

Penguin



Readers

CHARLOTTE
BRONTË

Jane Eyre

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CHAPTER ONE

At Gateshead

We did not go for a walk that day, because the November wind was too cold, and the sky was full of clouds. I was happy because I hated long winter walks. Bessie, our **servant**, usually got cross, and my three cousins, Eliza, John and Georgiana, were much taller and stronger than me.

That evening, they sat around their mother, Mrs Reed, in the **drawing room**. She did not like me to come near her – she thought that I was bad and not **polite**. So I sat in another room and found a book to read. I was happy and comfortable, but suddenly the door opened and John Reed appeared.

“Ah, here she is!” he said, sitting in a large armchair. “Hiding behind the **curtain**! Come here, Jane Eyre.”

At fourteen years old, my cousin was four years older than me. He was a large, cross boy with a **pale** face, who was not very polite to his mother and sisters, and he hated me. He hit me two or three times every day, and I was very frightened of him. But Mrs Reed never saw him hit me.

“What do you want?” I replied. But I put down the book and came up to his chair.

“I am more important than you, so you must call me ‘Master Reed!’” he said, angrily. Then he threw a book at me. It hit my head, and blood started running down my face.

“You must not read my books!” he shouted. “Everything

in this house is *mine*, or it will be in a few years. You have no money because your father left you none when he died. You shouldn't be living here with rich children. You should be **begging** on the streets like other children who have nothing!"

"You are a horrible boy!" I shouted, but I was more angry than frightened.

Then he stood up and came towards me. He caught my hair and pulled it hard. I pushed hard against him and screamed, and, for the first time, I hit him. I could hear Bessie's voice telling me to stop, and then Mrs Reed shouted, "Take her to the red room!" I felt four hands on me, and then I was carried upstairs.



The red room was a small bedroom with a huge red bed. In the corner was a large box.

My uncle, Mr Reed, died in this room nine years ago. After that day, no one ever slept there.

I sat on the box and thought angrily about John Reed. Why did his mother and the servants always listen to him and not to me?

The afternoon was long and boring. I listened to the rain hitting the window while it slowly grew dark. Nine years ago, Mr Reed – my mother's brother – brought me to Gateshead Hall after my parents died. My mother and her brother were both from a rich family. But my grandparents were angry with my mother because she married a poor **clergyman**, so they left all their money to my uncle.

Soon after I was born, my father died of **typhus**. He caught it from one of the poor families that he was helping. My mother caught typhus from my father and died soon after him.

Suddenly I saw a light on the wall. Was it the light from the moon? No, it was not, because this light moved above my head and began to turn round and round. I thought that it was a **ghost**, and I screamed.

I heard feet running outside, and then the door opened. "Miss Eyre, are you ill?" said Bessie.

"Oh, Bessie, I saw a ghost!" I cried, and I took hold of her hand.

"What is all this?" said a voice, and suddenly Mrs Reed was behind Bessie.

“Oh, please, Aunt, don’t keep me here,” I cried.

But Mrs Reed did not believe me about the ghost. “You must stay here for another hour, you horrible child,” she said. The door closed, and the room was dark again. At that moment I **fainted**, and I do not remember any more of that night.

Three months passed. Christmas came and went. Presents were given, but not to me. **Visitors** came and went, and they ate dinners with the family. But I was not invited. The only person who was kind to me was Bessie. I often sat with her in the kitchen, and she sang me songs while she cooked.

Then, one morning, I was called to Mrs Reed’s room. I found her in her usual seat by the fire. She had a man with her. “This is the little girl who I told you about,” she said to him. The man, who was tall with dark hair, looked at me with **cold** grey eyes.

“What is your name, little girl?” he said.

“Jane Eyre, sir.”

“Mr Brocklehurst, the girl is naughty,” said Mrs Reed. “At your school, she must be taught how to live the life of a poor woman. She must be polite and quiet, and she must work hard. She must stay at Lowood for her holidays, too, because I don’t want her here. I will send her to you as soon as possible.”

CHAPTER TWO

Jane goes to school

Four days later, a **carriage** took me out of Gateshead on a dark and rainy morning. Only Bessie was there to say goodbye to me. Fifty miles was a long journey for a ten-year-old girl who was alone, and I do not remember much of it. We passed through some small towns, and then, as night came, great grey hills were all around us. At last I fell asleep, and when I woke up the carriage's door was open. A girl in a brown dress was standing outside.

I got out and looked tiredly around me. Wind and rain filled the air as I followed the girl towards some tall stone buildings that had lots of windows.

I was taken into a room with a fire. I put my hands next to the fire and then looked around me. I could see high walls, old furniture and dark curtains. Suddenly two women came in. The first was tall, and she was holding a **candle**. "Are you hungry?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

"Please get her some dinner, Miss Miller," she said, turning to the other, younger woman. Then she left. The second woman took me through the building's long, dark **corridors** until we reached a huge room that was filled with four long tables. Eighty girls sat around the tables on **benches**. They were between nine and twenty years old, and all of them wore the same brown dresses. They were

studying with their heads together over opened books. They read by the light of candles.

Miss Miller told me to sit. Then she shouted, “Put your books away, girls. It’s time for dinner!”

Four of the older girls stood up from different tables and took the books away. Then they came back with **trays** of water and a small, dry cake for each of us. I drank some of the water, but I was too tired to eat.

When the meal was finished, Miss Miller said some **prayers**. Then the girls began to leave. Miss Miller and I followed them to a huge room with rows of beds.



Miss Miller helped me to take off my clothes and gave me one of the brown dresses to wear in the morning. Suddenly everything was dark and silent. I was very tired, and I immediately fell asleep.