rochester with Blanche, Jane realizes that she's helplessly in love with him. She sneaks away, about to cry, but Rochester catches her in the hallway. He lets her leave when he sees that she's about to cry, but demands that she come to the nightly parties for as long as his guests remain at Thornfield. He finishes with the words, "Good-night, my—" before cutting himself off.

Jane's emotion comes from her belief that her social position will make it impossible for Rochester to love her. Rochester almost reveals his own feelings for Jane. Yet, by commanding her to attend the parties, he still doesn't treat her as an equal.

CHAPTER 18

The guests remain for several days. Each night Jane has to watch Blanche flirt with Rochester, including during a game of charades from which Jane is excluded.

Rochester forces Jane to attend the parties, while the other guests exclude her. None of them treat her as an equal.

Jane senses that Blanche, despite all her efforts, cannot charm Rochester. Still, she thinks Rochester will probably marry Blanche, perhaps for political or social reasons that Jane doesn't understand.

Jane continues to believe that Rochester will place a higher priority on class constraints than on his emotions.

One day, Rochester is away on business. A strange gentleman—Mr. Mason—comes looking for him. The man's unusual, vacant appearance makes Jane uneasy. She learns from Mr. Mason that he and Rochester both had business in the West Indies.

Mr. Mason's disturbing nature seems to link him to the Gothic events at Thornfield. His West Indies origins make him an outsider, and therefore suspect.

A few nights later, while Rochester is still away, an old gypsy woman comes to the house to tell the fortunes of the party. Blanche demands to be first, but returns from the library looking disappointed. The other girls twitter about the gypsy's surprising knowledge. The old woman then requests to see Jane.

The gypsy's presence emphasizes Brontë's interest in a supernatural connection between minds, which will come into play later in the novel.

CHAPTER 19

Alone with Jane, the gypsy hides behind a large hat. She describes how Jane feels lonely and represses her feelings. Though initially skeptical, Jane is awed by how much insight the gypsy has into her feelings. The gypsy says that Jane is very close to achieving happiness. She tells Jane that Blanche's dismay resulted from the gypsy's telling her that Rochester wasn't as rich as he seemed.

The gypsy really does seem to have mystical powers, and can see right into Jane's heart. Blanche, meanwhile, is revealed as totally shallow and interested only in money rather than love or any emotional connection.

The gypsy asks Jane about any love interests, which Jane denies having. Jane admits she is alone, but not sad. She says that thoughts of someday building a school cheer her up.

Blanche and the other women asked about love and husbands. Jane focuses on her own independent dreams.

As the gypsy woman continues speaking, her voice deepens, and Jane suddenly recognizes the gypsy's voice and hand—the gypsy is Rochester in disguise! (For a moment, Jane had suspected that the gypsy was Grace Poole.)

The disguise represents how Rochester masks the truth about his identity. He plays with people, including Jane, and shows them little respect.

Though furious with Rochester for fooling her, Jane still mentions Mr. Mason's arrival at Rochester. Rochester staggers and Jane holds him up. Rochester asks Jane if she would shun him if he were to experience a scandal. Jane promises to stand by him, and goes to bring Mr. Mason to Rochester.

Rochester's question implies that he doesn't think Jane would accept him for who he really is. It also suggests that he might be linked to the supernatural events at Thornfield. Jane is devoted to Rochester, however, and wants to serve him.

CHAPTER 20

That night, a scream rips through the midnight silence at Thornfield. All the guests run into the hallway, but Rochester calms everyone by saying that the noise came from a servant having a nightmare.

Secrets cannot be contained forever. The secrets of Rochester's past break out violently after being repressed for so long.

Once everyone has returned to bed, Rochester taps on Jane's bedroom door and asks for her help. They go up to Grace Poole's third floor room, where Mr. Mason lies bleeding from knife and bite wounds in his arm. They bandage him up and Rochester leaves to fetch a doctor, demanding that Jane and Mr. Mason not speak to each other while he's gone.

Jane is earning Rochester's confidence. But, by demanding silence, Rochester still tries to silence his past secrets. His late-night visit to Jane's bedroom would have been considered risqué in Brontë's time.

Jane is left alone in the dark with Mason. From Grace Poole's locked room down the hall emerge "canine" snarling sounds and human groans. Before dawn, Rochester returns with the surgeon. They sew up Mason and send him away before any of the guests wake.

Jane is kept in the dark about Rochester's secret, which seems more grave than ever. Since Mason could reveal Rochester's secrets, he must be silenced and removed from Thornfield.

Rochester takes Jane for a walk in the garden. He tells her about an obviously autobiographical story of a young man who got himself into serious trouble as a youth and then, to escape from that error, went on to lead a life of luxury and sinful excess. He asks, What if that man now wants to find redemption by living a good and moral life with a wife but is blocked from marrying her by the rules of society? Should he ignore those rules? Jane responds that the person should look not to any other person for redemption, but to God. Rochester then says that he will marry Blanche for his "regeneration," and changes the subject.

To gain redemption ("regeneration") from his secret sin, Rochester wants to ignore particular rules of society. He wants to take a short cut to redemption by marrying Blanche and living virtuously from here on out, without ever revealing his secret past. Jane's answer makes it clear that such shortcuts never work and are themselves immoral, but Rochester is not yet ready to hear it.

CHAPTER 21

One afternoon, a messenger from Gateshead brings Jane some shocking news. John Reed, heavily in debt from gambling, has committed suicide. Now Mrs. Reed is deathly ill and demands to see Jane, who travels from Thornfield to Gateshead.

With his debts, drinking, and suicide, John Reed contrasts with Jane's learning and poise, showing that virtues are not based on class.

At Gateshead, Jane has a pleasant reunion with Bessie. The Reed sisters, meanwhile, have grown into two very different types of people. Eliza is stern, organized, and highly religious, while Georgiana is a social butterfly who gushes about her romances.

The Reed sisters are caricatures of judgment and feeling taken to extremes. Jane has learned to avoid extremes and instead seeks balance.

Though she's on her deathbed, Mrs. Reed shows no remorse for her treatment of Jane. On the tenth day of Jane's visit, Mrs. Reed calls Jane into her room and confesses to keeping a letter from Jane. Jane's uncle—John Eyre, a successful wine merchant—had requested custody of Jane three years ago. But Mrs. Reed, hoping to squash any chance of Jane's getting ahead in life, told him that Jane had died of fever at Lowood. Jane is upset and angry, but nonetheless tries to heal her relationship with Mrs. Reed. She rebuffs Jane, and dies that night.

Mrs. Reed is a liar and lacks the religious virtue of repentance. Like Rochester in the attack on Mr. Mason and the fire in his room, Mrs. Reed has created a cover-up. He wants things his way, just as Mrs. Reed does, and is willing to lie to get what he wants. In contrast to them, and like a good Christian, Jane is able to forgive Mrs. Reed despite her awful actions.

CHAPTER 22

Jane stays at Gateshead for a month to settle the affairs of the Mrs. Reed's estate. Georgiana soon goes to London and eventually marries a rich gentleman. Eliza decides to enter a French convent where she eventually becomes Mother Superior.

Brontë criticizes Georgiana as just another rich aristocrat and portrays Eliza as a strict unfeeling nun in order to criticize Roman Catholicism.

While at Gateshead, Jane gets a letter from Mrs. Fairfax that says Rochester has gone to London to buy a carriage, presumably in preparation for his marriage to Blanche. Jane fears that her days at Thornfield are numbered.

Everyone assumes Rochester will marry Blanche because she is a member of his class. Blanche, living at Thornfield, would surely send Jane away.

On the road, Jane unexpectedly meets Rochester, who's out driving his new carriage. Rochester begs her to look at the carriage and to tell him "if you don't think it will suit Mrs. Rochester exactly." Jane is so excited to see Rochester that she exclaims how glad she is to return to him, and adds that "wherever you are is my home—my only home."

Jane's feelings for Rochester are now on full display. Yet her passionate declaration seems excessive and inappropriate since Rochester will most likely marry another woman...

CHAPTER 23

Two weeks after Jane returns to Thornfield, Rochester finds her in the garden and tells her that his plans to marry Blanche are decided. He tells Jane that he has found a governess job for her in Ireland. Jane, upset, says that Ireland is too far away. Jane explains how much she loves Thornfield. Rochester requests that she stay. But Jane fiercely declares her independence and equality, and rebukes him for choosing a loveless marriage.

Jane stands up to Rochester for prioritizing social concerns ahead of his feelings. Jane's passionate response comes in part from her thwarted feelings for Rochester, but also because he seems to think he can send her away, or keep her near, as he wishes.

Rochester confesses that he has no plans to marry Blanche. He was only trying to make Jane jealous. He passionately asks Jane to marry him. Jane at first thinks Rochester is teasing her, but he convinces her. Jane, overwhelmed with emotion, agrees to marry him.

Rochester loves Jane, but even in proposing to her he distorted the truth to make it seem like he was marrying Blanche. He still has not fully revealed himself or his secrets to Jane.

The weather suddenly changes into a downpour, and the couple rushes inside, where Rochester kisses Jane. Later that night, lightning splits the chestnut tree where they had sat when Rochester proposed.

The storm represents divine disapproval of the marriage. Rochester's secrets will split up their marriage, just as lightning split the tree.

CHAPTER 24

Rochester promises a wedding in four short weeks. After the engagement is announced, Mrs. Fairfax congratulates Jane weakly and warns her about men and marriages between unequal parties. Jane is irritated with Mrs. Fairfax's assumptions, but is also still a little suspicious of her fiancé.

In Brontë's time, it would have been scandalous for a gentleman to marry his governess. It's unclear if Mrs. Fairfax knows about Bertha, but even if not, she has reason to be suspicious of his rush to marry.

Feeling like she's living a fairy tale, Jane is exuberantly happy—at first. But when Rochester starts lavishing expensive gifts and flattering compliments on her, Jane feels objectified and degraded. She demands to be treated normally, to live on the salary she earns as a tutor, and to dress in her plain outfits.

Rochester treats Jane like Céline Varens. Jane refuses to be his love object, dependent on his gifts and money. Her self-respect stems from independence, not inflated self-esteem.

Jane privately decides to answer the letter from her uncle, John Eyre, which Mrs. Reed had kept from her. She does so because she thinks that if John Eyre made her his heir, as the letter stated, she would be closer to Rochester's equal in terms of class.

Unlike Blanche, Jane doesn't value money for its own sake. She needs it to be independent, to meet Rochester as an equal. Despite her love for Rochester, she senses the match isn't right.

Throughout the wedding planning process, Jane resists Rochester's romantic overtures. To put him off, she argues with him and aggravates him. But even so, she still worships him like an idol.

Jane puts Rochester before her love of God, which is a serious sin in Christianity and will require her repentance.

CHAPTER 25

The wedding day approaches and everything is packed for a honeymoon to Europe. While Rochester is briefly away on business, Jane wanders outside to see the lightning-blasted chestnut tree.

Jane's visit to the split tree shows that subconsciously she knows there is something wrong with this marriage even before she learns about Bertha.

When Rochester returns the next day, the day before the wedding, Jane tells him of the strange things that happened while he was away. First, she dreamed about being alone on a long, empty road with a pitiful crying child. In a second dream, she was waiting for Rochester at a ruined Thornfield with the same child, but tripped and dropped the child.

Jane's dreams suggest the distance she still feels from Rochester. The suffering child symbolizes an unhealthy future for their marriage. The decaying Thornfield foreshadows its actual destruction and represents the mess of Rochester's life.

This second dream startled Jane awake, and in the darkness of her room she saw a strange woman with wild hair and a discolored "savage" face going through her closet. The woman put on the wedding veil Rochester had bought for Jane, then tore it in half and stomped on it. Rochester dismisses the story as just another dream, then says that the woman must have been Grace Poole. Finally, he promises to explain everything a year and a day into their marriage.

Bertha appears as a terrifying image of a bride, which parallels Jane's anxieties about her marriage. The ripped veil, like the split tree, represents how Jane's wedding will be broken up. Instead of telling Jane the truth, Rochester delays his confession—an ominous start to a marriage based on equality.

Jane spends the night cradling Adèle in the nursery behind a bolted door. She cries when leaving Adèle in the morning.

As an independent tutor, Adèle represents the life that Jane is leaving behind.

CHAPTER 26

On the morning of the wedding, as Rochester hurries Jane to the church, Jane notices two strangers in the churchyard. The strangers also attend the ceremony. When the priest asks if anyone has any objections to the marriage about to take place, one of the strangers stands up and announces that there is an "impediment" to the marriage. Rochester insists that the ceremony proceed, but the clergyman refuses.

Rochester thought he was above the civil laws represented by the lawyer, and the religious laws represented by the church. He refused to repent his actions or reveals his secrets. Now, with the unraveling of his marriage, he must pay the price for his arrogant self-centeredness.

The stranger identifies himself as Mr. Briggs, a London lawyer, and reveals that Rochester is already married. 15 years ago in Jamaica, Rochester married a Creole woman, Bertha Mason, who still lives in Thornfield. The other stranger turns out to be her brother, Mr. Mason, who timidly comes forward to confirm the story.

Like Bertha, Mr. Mason is characterized negatively—as scheming, timid, and strange-looking—because of prevailing class prejudices against his West Indies origins and mixed-race background.

Rochester is furious. He concedes that the story is true, but stresses that neither Jane nor anyone else knew of Bertha. His wife is insane, he says, and is kept locked away on the third floor of Thornfield. He brings everyone back to Thornfield and they go up to the third floor. Behind a secret door stands Grace Poole and a disheveled "lunatic" pacing in the shadows. This is Bertha, who seems half-human, half-animal to Jane. Bertha attacks Rochester and he wrestles her into a chair. He goes on to explain that her family hid her insanity until after their marriage.

Bertha is made out to be a violent and insane monster, but there is method in her madness: all of her violence is directed against the people who took away her freedom, love, and identity. Her rage is unchecked. She is all feeling, no judgment. Ironically, Rochester, who has kept Bertha secretly locked up, claims to be a victim of families hiding their secrets.

Mr. Mason then reveals to Jane that he learned about her wedding plans with Rochester from a business acquaintance—Jane's uncle. After receiving Jane's letter, John Eyre sent Mason to save her from the sham marriage. John Eyre could not make the trip, as he is dying of consumption (tuberculosis).

Even though the fault would be Rochester's, Jane's reputation and future prospects would be ruined by this marriage.

Jane locks herself into her room. Feeling that all her hopes have been destroyed, she succumbs to a flood of sorrow over the troubles and betrayals that she has endured. She turns to God, and prays.

Jane is tested when she loses her entire family at Thornfield. Alone again, she calls upon the faith that Helen taught her.

CHAPTER 27

Jane realizes that she must leave Thornfield. But when she steps out of her room, she finds Rochester waiting for her. He asks her forgiveness. Jane doesn't respond, though she secretly forgives him immediately. Rochester then pleads with her to come live with him in southern France. Though she still loves him deeply, Jane refuses to go with him and become his mistress.

Jane loves Rochester, and so forgiving him is easy. Yet she knows that love is not everything, and that becoming Rochester's mistress would ruin her in the eyes of the law and God. A mistress can never be the equal of her lover, so Jane refuses to go with him.

Rochester admits that he acted cowardly and wrong and tells Jane the full truth about his past. Rochester's father left his entire fortune to his eldest son, Rochester's older brother. Rochester's father tried to secure a fortune for Rochester by making him a partner with Mason in the West Indies and arranging a marriage for him to Bertha, who was promised a huge inheritance. Rochester met Bertha only briefly, but was dazzled by her exoticism and beauty. However, after marrying her, Rochester learned that Bertha's mother was not dead, as he had been told. Rather, she was insane. Bertha is herself violent, coarse, and profoundly self-indulgent. Before long, she also followed her mother into insanity.

Aside from Jane, Rochester never respected the women in his life as thinking individuals, and in turn he paid an awful price. Like Adèle, Bertha inherits bad traits from her foreign mother—an example of typical Victorian prejudice against foreigners. Whereas Brontë characterizes the French as fickle, she portrays people from the West Indies as exotic, sensual, and temperamental.

By this point Rochester's father and brother had died. Legally bound to Bertha, Rochester returned to England, secretly installed her at Thornfield, and hired Grace Poole to watch over her. He then left Thornfield and spent years looking for another wife, specifically a European woman. Finding no one, Rochester plunged into debauchery with many mistresses, including Céline Varens. In the end, consorting with mistresses made him disgusted with himself, as it seemed almost like buying a slave. Eventually, he returned to England with Adèle. Then he met Jane, whom he loved from the first moment.

Rochester tries to escape his past by covering it up, and then by hiding from it through cheap pleasures and mistresses. He comes to realize that taking mistresses can only cover up his pain for so long, since it is itself sinful and exploitative. While his generous act of taking in Adèle shows his underlying goodness, his inability to reveal his secrets shows his pride.

For an instant, Jane considers staying with Rochester, reasoning that she deserves a devoted man after a life of isolation and neglect. She also fears that she may never find another. Yet at the same time she knows that she will respect herself only if she does what she knows is right. Still, she remains at Thornfield. But that night, Jane's mother appears to her in a dream and tells her to flee temptation. Fighting her own desires, Jane sneaks away from Thornfield with her modest belongings and hires a carriage on an unknown road.

Jane's mother is a spirit, a supernatural entity, yet Jane's dream could also just be an expression of her subconscious. Either way, the spirit carries a religious message. It helps Jane to renounce temptation and give up what she loves most in order to preserve her virtue. In the end, Jane prizes her independence and self-worth above her love for Rochester.

CHAPTER 28

Jane soon runs out of money. The carriage drops her off at a crossroads, and she realizes moments later that she left her belongings in the departed coach. With nowhere to turn, she spends the night outdoors contemplating the stars and God.

Stripped of everything and at a crossroads in her life, Jane begins a spiritual trial. She finds comfort in nature, which represents God's presence.

Jane walks into a nearby village to ask for work, which is scarce. She tries to exchange her gloves and handkerchief for food, but she is refused. Burning with shame but desperately hungry, Jane begs at a farm for some leftover porridge fed to the hogs.

Jane's quest for independence reaches a low point. Though on her own, she is dependent on strangers for charity. Her plight reflects the hardships of England's poor.

Weak from hunger and despair, Jane wanders into the wilderness expecting to die. She follows the light of a distant candle and finds a country house (Moor House) with two young women—the sisters Mary and Diana Rivers—inside studying German. Jane knocks, but the servant, Hannah, turns her away as a suspicious beggar.

Like the crossroads, the wilderness represents Jane's lack of direction in her time of trial. The candlelight is a beacon of hope that brings her to Moor House and to God.

Jane collapses outside, believing death is imminent and vowing to wait for God's will. Just then, the women's brother, St. John (pronounced "Sinjin") arrives home. He brings Jane into the house, where the River sisters give Jane food and a dry bed. Jane does not want to be discovered, so she identifies herself by a the false name of "Jane Elliott."

Jane gives herself up to God's will, as opposed to focusing on her own feelings, and is saved. Nonetheless, like Rochester, she and is not truthful with those who saved her.

CHAPTER 29

Jane is semi-conscious for three days. On waking on the fourth day, she finds her clothes cleaned and gets a hot meal. She criticizes Hannah for turning her away the night before. Hannah apologizes, then tells Jane about the Rivers family. Their father lost his fortune in a business deal and died just three weeks ago. Mary and Diana are still in school and afterwards will look for governess jobs. St. John is a poor parson.

There's a Christian allegory in Jane rising again after three days, just as Christ did after the crucifixion. And just as Christ was in a sense reborn, Jane is metaphorically born into a new family. The family also seems to be of her class, with two sisters in school and a parson who, like her father, works with the poor.

Later, Jane gives the Rivers a brief personal history, but refuses to reveal her real name or any details about her former employer. She claims to have no ties and no connections in England, and asks for help looking for work of any kind. St. John is firm but charitable, and promises to help. Mary and Diana, much warmer personalities than their brother, assure Jane that she can stay with them.

Like Rochester, Jane disguises her own identity and hides her past, as if she could make a new start. She wants to be self-supporting and free of her previous life, but this is an illusion. St. John, like Rochester, is a commanding male character.

CHAPTER 30

Jane quickly becomes friends with Mary and Diana. They share books and conversation, Jane teaches them drawing, and they all enjoy the hardy natural landscape. A month passes in this way, but then Mary and Diana must leave for their jobs as governesses in wealthy households. The Rivers sisters tell Jane that they suspect that St. John will also leave, maybe forever, to become a missionary.

Jane finds kinship and love with Mary and Diana, as she once did with Helen and Ms. Temple. They share an emotional and intellectual bond. The Rivers sisters mirror Jane in their educations, missing parents, and governess jobs.

St. John, unlike his sisters, remains pensive and distant at home. Jane visits his church and hears him preach a stern sermon that leaves her feeling sad. In conversation, the two of them realize that they both feel restless but in different ways.

Like Jane, St. John is restless for a "new servitude." But he seems to serve out of a cold religious passion that does not allow for any human feelings.

St. John offers Jane a position running a small school for the poor children of his parish in Morton. The pay and lodgings are meager, but Jane is glad for the job's independence, so she accepts.

The teaching job fits Jane's personality: independent, modest, and respectable. Jane can nurture virtues, not empty social conventions, in her students.

Soon after, a letter arrives informing St. John, Mary, and Diana that their wealthy uncle John has just died and left them nothing, with his fortune going to an unknown "other relation." They tell Jane that it was their uncle who led their father into his disastrous business failure.

The uncle turns out to be Jane's uncle, too—John Eyre. As his heir, Jane will have the opportunity to reconcile the families and repay the Rivers's charity.

CHAPTER 31

Jane starts work at her school. She has 20 students with little education. While Jane believes that personal potential is not limited to social class, she cannot help feeling a little degraded in becoming a small-town teacher and fears her life is going nowhere. Still, she thanks God for guiding her decision not to become Rochester's mistress.

As a teacher, Jane will instill in her students the education that gave her self-respect and strong morals. Since Jane has grown so much, the job now feels small to her, just as being Rochester's mistress would have felt small.

In conversation, St. John reassures Jane that he also had doubts about choosing his career in the parish church, but that now he has found his life's purpose—to become a missionary in India. St. John speaks with conviction about choosing the difficult but noble path in life.

St. John and Jane both have strong personalities and convictions, but their values differ. Jane learns from St. John about determination, but will choose a different path.

One of the school's benefactors is the rich and classically beautiful Rosamond Oliver. Jane can see that Rosamond and St. John are in love.

Rosamond's name is French for the "rose of the world." She represents the earthly desire that St. John rejects for his cold spiritual principles.

CHAPTER 32

As the days pass, Jane starts to enjoy her teaching, makes progress with her students, and becomes a respected favorite in the community. She enjoys her new life, but is unsettled by persistent and stirring dreams of Rochester.

Unlike St. John, Jane can't leave her true feelings behind. Jane's dreams are a window into her emotions and spirituality.

Rosamond makes frequent visits to the school, conveniently arriving when St. John is also there. Jane notices that St. John is visibly affected by Rosamond's presence. At home, Jane draws a portrait of Rosamond and offers it to St. John, hoping to learn more about his feelings. Infatuated, St. John gazes at the portrait and daydreams for a blissful 15 minutes. Jane sees her opportunity and boldly suggests that St. John marry Rosamond. St. John admits his love for her, but doubts that Rosamond would take well to missionary work. St. John says that he will not exchange earthly delights for the heavenly kingdom he is working so hard to reach. Suddenly, St. John spots something on the edge of Jane's drawing paper. He tears off a corner of it and, looking agitated, leaves abruptly. Jane, confused, dismisses the act as meaningless.

Jane surprises St. John in speaking to him more boldly and directly than women typically do. Jane wants St. John and Rosamond to marry in part because their happiness would substitute for the marriage that Jane cannot have. The portrait Jane draws represents passion and imagination. St. John's eventual rejection of these things reveals the main difference between St. John and Jane—Jane won't completely reject her feelings. What St. John sees on Jane's drawing paper is not immediately clear.

CHAPTER 33

The following night, St. John fights through the snow to visit Jane. He tells her a story which, to Jane's astonishment, is her own personal history. It ends with something she didn't know: after Jane disappeared from Thornfield, an urgent message came that her uncle John Eyre had died and left her a fortune of 20,000 pounds.

St. John is associated with ice and snow, symbolizing his cold personality and lack of affectionate emotions. The money will make Jane independent, without having to work or to marry for financial security.

Notices and letters were posted everywhere to find Jane. One reached St. John because John Eyre is in fact his uncle, too. St. John reveals to Jane his full name: St. John Eyre Rivers. His mother was Jane's father's sister, so St. John, Mary, and Diana are all Jane's cousins. St. John says he pieced together the mystery from the scrap of drawing paper he grabbed at the end of Chapter 32: it had her signature, "Jane Eyre." Jane is elated to suddenly have close family, and decides the best thing she could do is share her new fortune equally among all of them. Jane hopes the money will allow Mary, Diana, and St. John all to be financially independent and to live nearby.

Rochester ended up married to Bertha because social convention is that people do not share inheritances. Out of love and gratitude to the Rivers, Jane breaks that social rule. As for the Rivers, Jane's generosity rewards their true Christian charity, which was given without any expectation of compensation. In sharing her inheritance, Jane also atones for the injustices of her uncle, whose dealings impoverished the Rivers' father.

CHAPTER 34

When the winter holidays arrive, Jane closes her school and spends a happy Christmas with Mary and Diana, who have returned from their jobs. St. John, on the other hand, is increasingly distant and cold. Asked about Rosamond Oliver, St. John tells them she has recently married a wealthy aristocrat.

The cheery holidays illustrate the loving home that Jane has found. St. John though has little respect for worldly connections. He won't even admit unhappiness for having lost Rosamond.

One day, St. John finds Jane studying German and suggests that she learn "Hindostanee" instead—the language he's studying for his missionary work in India. Jane agrees, and notes that she feels as if St. John is slowly gaining a strong influence over her, but one that leaves her cold.

As happened with Rochester, Jane instinct towards "servitude" lead her into a position as a helper to a strong and commanding man.

Time passes. That summer, St. John takes Jane on a walk in the hills. St. John tells Jane she has admirable qualities, and proposes that she marry him and accompany him on his missionary work. But Jane's "heart is mute." She recognizes that she could never be happy as St. John's wife. She tells him she would only go to work in India as his sister. He responds that in denying his proposal she is denying the Christian faith.

Unlike Rochester, St. John only admires Jane's qualities for their usefulness. He wants her to be a traditional religious wife—an aide to her husband. He doesn't love her; he only loves his religion. While St. John believes that human hearts should only serve God, Jane wants the freedom to feel.

CHAPTER 35

St. John continues to try to convince Jane to marry him. Jane knows that working in India would be a tremendous sacrifice: the heat and heavy labor would soon take her life. She reflects that death doesn't scare her, but that she wants to feel real love in life. Diana agrees that Jane shouldn't go, saying that St. John wants Jane merely to be a tool in his great missionary cause.

Living an independent life, experiencing new feelings, and finding love are all important to Jane. She shows respect for God by trying to find a path that is true to all of her needs.

One evening after dinner, St. John reads prayers aloud with such fervor and command that Jane feels compelled to accept his marriage proposal.

The strength of St. John's mission and faith almost overwhelms Jane.

Yet just as she's about to give in, Jane hears Rochester's voice calling for help as if from a great distance: "Jane! Jane! Jane!" She rushes outside and cries out a promise to come to him.

While Jane's heart is "mute" to St. John, it speaks directly to Rochester. Jane's spiritual connection to Rochester restores her independence.

CHAPTER 36

As Jane prepares to leave to go to Thornfield, St. John slips a note under her door urging her to resist temptation. Though unsure herself, Jane feels that what's she's doing is right and that the voice and the "wondrous shock of feeling" she felt were real.

St. John thinks that all feeling is wrong. He does not value passion or human love. But Jane, while herself unsure, still believes in it.

On the journey to Thornfield, Jane thinks about the differences the year away has made in her. Formerly poor and alone, she now has a family and a fortune.

Jane used to be dependent on Rochester for family and money. Now she returns to him for love, and is independent.

At Thornfield, though, Jane is astonished to find the house burned down and in ruins.

Jane's dreams in Chapter 25 foreshadowed this destruction.

Jane learns what happened from the proprietor of a local inn. Bertha escaped and set Jane's old bedroom on fire. As the inferno spread, Rochester helped all the servants get out safely. But he could not save Bertha, who stood on the roof laughing maniacally and then jumped to her death. In the collapsing building, Rochester was badly injured: he lost a hand and lost his sight. He lives nearby in a modest house called Ferndean.

Bertha uses fire to destroy the room where Jane, who stole Bertha's husband's love, lived. Fire symbolizes Bertha's unrestrained passions and madness. The inferno represents the fatal consequences of Rochester's secrets. He loses his eyes, symbols of his pride and power, as punishment from God.

CHAPTER 37

Jane travels to Ferndean, which is deep in the forest. When she arrives, she sees Rochester in the yard. He looks physically strong still, but now his face looks desperate and sad. Rochester shrugs off the help of a servant, wanders hesitatingly around the yard, and returns inside.

In crisis, Rochester ends up in the woods, just as Jane wandered in the wilderness during her crisis. Though diminished, Rochester still tries to remain independent, refusing all help.

Jane knocks and talks with the servants at the door. Jane then takes to Rochester a tray with a glass of water that he had asked a servant to bring him. Jane enters the parlor and offers him the water. He recognizes Jane's voice and thinks at first that she is a ghost, but then catches her hand and takes her into his arms, brimming with emotion.

Jane literally takes the place of the servant by bringing the tray—she returns to Rochester to serve him forever. Rochester may be physically powerless, but he is still her master.

Jane updates Rochester about her new wealth and leads him on about St. John, jokingly using jealousy to distract him from misery. Rochester mentions all of his infirmities, and advises Jane to go her own way. But Jane, loving him more than ever, promises never to leave him again. Rochester asks her to marry him. Jane joyfully accepts.

Jane's teasing and Rochester's newfound humility show that Jane is also Rochester's master. They are equals—each other's masters—and so their marriage is a joining of two independent people.

Rochester tells Jane about his new repentant relationship with God. He feels punished for his pride and now prays regularly. One evening, asking for God's help in restoring his happiness, he had involuntarily called out for "Jane! Jane! Jane!" and felt as if he heard her respond. Jane is awed by their shared connection. Serving as "his prop and his guide," she leads him home.

Rochester was punished for his pride and arrogance through divine justice. Rochester finally finds redemption through religion. Like Jane after her time of trials that led her to Moor house, Rochester is chastened, prayerful, and humble.

CHAPTER 38

The final chapter begins with the famous line: "Reader, I married him." Remaining at Ferndean, Jane and Rochester have a small, quiet wedding and live in perfect harmony. Jane never tires of guiding her husband, reading aloud to him, and describing the landscape to him. St. John never comments on Jane's marriage, but Mary and Diana are overjoyed about it.

Jane is Rochester's prop and his guide, both his servant and his master. She becomes his eyes, which were a symbol of his power. St. John does not respond because human love means nothing to him, but the rest of Jane's family is joyful.

Jane visits Adèle and finds her unhappy in a harsh school. Jane transfers her to a more liberal one closer to home. Through a good English education, Adèle's "French defects" are purged and she grows into a polite and principled young woman.

Jane represents specifically English values, nurtured in good homes and schools. In reforming Adèle, Jane also reforms Rochester's sinful past.

Two years into their marriage, Rochester partially regains sight in one eye in time to see the birth of their first baby: a son who inherits Rochester's brilliant black eyes.

Rochester's regained sight shows how God tempers justice with mercy. The son represents Rochester's redemption.

Writing ten years after the events of the novel, Jane informs the reader that Diana and Mary both have married respectable and caring husbands and visit regularly. St. John went to India alone. She says that in his last letter, St. John said that he had a premonition of his death, and she adds that she does not expect another letter from him. Jane ends by saying that she doesn't grieve for St. John, who has done God's work, and then quotes St. John's last letter, in which he begs his Master, Jesus Christ, to take him soon.

St. John is solitary and strong, but his fate is sad. He and Jane both craved and found a "master" they can serve. Unlike St. John, however, Jane doesn't sacrifice herself (or her life) in order to serve that master and be virtuous. Instead, Jane has found a balance between love and purpose, and between independence and service.

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