

JANE EYRE

PREISS  MURPHY
School Publishers

About the Author

Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë was born on 21 April 1816 in Thornton, Yorkshire. She was the third of six children, all of whom were girls except Branwell, who was born in 1817. In 1820, the family moved to Haworth village, the village where the Brontës would write most of their novels. In 1824, Charlotte went to a Clergy Daughters School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire, together with her older sisters Maria and Elizabeth, as well as her younger sister Emily (who we know for her novel *Wuthering Heights*). Maria and Elizabeth died at school, leaving Charlotte the eldest child of the Brontë family. The circumstances and Charlotte's experiences at school were to serve as inspiration for Lowood school in *Jane Eyre*.

Characterization

Jane Eyre:

An orphan since early childhood, Jane feels exiled and ostracized at the beginning of the novel, and the cruel treatment she receives from her Aunt Reed and her cousins only exacerbates her feeling of alienation. Afraid that she will never find a true sense of home or community, Jane feels the need to belong somewhere, to find "kin," or at least "kindred spirits." This desire tempers her equally intense need for autonomy and freedom.

Edward Rochester:

Despite his stern manner and not particularly handsome appear-

ance, Edward Rochester wins Jane's heart, because she feels they are kindred spirits, and because he is the first person in the novel to offer Jane lasting love and a real home. Although Rochester is Jane's social and economic superior, and although men were widely considered to be naturally superior to women in the Victorian period, Jane is Rochester's intellectual equal.

St. John Rivers:

St. John Rivers is a foil to Edward Rochester. Whereas Rochester is passionate, St. John is strict and ambitious. Jane often describes Rochester's eyes as flashing and flaming, whereas she constantly associates St. John with rock, ice, and snow. Marriage with Rochester represents the abandonment of principle for the consummation of passion, but marriage to St. John would mean sacrificing passion for principle.

Helen Burns:

Helen Burns, Jane's friend at Lowood School, serves as a foil to Mr. Brocklehurst as well as to Jane. While Mr. Brocklehurst embodies an radical form of religion that seeks to strip others of their excessive pride or of their ability to take pleasure in worldly things, Helen represents a mode of Christianity that stresses tolerance and acceptance. Brocklehurst uses religion to gain power and to control others; Helen ascetically trusts her own faith and turns the other cheek to Lowood's harsh policies.

Mrs. Reed:

Mrs. Reed is Jane's cruel aunt, who raises her at Gateshead Hall until

Jane is sent away to school at age ten. Later in her life, Jane attempts reconciliation with her aunt, but the old woman continues to resent her because her husband had always loved Jane more than his own children.

Bessie Lee:

The maid at Gateshead, Bessie is the only figure in Jane's childhood who regularly treats her kindly, telling her stories and singing her songs. Bessie later marries Robert Leaven, the Reeds' coachman.

Maria Temple:

Maria Temple is a kind teacher at Lowood, who treats Jane and Helen with respect and compassion. Along with Bessie Lee, she serves as one of Jane's first positive female role models. Miss Temple helps clear Jane of Mrs. Reed's accusations against her.

Grace Pool:

Grace Poole is Bertha Mason's keeper at Thornfield, whose drunken carelessness frequently allows Bertha to escape. When Jane first arrives at Thornfield, Mrs. Fairfax attributes to Grace all evidence of Bertha's misdeeds.

Richard Mason:

Richard Mason is Bertha's brother. During a visit to Thornfield, he is injured by his mad sister. After learning of Rochester's intent to marry Jane, Mason arrives with the solicitor Briggs in order to thwart the wedding and reveal the truth of Rochester's prior marriage.

Mr. Briggs:

John Eyre's attorney, Mr. Briggs helps Richard Mason prevent Jane's wedding to Rochester when he learns of the existence of Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife. After John Eyre's death, Briggs searches for Jane in order to give her her inheritance.

Plot Overview:

Jane Eyre is a young orphan being raised by Mrs. Reed, her cruel, wealthy aunt. A servant named Bessie provides Jane with some of the few kindnesses she receives, telling her stories and singing songs to her. One day, as punishment for fighting with her bullying cousin John Reed, Jane's aunt imprisons Jane in the red-room, the room in which Jane's Uncle Reed died. While locked in, Jane, believing that she sees her uncle's ghost, screams and faints. She wakes to find herself in the care of Bessie and the kindly apothecary Mr. Lloyd, who suggests to Mrs. Reed that Jane be sent away to school. To Jane's delight, Mrs. Reed concurs.

Once at the Lowood School, Jane finds that her life is far from idyllic. The school's headmaster is Mr. Brocklehurst, a cruel, hypocritical, and abusive man. Brocklehurst preaches a doctrine of poverty and privation to his students while using the school's funds to provide a wealthy and opulent lifestyle for his own family. At Lowood, Jane befriends a young girl named Helen Burns, whose strong, martyrlike attitude toward the school's miseries is both helpful and displeasing to Jane. A massive typhus epidemic sweeps Lowood, and Helen dies of consumption. The epidemic also results in the departure of Mr. Brocklehurst by attracting attention to the insalubrious

conditions at Lowood. After a group of more sympathetic gentlemen takes Brocklehurst's place, Jane's life improves dramatically. She spends eight more years at Lowood, six as a student and two as a teacher.

After teaching for two years, Jane yearns for new experiences. She accepts a governess position at a manor called Thornfield, where she teaches a lively French girl named Adèle. The distinguished housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax presides over the estate. Jane's employer at Thornfield is a dark, impassioned man named Rochester, with whom Jane finds herself falling secretly in love. She saves Rochester from a fire one night, which he claims was started by a drunken servant named Grace Poole. But because Grace Poole continues to work at Thornfield, Jane concludes that she has not been told the entire story. Jane sinks into despondency when Rochester brings home a beautiful but vicious woman named Blanche Ingram. Jane expects Rochester to propose to Blanche. But Rochester instead proposes to Jane, who accepts almost disbelievingly.

The wedding day arrives, and as Jane and Mr. Rochester prepare to exchange their vows, the voice of Mr. Mason cries out that Rochester already has a wife. Mason introduces himself as the brother of that wife—a woman named Bertha. Mr. Mason testifies that Bertha, whom Rochester married when he was a young man in Jamaica, is still alive. Rochester does not deny Mason's claims, but he explains that Bertha has gone mad. He takes the wedding party back to Thornfield, where they witness the insane Bertha Mason scurrying around on all fours and growling like an animal. Rochester keeps Bertha hidden on the third story of Thornfield and pays Grace Poole to keep his wife under control. Bertha was the real cause of the mys-

terious fire earlier in the story. Knowing that it is impossible for her to be with Rochester, Jane flees Thornfield.

Penniless and hungry, Jane is forced to sleep outdoors and beg for food. At last, three siblings who live in a manor alternatively called Marsh End and Moor House take her in. Their names are Mary, Diana, and St. John (pronounced “Sinjin”) Rivers, and Jane quickly becomes friends with them. St. John is a clergyman, and he finds Jane a job teaching at a charity school in Morton. He surprises her one day by declaring that her uncle, John Eyre, has died and left her a large fortune: 20,000 pounds. When Jane asks how he received this news, he shocks her further by declaring that her uncle was also his uncle: Jane and the Riverses are cousins. Jane immediately decides to share her inheritance equally with her three newfound relatives.

St. John decides to travel to India as a missionary, and he urges Jane to accompany him—as his wife. Jane agrees to go to India but refuses to marry her cousin because she does not love him. St. John pressures her to reconsider, and she nearly gives in. However, she realizes that she cannot abandon forever the man she truly loves when one night she hears Rochester’s voice calling her name over the moors. Jane immediately hurries back to Thornfield and finds that it has been burned to the ground by Bertha Mason, who lost her life in the fire. Rochester saved the servants but lost his eyesight and one of his hands. Jane travels on to Rochester’s new residence, Ferndean, where he lives with two servants named John and Mary.

At Ferndean, Rochester and Jane rebuild their relationship and soon marry. At the end of her story, Jane writes that she has been married for ten blissful years and that she and Rochester enjoy perfect equality in their life together. She says that after two years of blindness,

Rochester regained sight in one eye and was able to behold their first son at his birth.

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CHAPTER 1

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wondering, indeed, in the leafless shrubs for an hour or so this morning; but since dinner, the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so dark and dull, and rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad that we did not go out that afternoon. I never liked long walks, especially during chilly weather. Dreadful for me was the fact of coming home in the twilight, with frozen cold fingers and toes only to be greeted by the angry glares of Eliza, John and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John and Georgiana gathered around their mama in the drawing – room enjoying the warmth of the fire. They looked perfectly happy and content. As for me, I was exempted from the honour of their company. And, until Bessie says a good word in my favour about how I mended my ways and behaved properly in her presence, I shall be deprived from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children.

“But, what have I done?” I asked

“Jane, I don’t like mischievous children. Besides, there is something truly forbidding about a child who challenges her elders in that manner of yours. Be seated somewhere; and until you learn how to speak pleasantly, remain silent” answered Mrs. Reed.

I stepped out of the room without another word and went directly to a small breakfast – room adjoined the drawing room. The room contained a massive book – case: I went through the books quickly and decided on one that was stored with pictures and colourful illustrations. I mounted into the window seat, gathering up my feet, I sat cross –

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legged and drew the window curtains around me to be totally concealed from sight.

I don't know how long I sat there hidden from the world as my lush imagination painted a live portrait of the book that was rested on my lap. I was like a moth drawn to the light. I devoured chapter after chapter with a big smile on my face. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon. The breakfast – door opened.

“Boh ! Miss Menace” cried the voice of John Reed; then he paused: he found the room apparently empty.

“Where the Dickens is she?” he whispered. “Lizzy! Georgy!” (calling to his sister) “Jane is not here: tell mama she is run out into the rain – bad animal!”

“It's well that I drew the curtains over me,” I thought to myself; and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding place. John was not that intelligent to discover my hiding place. If it wasn't for his sister Eliza, I would never had been found. Eliza just poked her head in the room and said at once: “She's in the window – seat, to be sure, Jack”

And I came out immediately; for I trembled at the idea of being dragged from behind the curtains by John.

“What do you want?” I asked with awkward shyness.

“Say, what do you want Master Reed?” he said with a cruel smile on his face. “I want you to come here at once” he answered as he leaned on the wall and made a gesture with his hand that I was to approach and stand before him.

John Reed was a school boy of fourteen years old: four years older than I, for I was but ten. He was a large and stout boy for his age. John ought now to be at school; but his mama had taken him home for a month or two “On account of his delicate health” she said!

John had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and he despised me with all his might. He bullied and punished me: not two

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or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually. Every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. The servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my side against his, as for Mrs. Reed, she was blind and deaf on the subject: she never saw him beat me or hear him abuse me; though he did both in her presence. More frequently however behind her back.

I approached John hesitantly. He spent some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at me as far as he could. I knew he would strike, and while I helplessly waited for his blow, I looked at his rude appearance in disgust. I wonder if he read that notion in my face. As quick as a flash he struck me suddenly and strongly. I took a step or two away from his reach.

“That’s for hiding behind the curtains you rat!” he exclaimed. Accustomed to his continuous insults, I never had the idea of answering back; all I cared about now was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow his insult.

“What were you doing behind the curtain?” he asked

“I was reading”

“Show the book”

I returned to the window and fetched it at once.

“You have no business to take our books: you are an orphan, 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, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense. Now, I will teach you to go through my book – shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years time that is. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows”

I did so, not at first aware of his intention; but when I saw him lift the heavy book and stand in act to throw it, I instinctively moved aside

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with a cry of alarm: not soon enough however; the heavy volume was flung, it hit me and I fell to the ground, struck my head against the door cutting it. Warm blood trickled down my forehead and on the floor. The pain was sharp: my terror disappeared followed by a fit of anger.

“Wicked and cruel boy!” I shouted. “You are like a murderer – you are like a slave runner, you are like the Roman emperors!” I added. (I had read all about the History of Rome).

“What! What!” he cried “Did you hear what she called me, Eliza and Georgiana? Won’t I tell mama? But first.....”

He barged towards me and grabbed me by the hair. I really saw in him a tyrant: a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck. In act of desperation I tossed my arm towards his face and landed a blow to his chin. It must have hurt him because he ran off to his mama crying out loud like an infant. Aid was near him: both Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs. Reed, who dashed into the room followed by Bessie and her maid Abbot.

“Dear! Dear! What a bad temper. How could you strike master John like that?” said Bessie surprised.

“Take her away to the red – room, and lock her in there.” Four hands were immediately laid upon me, and I was borne up stairs.

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I resisted all the way: I was conscious that a moment's mutiny had already rendered me to strange penalties, and like any other rebel slave, I was desperate, hurt and determined to go all lengths paying no attention to future ill-treatment.

"Hold her arms, Miss Abbot; she's like a mad cat." Said Bessie.

"For shame! For shame!" cried Abbot. "What shocking conduct, Miss. Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your benefactress's son! Your young master!"

"Master? How is he my master? Am I a serva? I asked in shock.

"No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There sit down and think over your wickedness."

They had got me by this time into the room indicated by Mrs. Reed, and had thrust me upon a stool: my instant reaction was to rise from it like a spring; their two pair of hands arrested me instantly.

"If you don't sit still, you must be tied down," said Bessie. "Miss Abbot, lend me your belt." The threat of being restrained to the stool for God knows how long took a little of the excitement out of me.

"No, no, I won't stir, I promise" I cried. In guarantee, I attached myself to my seat by my hands.

"Mind you don't," said Bessie; and when she had ascertained that I was really subsiding, she loosened her grip of me; then she and Miss Abbot stood with folded arms, looking darkly and doubtfully on my face suspicious of my sanity.

"She was never that violent" at last said Bessie, turning to Miss Abbot.

"But it was always in her, the little beast" was the reply. "I've told Missis often my opinion about the child, and Missis agreed with me.

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She's and underhand little thing; I never saw a girl of her age with such a bad temper."

Bessie answered not; but turned to me once again, she said, "You ought to be aware, Miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed: she keeps you; if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poor house."

I had nothing to say to these words: they were not new to me; my very first recollections of existence included words and hints of the same kind.

Miss Abbot joined in: "And you ought not to think yourself on an equality with the Missis Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows you to be brought up with them. They will have a great deal of money, and you will have none: it's your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them."

"What we tell you, is for your own good," added Bessie in no harsh voice; "you should be useful and pleasant, then perhaps you would always have a home here; but if you become passionate and rude, Missis will send you away, I'm sure."

"Besides," said Miss Abbot, "God will punish her: he might strike her dead in the midst of her fits, and then where would she go? Come Bessie, we will leave her. Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; pray for forgiveness young lady or else, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney, and fetch you away." They went, shutting the door, and locking it behind them.

The red – room was a spare chamber, very seldom used; I might say never, indeed; unless when Mrs. Reed had visitors at Gateshead – Hall. Yet it was one of the largest and best kept chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany wood, hung with curtains of deep red damask cloth stood out like a shrine in the centre; two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down and a dark red carpet

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covered most of the floor. The table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; the walls were dark pink.

This room was cold, because it seldom had a fire; it was silent because it was remote from the nursery and kitchens; it was seldom entered. The housemaid alone came here on Saturdays, to wipe the mirrors and furniture from a week's quiet dust; Mrs. Reed herself, at far intervals, visited it to review the contents of a certain secret drawer in the wardrobe, where she kept her jewel – casket and a portrait of her late husband; and in those last words lies the secret of the red – room: the spell which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur.

Mr. Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this very chamber he breathed his last; here he lay as white as a sheet; hence his coffin was brought by the undertaker's men; and, since that day a state of dreary discomfort had guarded it from frequent entry.

All John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's cruelty, all the servants' mocking, turned up in my disturbed mind like a dark deposit in a turbid well. Why was I always suffering, always beaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one's favour? Eliza, who was head strong and selfish, was respected. Georgiana, who had a spoilt temper was accepted by every one and any one. Her beauty, her pink cheeks and golden curls, seemed to give delight to all who looked at her. John, was never punished; though he twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea chicks, set the dogs at the sheep and broke the buds off the beautiful flowers in the garden; he even called his own mother "old girl" and made fun of her dark skin, similar to his own. I strove to fulfil every duty; and was marked naughty and tiresome from morning to noon and from noon to night.

My head still ached and bled with the blow and fall I had received: no one had scolded John for striking me; and because I had turned against

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him to avoid further irrational violence, I was punished and locked up.

I was like an outcast in Gateshead – Hall: I was like nobody there: I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her servants.

As for Mr. Reed, I could hardly remember him. I knew that he was my own uncle – my mother’s brother – and that he had taken me as a parentless infant to his house; and that in his last moments he had required a promise of Mrs. Reed that she would maintain me and bring me up as one of her own. I doubted not – had never doubted – that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly. Warm tears tricked down my cheeks as I evaluated my poor state of being in the cold dark room. I whipped my tears and hushed my sobs and comforted myself. I didn’t want to seem weak and helpless in front of the house hold; John would take advantage of being vulnerable for sure.

I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room: at this moment a light gleamed on the wall. Was it a ray from the moon? I asked myself. No: it was still too early for moon light. While I gazed it glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head. I thought the swift – darting beam was a specter of some coming vision from another world as punishment for my sins. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot while my blood ran cold. I uttered a wild involuntary cry, ran to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort. Steps came running along the passage; the key turned, Bessie and Abbot entered.

“Miss Eyre, are you ill?” said Bessie

“What a dreadful scream! It went quite through me!” exclaimed Abbot.

“Take me out! Let me go into the nursery!” was my cry.

“What for? Are you hurt? Have you seen something?” again demanded Bessie.

“Oh! I saw a light and I thought a ghost would come.” I had now got hold of Bessie’s hand, and she did not snatch it from me.

“She has screamed out on purpose, there’s nothing in the room” declared Abbot in some disgust. “I know here naughty tricks.”

“What is all this” demanded another voice as Mr. Reed appeared from behind the open door.

“Miss Jane screamed ever so loud, ma’am” pleaded Bessie

“ You will not succeed in getting out of here by these means, be assured” said Mrs. Reed coldly: “you will now stay here an hour longer, and it’s only on condition of perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you then.”

“Oh aunt, have pity! Forgive me! I cannot endure it, let me be punished some other way! I shall be killed if –”

“Silence” said Mrs. Reed impatiently as she thrust me back and locked me in without a second’s thought. I heard her sweeping away; and soon after she was gone, I dropped to the ground unconscious.

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CHAPTER 3

The next thing I remember is, waking up with a feeling as if I had had a frightful night – mare, and seeing before me a terrible red glare, crossed with black bars. I heard voices, too, speaking with a hollow sound, and as if muffled by a rush of wind or water: agitation, uncertainty and terror confused my rational. I became aware that someone was handling me; lifting me up and supporting me in a sitting position: and that more tenderly than I had ever been raised or upheld before. I rested my head against a pillow or an arm, and felt easy.

In five minutes more, the cloud of bewilderment dissolved: I knew quite well that I was in my own bed, and that the red glare was the nursery fire. It was night: a candle burnt on the table; Bessie stood at