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opening extract from

Jane Eyre

written by

Charlotte Brontë

– retold by Gill Tavner

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THE CHARACTERS



Jane Eyre

Plain, small, and orphaned, Jane is alone in the world. Will she ever find the adventure she seeks and the affection she so desperately needs?



Mrs Reed

Mrs Reed is Jane's cold, cruel aunt. Does she have the power to make Jane miserable for ever?



Helen Burns

Gentle Helen is Jane's best friend. How will she influence Jane? Is she strong enough to survive?



Mr Rochester

Mr Rochester is dark and brooding, but full of fire. Why does he hate his home? What secret does he keep locked away?



Adèle

Adèle is Mr Rochester's charge and Jane's pupil. Will she like her new governess?



Grace Poole

Why does this servant live alone on the third storey? Is it she who haunts the night with savage laughter? What is her deadly secret?



St John Rivers

St John (pronounced 'Sinjun') is handsome and clever. Will he help to heal Jane's broken heart?



JANE EYRE

'Where are you Jane, you ugly rat? Come out, wherever you are.'

I cowered, cross-legged on the window seat behind the crimson curtain, my book still open in my trembling lap.

My cousin John flung back the curtain. 'There you are! Stand up immediately!'

I obeyed him. 'What do you want?'

'Say, "What do you want, Master Reed?"'

I forced myself to raise my eyes to his face. 'What do you want, Master Reed?'

Four years older than me, with dull eyes and overfed cheeks, John Reed bullied me continuously. Every part of my ten-year-old body feared him. Now, I waited for him to hit me. He struck me hard. I tottered backwards, hitting my head against the door frame. My head bled. 'Stand up, orphan,' shouted John. 'You should be begging in the streets, not living here at mama's expense.'

The fire of rebellion ignited within me. 'You are wicked and cruel,' I shouted.

John ran headlong at me, calling, 'Mama, help me! Jane is in a fury!' We struggled together for a few minutes before my aunt appeared with Bessie, her servant.

'Take her to the red room, and lock her in,' Mrs Reed commanded.



Once the fire in my blood had cooled, I looked around me. My prison was a large, stately room which had been left cold and silent since my uncle died in there nine years ago.

My parents had died of typhus when I was a baby. My uncle had vowed to take care of me, but his own untimely death one year later left this responsibility to his resentful wife. What would he have thought of my imprisonment?

The hours passed. I grew as cold as stone. The eerie light of the autumn evening stirred my

imagination. What if my uncle's ghost appeared now, in this room in which he had died? My heart beat rapidly. My head grew hot. Fear possessed me, and I threw myself against the door. 'Let me out! Let me out!'

My aunt's angry footsteps stopped outside. 'For this outburst,' her cold voice decreed, 'you must stay an extra hour.'

'Oh aunt, have pity,' I sobbed.

She walked away.



Autumn became winter. One cold January morning, summoned to my aunt's presence, I found myself standing before a tall man dressed in black.

'I'm sending you to boarding school,' my aunt told me. 'This is Mr Brocklehurst, the master of the school.'

The man looked down at me with stony eyes. 'You are small and plain,' he observed. 'Are you a good little girl?'



His deep voice scared me. I was unable to answer.

My aunt filled the silence. ‘I am afraid she has many faults, Mr Brocklehurst, the worst of which is deceit. Warn her teachers.’

‘Deceit!’ boomed Mr Brocklehurst. He stooped to look into my eyes. ‘Deceitful children go to hell.’ He turned back to my aunt. ‘I shall warn everybody.’

I struggled to suppress a sob. I now fully understood my aunt's power to wound me. However hard I tried, I had never won her affection. Now, she sowed her hatred and unkindness along my future path.

'Keep her humble, Mr Brocklehurst. I never want to see her again.'



On the day of my departure, I burned with resentment for the treatment I had received from my aunt in the past, and the treatment she had ensured me in the future. As I stood before her to say farewell, her icy eyes dwelt freezingly upon me, but they failed to cool my fire. Something over which I had no control spoke out of me.
'I will never call you aunt again,' I trembled. 'Your miserable cruelty makes me sick. *You* are deceitful, not I. You think, because I am poor and plain, that I can live without any human kindness. I cannot.'

My aunt stood, cold and silent as an iceberg. Bessie gently guided me into the awaiting coach. I was to travel to Lowood alone.



Lowood School sat in a dark, damp dell. Entering the grounds, I saw girls huddling in groups, with no shelter from the wind and rain. They were all without proper boots or gloves, their brown dresses offering insufficient protection. All were pale and thin.

