

Jane Eyre | Plot Summary

Jane Eyre is the coming-of-age story, or bildungsroman, of an orphan girl in early 19th-century Britain. The novel takes place in the early 1800s at fictional locations in northern England.

Orphaned shortly after her birth, 10-year-old [Jane Eyre](#) lives at Gateshead Hall with her aunt, Mrs. Reed, and the Reed children, Eliza, John, and Georgiana. The Reeds dislike Jane intensely because she has no money, and they treat her as an outsider. As the story opens, Jane is quietly reading. Her cousin John bullies her and scuffles with her. Mrs. Reed, as usual, blames Jane and banishes her to the red-room for punishment.

The red-room is where Jane's uncle died nine years earlier. While she is confined there, Jane thinks she sees a ghost and she passes out. When she wakes up, Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary who is tending to her, asks Jane about her life at Gateshead. Mr. Lloyd suggests that going away to school might solve Jane's problems, and Jane agrees. Happy to be rid of Jane, Mrs. Reed agrees as well. A few months later Jane leaves Gateshead Hall for Lowood school.

Lowood presents a new set of problems for Jane. The students are cold, underfed, and poorly clothed. [Helen Burns](#), a new friend, helps Jane accept the poor conditions. After a typhus epidemic passes through the school, during which time Helen dies from consumption, Lowood's deplorable conditions are investigated and remedied. During her six years as a student, Jane rises to the top of her class. She then stays on as a teacher for two more years.

In search of new experiences, Jane accepts the post of governess at Thornfield, a large, beautiful estate. Her student, [Adèle Varens](#), a young French girl, is the ward of Mr. Rochester, Jane's employer. Mr. Rochester is quirky and prone to dark moods, but Jane finds herself falling in love with him. One night she saves his life when she puts out a fire that has been set in his room. Jane wonders if the fire might be connected to strange laughter she sometimes hears on the third floor, and Mr. Rochester says that a servant, Grace Poole, was responsible.

Later another mysterious incident occurs involving an attack on Mr. Mason, a visitor to Thornfield. Again Mr. Rochester blames Grace Poole, but he doesn't fire her.

Jane is called away to Gateshead Hall at the request of her dying aunt. Mrs. Reed reveals that Jane's uncle, John Eyre of Madeira, has been trying to find Jane and would like to adopt her and leave his fortune to her. Mrs. Reed, still angry with Jane, informed him that Jane was dead. Now that Mrs. Reed is dying, she wants to unburden herself.

When Jane returns to Thornfield, Mr. Rochester tells her that he has secretly been in love with her, and he asks her to marry him. Jane accepts. However, happiness eludes Jane. Her wedding ceremony is interrupted by a lawyer, Mr. Briggs, who claims that Rochester is already married. Rochester admits that, when he was a young man in Jamaica, his father had arranged his marriage to a woman named [Bertha Mason](#). When Bertha revealed herself as insane and unmanageable, Rochester secretly brought her to Thornfield. He put her under the care of Grace Poole, on the third floor. It was Bertha, not Grace Poole, who set the fire in Rochester's room and

attacked Mr. Mason, her brother. Rochester pleads for Jane's understanding. He hadn't meant to deceive her but had convinced himself that Bertha's madness somehow nullified his marriage. He thought that, if he lived a good life, he deserved to find real love with Jane. Jane forgives him in her heart and assures him that she still loves him, but, as he is a married man, she knows that she must leave him.

Jane flees Thornfield and finds herself on the outskirts of a remote village on the moors with nothing but the clothes she is wearing. Three siblings—Mary, Diana, and St. John Rivers—take her in; Jane begins to teach at the village school and becomes close to the Rivers siblings. Jane receives news that she has inherited a large fortune from her uncle, John Eyre. To her delight she discovers that the Rivers siblings are her cousins, and she decides to share the fortune with them. St. John pressures Jane to go to India with him as his wife to do missionary work. She doesn't love him but she's on the verge of accepting, out of a sense of religious duty, when she thinks she hears Rochester's voice calling her name. She's been worried that Rochester has fallen into despair, and suddenly she knows that she must find out what has happened to him.

Jane goes back to Thornfield only to find the manor in ruins; it has burned to the ground. Bertha had escaped and set the fire before falling from the roof to her death. Jane rushes to Ferndean, the remote house where Mr. Rochester, who lost his sight and the use of a hand in the fire, is living. They rekindle their relationship and marry. Ten years later Jane reports that they are closer and happier than ever. Rochester has regained some of his sight, they have a son, and all of their loved ones are happy as well, even the dying St. John.