

# Jane Eyre

## Background Info

### Author Bio

**Full Name:** Charlotte Brontë

**Pen Name:** Currer Bell, the "editor"

**Date of Birth:** 1816

**Place of Birth:** Yorkshire, England

**Date of Death:** 1855

**Brief Life Story:** 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.

### Key Facts

**Full Title:** *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*

**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.

**Protagonist:** Jane Eyre

**Antagonists:** Mrs. Reed, Bertha Mason, St. John Rivers

**Point of View:** First person. Jane recounts her story ten years after its ending.

### Historical and Literary Context

**When Written:** 1847

**Literary Period:** Victorian

**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).

**Related Historical Events:** 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.

### 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

**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.

**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 flirtily 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## Themes

In LitCharts, each theme gets its own corresponding color, which you can use to track where the themes occur in the work. There are two ways to track themes:

- Refer to the color-coded bars next to each plot point throughout the *Summary and Analysis* sections.
- Use the *ThemeTracker* section to get a quick overview of where the themes appear throughout the entire work.

### 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 hand 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 are shown in **red** text whenever they appear in the *Plot Summary* and *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.

## Summary and Analysis


The color-coded bars in *Summary and Analysis* make it easy to track the themes through the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the *Themes* section. For instance, a bar of  indicates that all six themes apply to that part of the summary.

### Preface

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 mooping, 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 that **Mrs. Reed** raise Jane like one of her own children.


*Along 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 endure 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.”

**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.

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.

**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.

## 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.

**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.

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.”

## 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** 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.

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



*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.*



*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.*



*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.”*



*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.*



*Thornfield’s supernatural qualities grow even more pronounced.*



*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.*



*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.

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.

## 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.

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.

**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 first 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.

## 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.

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.

**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.

*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.”*



*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.*



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



*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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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 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.

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.

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.

**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.

*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.*



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



*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.*



*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.

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 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.*



*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.

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.

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.

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



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



*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.

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.

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



*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.

**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.

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.

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**.

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



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



*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.*



*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 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.

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**.)

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.

*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.*



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



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



*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 "Hindustanee" 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.*



## Important Quotes

### 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. — *John Reed*

### 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.

### Chapter 3 Quotes

I shook my head: I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste.

### 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 un hoped-for liberty.

### Chapter 6 Quotes

I hold another creed: ... it makes Eternity a rest—a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss. ... with this creed revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low: I live in calm, looking to the end. — *Helen Burns*

### 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.

### 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!"

### 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.

### 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.

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.

### Chapter 13 Quotes

I knew my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows; his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognized his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, cholera; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw—yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake.

### 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.

### 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."

### 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*.

### 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 dearest 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?

### Chapter 21 Quotes

Presentiments are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs; and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key.

### Chapter 22 Quotes

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

### 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 — *Rochester*

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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!

### Chapter 30 Quotes

There was a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first time—the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles.

### 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.

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.

### 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.

### Chapter 34 Quotes

I found him a very patient, very forbearing, and yet an exacting master ... By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind ... But I did not love my servitude: I wished, many a time, he had continued to neglect me.

### Chapter 35 Quotes

I broke from St. John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force ... I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and prayed in my way—a different way to St. John's, but effective in its own fashion.

### 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.

Then he stretched his hand out to be led. I took that dear hand, held it a moment to my lips, then let it pass round my shoulder: being so much lower of stature than he, I served both for his prop and guide.

### Chapter 38 Quotes

Reader, I married him.

## ThemeTracker™

The LitCharts ThemeTracker is a mini-version of the entire LitChart. The ThemeTracker provides a quick timeline-style rundown of all the important plot points and allows you to track the themes throughout the work at a glance.

Themes	Chapter	
	<b>Preface</b>	– “Currer Bell” attacks literary critics who expect authors to stick to stylistic and moral conventions.
	<b>1</b>	– <b>Jane</b> is treated cruelly by her cousin <b>John Reed</b> and fights back when provoked. As punishment, <b>Mrs. Reed</b> locks Jane in the <b>red-room</b> .
	<b>2</b>	– In the <b>red-room</b> , <b>Jane</b> is terrified when she thinks she sees her uncle <b>Mr. Reed’s</b> ghost. Jane screams and begs to be let out, but <b>Mrs. Reed</b> refuses.
	<b>3</b>	– The apothecary <b>Mr. Lloyd</b> offers <b>Jane</b> a chance to attend school and gets permission from <b>Mrs. Reed</b> .
	<b>4</b>	– During <b>Jane’s</b> interview for Lowood school with <b>Mr. Brocklehurst</b> , <b>Mrs. Reed</b> warns him that Jane is deceitful. Furious with her aunt, <b>Jane</b> later exposes <b>Mrs. Reed</b> as a hypocrite.
	<b>5</b>	– <b>Jane</b> arrives at Lowood school. She meets the kindly headmistress <b>Ms. Maria Temple</b> . – <b>Jane</b> spots <b>Helen Burns</b> reading alone and introduces herself.
	<b>6</b>	– <b>Jane</b> watches <b>Helen</b> get punished and whipped by <b>Miss Scatcherd</b> . Helen describes to Jane her philosophy on suffering and hope.
	<b>7</b>	– <b>Mr. Brocklehurst</b> visits Lowood and orders the students’ hair to be cut off. Mr. Brocklehurst humiliates <b>Jane</b> by proclaiming that she is a liar and making her stand front-and-center on a stool.
	<b>8</b>	– <b>Helen Burns</b> and <b>Ms. Temple</b> console <b>Jane</b> , and they all talk and <b>snack</b> in Ms. Temple’s office. After writing to <b>Mr. Lloyd</b> , Ms. Temple announces to the whole school that Jane is innocent.
	<b>9</b>	– In the spring, a typhus epidemic kills many Lowood students. <b>Helen Burns</b> dies from consumption.
	<b>10</b>	– Eight years pass. <b>Jane</b> becomes a teacher at Lowood. <b>Ms. Temple</b> gets married and moves away. Jane advertises in the newspaper for a governess job and is contacted by <b>Mrs. Fairfax</b> .
	<b>11</b>	– <b>Jane</b> travels to Thornfield Hall and meets <b>Mrs. Fairfax</b> and <b>Adèle Varens</b> . On a tour of the house, Jane hears strange laughter from the third floor. Mrs. Fairfax blames it on the servant <b>Grace Poole</b> .
	<b>12</b>	– One night on a walk, <b>Jane</b> helps a mysterious rider when his horse slips on a patch of ice. The rider turns out to be <b>Mr. Edward Rochester</b> .
	<b>13</b>	– <b>Jane</b> and <b>Rochester</b> speak at evening tea. Rochester is gruff and impolite. Rochester admires Jane’s portfolio of <b>drawings</b> .
	<b>14</b>	– A little drunk, <b>Rochester</b> speaks again to <b>Jane</b> and more freely about his difficult past.
	<b>15</b>	– <b>Rochester</b> tells <b>Jane</b> about his history with <b>Céline Varens</b> and <b>Adèle</b> . – In the middle of the night, <b>Jane</b> hears demonic laughter and finds <b>Rochester’s</b> bedroom on <b>fire</b> . She saves his life.
	<b>16</b>	– <b>Rochester</b> lies about what happened to the servants. Rochester leaves to join a party of aristocrats including <b>Blanche Ingram</b> .
	<b>17</b>	– The party comes to Thornfield. – <b>Blanche</b> flirts energetically with <b>Rochester</b> .
	<b>18</b>	– <b>Mr. Mason</b> comes looking for <b>Rochester</b> who is away on business. – A gypsy visits the party and tells everyone’s fortune. <b>Blanche</b> looks especially disappointed.

## Theme Key

Love, Family, and Independence

Social Class and Social Rules

Gender Roles

Religion

Feeling vs. Judgment

The Spiritual and the Supernatural

- 19** – The gypsy interviews **Jane**.  
– Jane discovers that the gypsy is actually **Rochester** in disguise.
- 20** – A scream wakes everyone at midnight. **Rochester** again blames **Grace Poole**. Upstairs, **Mr. Mason** has been bitten and stabbed. **Jane** helps Rochester patch him up and send him off before dawn. Rochester tells Jane he plans to marry **Blanche Ingram**.
- 21** – **Jane** gets a message from Gateshead: **John Reed** committed suicide and **Mrs. Reed** is very ill. Jane visits **Mrs. Reed** who has been hiding a letter from Jane's uncle, **John Eyre**. Mrs. Reed soon dies still hating Jane.
- 22** – **Jane** stays at Gateshead until **Georgiana** and **Eliza** leave for good. Returning to Thornfield, Jane meets **Rochester** on the road in his new carriage.
- 23** – One evening, **Rochester** follows **Jane** into the orchard to talk. Jane cries at the prospect of leaving Thornfield. Rochester reveals his real intentions: to marry Jane, not **Blanche**. He proposes and Jane accepts. Later, the tree they were sitting under gets split in half by lightning.
- 24** – Preparing for the wedding, **Rochester** overwhelms **Jane** with flattery and expensive gifts.
- 25** – While **Rochester** is away, **Jane** has two strange dreams and wakes up to find **Bertha** in her closet. Bertha tears Jane's new wedding veil in two. Jane faints in terror. Rochester promises to explain everything to Jane a year into their marriage.
- 26** – **Rochester** and **Jane** go the church, but their wedding ceremony is interrupted when a London lawyer and **Mr. Mason** claim that Rochester is already married. Rochester takes everyone to Thornfield's third floor and reveals **Bertha Mason**, who attacks him.
- 27** – **Rochester** asks **Jane** to escape with him to southern France but Jane refuses.  
– **Jane's** mother appears to her in a dream. Jane secretly leaves Thornfield before dawn.
- 28** – **Jane** is forced to beg for **food** in a strange village. She nearly starves in the wilderness. Jane finds Moor House and meets **Mary**, **Diana**, and **St. John Rivers** who take her in. Jane gives them a false name.
- 29** – **Jane** suffers three days of delirium. On her recovery, Jane tells **St. John** she has no ties to anyone in England and asks for help finding a job.
- 30** – **Jane** makes fast friends with **Mary** and **Diana Rivers**.  
– **St. John** offers **Jane** a job as a teacher in a small, country school.
- 31** – **Jane** watches **Rosamond Oliver** flirt with **St. John**.
- 32** – At home, **Jane** draws a **portrait** of **Rosamond** for **St. John** and suggests he propose marriage, but St. John has other plans to become a missionary. St. John tears off a corner of Jane's scratch drawing paper.
- 33** – **St. John** pieces together **Jane's** true identity. Jane has inherited a fortune from her uncle, **John Eyre**. **Jane** discovers that **Mary**, **Diana**, and St. John are her cousins. Jane decides to split her fortune equally and live at Moor House.
- 34** – **St. John** proposes marriage to **Jane** and asks for her help in India. Jane does not love him and refuses.
- 35** – **Jane** almost changes her mind during **St. John's** powerful reading of prayers.  
– Suddenly, **Jane** hears **Rochester's** disembodied voice calling for help.
- 36** – **Jane** returns to Thornfield and discovers it in ruins. **Bertha** burned it down and jumped off the roof. **Rochester** was **blinded** and injured in the **fire**.
- 37** – **Jane** finds **Rochester** at Ferndean. She pretends to be his servant but he recognizes her voice. **Rochester** proposes marriage again and **Jane** accepts.
- 38** – **Rochester** partially regains his sight. He and **Jane** have a son who inherits Rochester's **eyes**. **St. John** occasionally sends **Jane** letters from India. His last letter suggests that he will soon die.