

Jane Eyre (1847)

by Charlotte Brontë

PLOT



Jane Eyre is the story of a young, orphaned girl who lives with her aunt and cousins, the Reeds, at Gateshead Hall. Mrs. Reed hates Jane and allows her son John to torment the girl. Even the servants are constantly reminding Jane that she's poor and worthless. At the tender age of ten, Jane rises up against this treatment and tells them all *exactly* what she thinks of them.



She's punished by being locked in "the red room," the bedroom where her uncle died, and she has a hysterical fit when she thinks his ghost is appearing. After this, nobody knows what to do with her, so they send her away to a religious boarding school for orphans—Lowood Institute.

At Lowood, which is run by the hypocritical headmaster Mr. Brocklehurst, the students never have enough to eat or warm clothes. However, Jane finds a good friend, Helen Burns, and a nice teacher, Miss Temple. Under their influence, she becomes an excellent student.

She learns all the little bits and pieces of culture that made up a lady's education in Victorian England: French, piano-playing, singing, and drawing. Unfortunately, an epidemic of typhus breaks out at the school, and Helen dies.



Jane remains at Lowood as a student until she's sixteen, and then as a teacher until she's eighteen. When Miss Temple leaves the school to get married, Jane decides to go away and become a governess. The governess job that Jane accepts is to teach the master's foster child Adele Varens, a little French girl, at a country house called Thornfield .

Actually, Jane goes there thinking that she'll be working for a woman named Mrs. Fairfax; but Mrs. Fairfax is just the housekeeper: the owner of the house is the mysterious Mr. Rochester.

Although he has a brusque manner, Jane finds the master, Edward Fairfax Rochester, attractive and fascinating.



One night Jane is awakened by strange noises. Seeing smoke coming from Mr. Rochester's room, she runs in and throws water on the fire, awakening him. He leads Jane to believe that it is Grace Poole, a servant, who caused the damage.

Meanwhile, Mr. Rochester apparently pursues Blanche Ingram, a local beauty, while Jane's love for him continues to grow.

Jane leaves Thornfield to visit the dying Mrs. Reed, who tells her that John Eyre, her father's brother, is trying to contact her.

When Jane returns to Thornfield, Mr. Rochester switches his affections from Blanche to Jane, and proposes marriage. The wedding ceremony is interrupted by Mr. Briggs, who claims that Mr. Rochester is already married. The mad Bertha Rochester, who is locked away on the third floor of Thornfield, is exposed to Jane.



Jane runs away, and arrives at Moor House where she is taken in by St. John Rivers, a minister. Jane receives an inheritance from her uncle, John Eyre. St. John Rivers proposes marriage to Jane, but she declines since she still has Mr. Rochester on her mind.



Jane returns to Thornfield and discovers it has burned to the ground. It seems that Bertha Rochester set the fire and died in it, while Mr. Rochester suffered a mangled hand that had to be amputated and has been left blind. Jane reunites with Mr. Rochester at Ferndean, his current home, and they marry.

Ten years pass, and Jane tells us how happy she is with married life; Mr. Rochester has regained partial vision in one eye, and they have a son.

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