

JANE EYRE

Charlotte Brontë
Adapted by Jane E. Gerver



RANDOM HOUSE
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Jane Eyre



BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË
ADAPTED BY JANE E. GERVER

A STEPPING STONE BOOK™
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About the Author

Chapter One *My Story Begins*

There was no chance of taking a walk that cold and rainy day. I was glad. My three cousins teased me during the walks. They didn't like me any more than I liked them.

My name is Jane Eyre. My parents had died ten years before, when I was just a baby. Since then, I'd lived with my aunt and her three children at Gateshead Hall.

On this day, my cousins, John, Eliza, and Georgiana, were in the warm parlor with their mother. But I was not allowed in.

"Until you can behave like a good girl, you are not to come in here," Aunt Reed told me.

"But what have I done?" I asked.

"Jane, I do not like children who question their elders," she snapped.

I slipped into a cozy sitting room. There, I sat down to read in a window seat. But I was not safe for long.

John flung open the door. He did not see me behind the window curtains. "Lizzy! Georgy!" he called to his sisters. "Jane is not here! Tell Mama!"

Eliza was smarter than her brother. "Jane is in the window seat," she said.

I came out from the curtains at once, afraid of being dragged out by John.

"What do you want?" I asked him.

"Say 'What do you want, Master Reed?' " was his answer. "I want to know what you are doing."

John was large and fat for a fourteen-year-old boy. He did not like his mother or sisters. But he liked to bully me.

"I was reading." I showed him the book.

"You have no right to take our books," John said.

He snatched the book away. "You have no money. You should go and beg, not live with rich folks like us. I'll teach you not to touch my books. For they are *mine*—everything in this house will belong to me someday."

He angrily threw the heavy book at me. I fell against the door, cutting my head.

"You are a wicked and cruel boy!" I cried. I got up and tried to fight back. I could feel blood trickling down my neck from the cut on my head.

Aunt Reed and the servants came rushing in. "Ungrateful girl!" my aunt

said. "Lock her up in the red room!"

My aunt's maid, Bessie, took me upstairs to the cold, dark room.

"You have a duty to Mrs. Reed, Miss," Bessie said to me gently. "If not for her, you would go to the poorhouse."

This was not news to me. I had heard it many times before.

"Try to be useful and pleasant," Bessie went on. "Otherwise, Mrs. Reed will send you away, I'm sure."

She left me there, sad and lonely. It was the same room where my uncle had died, nine years earlier.

Uncle Reed had been my mother's brother. When my parents died, he had taken me in. And when he was dying, he'd made his wife promise to care for me as one of her own children.

I cried in the locked room for hours. I'd tried to behave. I'd tried to be good.

But it didn't matter. My aunt did not love me. She only took care of me because she had to.

Left alone, I cried until I fell asleep.

* * *

Things got no better as the months went on. I was left out of the holiday parties. And Aunt Reed told my cousins not to spend time with me.

My only friend was a small and ragged doll. And Bessie was sometimes kind. At night she brought me a treat, and she tucked me into bed with a kiss.

One day, I was called into the parlor. A tall man stood there. He stared at me and then turned to my aunt. "She is small. What is her age?"

"Ten years," Aunt Reed replied.

"What is your name, little girl?" the man asked me.

"Jane Eyre, sir," I said.

"Well, Jane, are you a good child?"

Aunt Reed sniffed and shook her head. "The less said on that, the better."

"A naughty little girl is a sad sight," the man said with a sigh.

"Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane is a liar," Aunt Reed said. "That is her biggest fault. If she goes to Lowood School, you will need to keep an eye on her. Train her to be useful and humble. And I wish her to spend all vacations there."

Mr. Brocklehurst nodded. "You have made a wise choice in schools, Mrs. Reed. Our pupils are quiet and wear plain clothes. Jane will be taught her proper place in life."

He handed me a book of prayers, then left the house. I glared at my aunt.

"I am *not* a liar!" I blurted out. "If I were a liar, I'd say I loved you. But I do

not love you! I hate you. I will never call you aunt again!”

My aunt looked frightened. “Children’s faults must be corrected,” she said.

“Lying is not my fault!” I cried out. “Send me away to school soon—I hate living here!”

“I will indeed,” muttered my aunt.

It took only a day or two to pack my few belongings. I left Gateshead Hall on a cold January morning. Bessie packed me some biscuits for the long trip.

A coach pulled by four horses and filled with passengers drew up to the gate. I climbed on board—but not before I hugged and kissed Bessie good-bye.

That was how I left Gateshead ... and headed for the unknown.

Chapter Two

Lowood School

I remember little of the long journey to Lowood. As night approached, our coach headed into a wooded valley. A wild wind whistled around us.

Soothed by the sound, I fell asleep. Suddenly the coach stopped.

“Is there a little girl called Jane Eyre here?” a servant asked. I was handed down, and the coach rumbled away.

The servant led me inside a large building. She left me alone in a parlor, warming my hands at a blazing fire.

The school superintendent, Miss Temple, soon entered the room. She was tall, with kind brown eyes.

“You must be tired,” she said gently to me. “Is this the first time you have left your parents, little girl?”

I explained that I had no parents. She asked me how old I was, my name, and if I could read, write, and sew. Then she sent me off to bed in a long dormitory lined with thirty or forty beds.

Surrounded by silence, I fell asleep.

A loud bell woke me. It was still dark, but the girls all around me were getting out of bed and putting on handmade brown frocks. I dressed, shivering in the bitter cold.

When the bell rang again, we marched downstairs to the dining room for breakfast. How glad I was! I felt sick from not eating.

The room was huge and gloomy. Bowls of steaming porridge sat on two tables. The food smelled terrible. I saw some of the girls wrinkle their noses.

“Disgusting! The porridge is burned again!” they murmured.

“Silence!” shouted a teacher.

After prayers and a hymn, the meal began. I was starving and quickly ate a few spoonfuls. But I soon realized how bad the cereal was.

Each girl tasted her food and tried to swallow it. But no one could.

When breakfast was over, we went to the schoolroom for our classes. Eighty girls sat on benches, softly reciting their lessons. The older girls were taught geography and music. My class learned history, grammar, writing, and arithmetic.

At noon, the bell rang, and Miss Temple stood up to make an announcement. She smiled. “This morning, you could not eat the breakfast.

You must be hungry. You will be served a lunch of bread and cheese.”

How good that food tasted! After lunch, each girl put on a straw bonnet and a cloak. We went out to the garden for exercise and play.

A fog hung over the damp garden. The stronger girls ran about. But many girls were pale and thin. They stayed on the porch. I heard them coughing often.

“Does this house belong to Miss Temple?” I asked one girl sitting nearby.

“Oh, no!” she said with a sigh. “We wish it did! She reports to Mr. Brocklehurst. He buys all of our food and the material we use to make our clothes.”

The bell called us to an early dinner of potatoes with shreds of rusty-looking meat. I wondered if every meal would taste this bad.

More lessons followed. At five o’clock, we were each given half a slice of brown bread. After more studying, water and thin oatcakes were handed out. Then we went up to bed.

The next few weeks were hard for me. Our plain dresses and aprons did not protect us from the winter weather. We had no boots, and snow got into our shoes and melted.

And there was not enough food. I was hungry all the time. The bigger girls took food from the smaller ones. Many times I was left with only a morsel.

One afternoon, Mr. Brocklehurst arrived in the schoolroom.

“Twice in the past two weeks, a lunch of bread and cheese was served to the girls. That is *not* in the rules! Who did this? And why?” he demanded.

Miss Temple stepped forward. “I did,” she confessed. “The breakfast was badly cooked. No one could eat it. I could not let the girls wait until midday dinner.”

Mr. Brocklehurst shook his head angrily. “I have a plan in bringing up these girls,” he said. “They must be patient and strong in spirit! How will they learn such things if they are fed treats?”

He looked around. I held up my chalk slate to hide my face. I remembered what Mrs. Reed had said to him about me. I didn’t want him to see me.

All at once, my slate slipped from my hand and crashed to the floor.

“Careless girl!” said Mr. Brocklehurst. “It is the new pupil, I see. Come forward!”

He made me stand on a high stool in the middle of the room.

“Children,” began Mr. Brocklehurst. “Do not play with this girl. Teachers, watch her carefully. For this child is a liar! She must stand for a half-hour on that stool. No one must speak to her for the rest of the day.” Then he left the room.

I almost began to sob. Then a student passed by and gave me a smile of

friendship. I took a deep breath and held my head up high. Mr. Brocklehurst would not win—I would be stronger than anyone!

As the months went by, I grew happier at school. Miss Temple was kind to me, and I made a few friends.

My classes went well, too. I began to learn French and drawing. When warmer weather came, we took walks among the flowers and trees.

But with the warm weather came sickness. A fever swept through Lowood School. Many students, weak from the harsh winter, fell ill. Some even died.

Finally the illness in the school ended. But the townspeople were angry. They checked the school and saw how poorly we were fed and clothed. They discovered how cruel Mr. Brocklehurst had been.

New people were put in charge. Things improved, and Lowood became a fine school.

I stayed there for six years as a student. I worked hard and rose to be the top student in the highest class.

After that, the school gave me a job as a teacher. I taught younger girls reading, writing, sewing, drawing, and more.

During my years at Lowood, Miss Temple guided me: first as my teacher, then as my friend. But after I had been there for eight years, she married and moved far away.

I grew tired of Lowood. What was keeping me there now? I wondered what lay beyond the school's gates. What kind of life could I make for myself?

I decided to seek work as a governess, teaching children in a family. I placed an advertisement in the town's newspaper.

After one long week, I heard from a Mrs. Fairfax at Thornfield Hall. She offered me a position!

I told the school that I wished to take the job. But Mrs. Reed had to give me permission. I wrote her a letter.

"You may do as you please," my aunt wrote back curtly.

On my last night at Lowood, I packed my few clothes in a trunk—the same trunk I had arrived with eight years earlier. Just then, I was told that a visitor wished to see me downstairs.

A woman rushed out of the parlor. "You've not forgotten me, Miss Jane?" she said.

"Bessie! Bessie!" I cried happily, hugging her. It was Aunt Reed's maid!

"When you wrote to your aunt, I decided to visit you before you went off on your new life," Bessie said.

Then she grew quiet. "There's something I need to tell you, Miss. Seven years ago, a man came to Gateshead. He was looking for you—his last name was Eyre! Mrs. Reed said you were away at school. He could not stay; he was

sailing to a foreign land. He looked like quite a gentleman. I believe he was your father's brother!"

I hesitated. I had an uncle, and he'd come looking for me!

"So he left the house?" I finally asked.

"Yes, and Mrs. Reed was rude to him. She always did say that the Eyres were poor and not to be trusted."

I shook my head sadly. Would my uncle ever come looking for me again?

The next day, I saw Bessie as we waited for our coaches. Bessie's coach took her back to Gateshead.

And mine took me to a new life at Thornfield Hall.

Chapter Three

A Curious Laugh

My journey to Thornfield took more than seventeen hours. The October night was raw and misty. I had time to think as the one-horse coach rattled along.

Did Mrs. Fairfax live alone with her little girl? “I hope Mrs. Fairfax will not be like Mrs. Reed,” I prayed.

About ten minutes after passing a church, we reached a set of gates in a wall. The driveway led to a large house, with candlelight in only one window.

“Will you walk this way, ma’am?” asked a young maid at the front door.

I followed her to a snug room. An elderly lady sat knitting by the fire.

“How do you do, my dear?” she said kindly. “I am Mrs. Fairfax. Do sit down. Your luggage will be taken up to your room.” She turned to the maid and said, “Leah, please bring us some sandwiches.”

She treats me like a visitor, not a governess, I thought, watching as Mrs. Fairfax served the food herself.

“Shall I see Miss Fairfax tonight?” I asked politely.

“Miss Fairfax? Oh, you mean Miss Varens, your pupil,” Mrs. Fairfax replied.

“She is not your daughter?” I asked, puzzled.

“No, I have no family,” Mrs. Fairfax explained. “I am so glad you have come. Thornfield can get quite lonely. We have Leah, and John, who drove you here, and his wife, the cook.”

She smiled and added, “Just last month little Adèle Varens came to live here. She makes the house come alive. And now you are here, too!”

She then showed me to my room. We walked up a staircase made of dark oak. The long chilly hallway on the second floor looked as if it belonged in a church, not a house.

I was pleased to find my new bedroom small and cozy. I fell asleep quickly and slept soundly all night.

The next morning, I walked downstairs and out onto the lawn. The house was imposing, with battlements around the top. Loudly cawing crows flew above it.

Mrs. Fairfax appeared at the door. “How do you like Thornfield?” she asked.

I told her I liked it very much.

“It is a pretty place,” she agreed. “But it will get out of order unless Mr. Rochester comes to live here permanently—or visits it more often.”

“Mr. Rochester!” I exclaimed. “Who is he?”

“The owner of Thornfield,” Mrs. Fairfax said. “You did not know that?”

“I thought Thornfield belonged to you,” I said.

“To me? What an idea!” she said, laughing. “I am only the housekeeper.”

“And the little girl—my pupil?”

“She is Mr. Rochester’s ward. He asked me to find a governess for her. Ah, here she comes with her nurse, Sophie.”

A delicate girl of seven or eight came running over. She had curls falling down to her waist, and a thin, pale face.

“Is this my governess?” Adèle asked her nurse in French. Her nurse answered “yes” back in French.

“Adèle was born in France,” Mrs. Fairfax explained to me. “When she first came here, she could speak no English at all. Now she speaks a little, but mixed with French.”

Luckily, I had studied French at Lowood and was able to chat with the girl during breakfast. Adèle told me about the clean, pretty town where she had lived in France.

“My mama is not alive anymore,” Adèle said. “She taught me to sing and dance. May I sing for you now?”

After the little performance, I took her to the house’s library. This would be our classroom. Mr. Rochester had left us many suitable books, a piano, an easel, and two globes.

I taught Adèle until noon, when I allowed her to return to Sophie. Mrs. Fairfax then showed me around the house. The dining room was beautiful and stately. It had a stained-glass window and purple chairs and curtains. The drawing room was also lovely, with a flowered carpet and large mirrors.

Everything was clean and tidy. “Mr. Rochester’s visits are rare,” Mrs. Fairfax said. “But they are always unexpected. So I keep the rooms ready for him. Would you like to see the rest?”

What a tour I had! The large front bedrooms on the second floor were grand-looking.

Over the years, older beds and chests had been moved up to the third floor. A long, narrow hallway separated the front and back rooms. It was lined with small black doors, all of them shut.

I liked the hush and gloom that filled those darkened rooms. Tapestries hung on the heavy oak doors and walls.

“The servants have smaller rooms in the back. No one ever sleeps here,” Mrs. Fairfax said. “If there were a ghost at Thornfield, this would be its haunt.”

“You have no ghost, then?” I asked with a shiver.

“None that I ever heard of,” Mrs. Fairfax replied, smiling. “Come, I’ll show you the view from the roof.”

I followed her up a narrow staircase to the attic. Then we climbed a ladder up through a trapdoor to the roof.

I leaned over the battlements and viewed the grounds spread out below: a velvet lawn, a field, dark woods, the country church, and a ring of hills.

I could hardly see my way back down the ladder. The attic was so dark after the bright blue sky above.

Mrs. Fairfax stayed behind to fasten the trapdoor. I groped my way down the narrow staircase to the third floor.

Then I heard something, the last sound I expected to hear in such a quiet place. A curious laugh!

The ghostly sound stopped, then began again, louder this time. It seemed to echo in every room.

“Mrs. Fairfax!” I called out. “Did you hear that laugh? Who is it?”

“Some of the servants, very likely,” she answered. “Perhaps Grace Poole. We use her for sewing and to help Leah with the housework. Grace sews in one of these rooms. Leah and she are often noisy together.”

The strange laugh sounded again, low and ending in an odd murmur.

“Grace!” called Mrs. Fairfax.

I did not really expect anyone to answer. But the door nearest me opened, and a servant came out. The woman was solidly built, with red hair and a hard, plain face. She did not look like a ghost at all.

“Too much noise, Grace,” said Mrs. Fairfax. “Remember the rules!” Grace curtsied silently and went back into the room. And Mrs. Fairfax and I returned downstairs to light and cheerfulness.

The weeks became routine. Adèle was not hard to teach, though she was rather spoiled.

But when I took walks alone, I began to feel restless. The servants were all pleasant. Yet I wanted to meet more people, to see more things.

The only thing that calmed me was to walk along the house’s third-floor corridor. As I paced, I imagined new experiences and felt less trapped.

Very often when on the third floor, I heard Grace Poole’s laugh—the same slow “ha! ha!” as the first time. I also heard her murmurs, stranger than her laugh.

And sometimes I saw her. She would come out of her room with a basin or a tray, go down to the kitchen, and then return. I tried to talk with her several times, but she seemed a person of few words.

Chapter Four

I Meet a Stranger

October, November, and December passed by. In January, I gave Adèle a day off from her lessons and offered to mail a letter for Mrs. Fairfax. The two-mile walk to town would be a pleasant way to spend the afternoon.

I left Adèle with a doll and a book, put on my bonnet and cloak, and set out.

The quiet lane was surrounded by empty fields. Little brown birds, nestled in the hedges, looked like autumn leaves. I walked quickly to get warm.

A mile from Thornfield, I walked up the hill to a fence and sat down. Wrapped in my cloak, I did not feel the cold. A little brook nearby had overflowed a few days before. A sheet of ice covered the road.

From my seat I could look down on Thornfield. It loomed large in the valley, with woods behind it. I sat until the sun went down, streaking the sky with red.

As I watched the moon rise over town, I heard a clattering sound. A horse was coming. The road curved, so I was not able to see the animal. I sat still to let it pass.

Just before the horse appeared, I heard another noise. A large black-and-white dog glided by, followed by the horse and its rider. They passed me, and I began my walk again. Then came a sliding sound and a clattering tumble.

I turned and saw that the horse and man had fallen on the ice. The dog came bounding back. He barked when he saw his master and the groaning horse.

Who else could help but me? I walked over and asked, "Are you injured, sir? Can I do anything?"

"Stand to one side," answered the traveler. He rose slowly to his feet. He helped the horse to rise, too.

"Down, Pilot!" the man said sternly to the dog. He limped over to the fence, rubbing his foot and leg, and sat down.

"If you are hurt, sir, I can fetch someone from either Thornfield Hall or from town," I said.

"Thank you, no. I have no broken bones, just a sprain," the man replied. He stood up and winced. "Ugh!"

In the daylight still left, I plainly saw him. He was about thirty-five or forty years old and of average height. His face was stern, with a heavy brow.

I had no fear of the stranger. If he had been a handsome young gentleman, I would not have dared to ask questions or offer help. If he had smiled and waved me on, I would have left. But his frown somehow put me at ease.

“I cannot think of leaving you alone in this lane, sir, at so late an hour, until I see that you can mount your horse.”

He glanced at me. “You should be at home yourself,” he said. “Do you live in this neighborhood?”

“I live just below and am not afraid when there is moonlight,” I answered. “I am going to town to post a letter.”

“Do you live at that house?” the man asked, pointing to Thornfield Hall.

“Yes, sir.”

“Whose house is it?”

“Mr. Rochester’s,” I said.

“Do you know Mr. Rochester?” he asked.

“No, I have never seen him.”

“You are not a servant ...” he mused, looking me over.

“I am the governess,” I told him.

“Ah, the governess!” he exclaimed. “Well, perhaps you can help me. Come over here, please,” he requested. Leaning on my shoulder, he limped to the horse and managed to mount it.

“Now make haste to town and return home as fast as you can,” he instructed me. Then he rode away, the dog close behind him.

I continued on to the post office. My help had been heeded, and I was pleased. The man’s face was new to me, too, and I liked that.

After mailing the letter, I hurried home. The front hall was dark, but a warm glow came from the open dining room. I spied a group, including Adèle, inside. The door closed, and I hurried to Mrs. Fairfax’s parlor.

She was not there, but a large dog was—sitting alone on the rug. He was black-and-white, like the dog in the lane.

“Pilot,” I said. The dog shuffled over and wagged his tail. I rang for Leah.

“Whose dog is this?” I asked her.

“He came with Mr. Rochester, who just arrived,” Leah said. “Mrs. Fairfax and Miss Adèle are with him in the dining room. John has gone to fetch a doctor, for the master has had an accident. His horse fell on some ice in the lane, and his ankle is sprained.”

“Ah, I see,” I said. Now I knew who the mysterious traveler was.

By the following morning, Thornfield had changed—and for the better. The house now had an owner in it. Every hour or so, there was a knock at the door or a ring of the bell. Footsteps crossed the halls, and new voices spoke.

We moved the schoolroom upstairs, as Mr. Rochester needed the library for meetings. Adèle was not easy to teach that day. She kept running to look over the banister for him.

After the lessons, Mrs. Fairfax said to me, "Mr. Rochester would like you and Adèle to join him for tea this evening. Change your frock—I always dress up for the evening when he is here."

I put on a black silk dress, along with a pearl brooch that Miss Temple had given me at Lowood. Then I nervously went down to the drawing room.

Adèle sat on the floor, with Pilot beside her. Mr. Rochester sat on a couch, his foot on a cushion. I recognized him at once. His mouth, chin, and jaw were grim-looking, almost ugly.

"Let Miss Eyre be seated," Mr. Rochester ordered stiffly.

We sipped our tea in silence. Then Adèle piped up, "Monsieur Rochester, I know you have brought me presents. Don't you have one for Mademoiselle Eyre?"

"Are you fond of presents, Miss Eyre?" Mr. Rochester asked gruffly. He stared at me with dark, piercing eyes.

"I hardly know, sir," I said. "I am not used to them. In any case, I am a stranger to you. I do not deserve a gift."

"Nonsense," scoffed Mr. Rochester. "Adèle's studies have improved greatly, thanks to you."

When our tea was finished, Mr. Rochester invited me to sit near him by the fire. He asked me many questions about Lowood and my courses.

Then without warning, he looked at his watch and said abruptly, "Nine o'clock! Take Adèle to bed, Miss Eyre." With a wave of his hand, he added curtly, "I wish you all good night."

After putting Adèle to bed, I joined Mrs. Fairfax in her rooms. "Mr. Rochester seems very moody," I said.

"He may be, but I am used to his manner," Mrs. Fairfax said. "Besides, he has painful thoughts of family troubles."

"I thought he had no family," I pointed out.

"Not now, but he used to," Mrs. Fairfax said. "His elder brother died nine years ago. Edward Rochester has been master of Thornfield Hall ever since. Yet he spends less than two weeks at a time here. Perhaps he thinks it's gloomy."

I would have liked to know more, but it was clear that Mrs. Fairfax could not—or would not—tell me.

I saw little of Mr. Rochester in the next few days. In the mornings he tended to business. In the afternoons men came by and sometimes stayed to dine. When his ankle was better, he rode out to visit people and returned at night.

If we passed in the halls, he merely nodded or glanced at me. Sometimes he gave a bow and a slight smile.

One day, he sent for me after dinner. He looked less glum than before and caught me staring at him.

“Do you think me handsome, Miss Eyre?” he asked.

My answer slipped out without warning. “No, sir.”

“You are indeed blunt!” he said. “I wish to learn more about you. Speak!”

I frowned. “You do not have the right to command me that way, sir.”

“You are right,” he agreed. “I have plenty of faults.” He paused, and a brooding look crossed his face. “I started off on the wrong track when I was twenty-one.”

“It seems to me, sir,” I began, “that you might try to change. In a few years, you could be happier.” I rose and added, “I must put Adèle to bed now.”

“Do you never laugh, Miss Eyre?” Mr. Rochester asked. “No doubt Lowood School kept you from being merry. But in time, I think you will be more lively with me. Good night!”

As the weeks passed, I warmed to Mr. Rochester. We talked often, though he did most of the talking. He liked telling me about the world, and I liked listening.

He told me about Adèle’s mother, a friend of his in France. When she ran away with a musician, Adèle was left with no one to raise her. So Mr. Rochester had brought Adèle to England.

Over time, he became more polite when we ran into each other. He always had a word and sometimes a smile for me. This made my time at Thornfield much happier.

However, I could not forget Mr. Rochester’s faults. He remained overly proud, moody, and rude to others.

But was Mr. Rochester still ugly in my eyes? Not anymore—his face was the one I most liked to see, and he was cheerier in a room than any fire.

Chapter Five

Fire!

After Mr. Rochester had been at Thornfield for eight weeks, I awoke suddenly late one night. A strange murmur came from above my room.

I sat up in bed. The sound stopped. I tried to sleep again, but my heart beat anxiously. The clock down the hall struck two. Just then, I heard fumbling at my door!

“Who’s there?” I called. No one answered. I was chilled with fear.

Pilot often liked to lumber upstairs from the kitchen to Mr. Rochester’s doorway at night. The idea calmed me, and I began to doze.

Then came a laugh—low and deep—almost at the keyhole of my locked door! I got out of bed, shivering. The laugh came again, followed by a gurgle and a moan.

Before long, I heard footsteps. They went down the hall, toward the stairs leading to the third floor. The staircase door opened and closed. Then all was still.

Was that Grace Poole? I wondered. It was impossible to stay by myself any longer. I had to find Mrs. Fairfax! I threw on a dress and shawl, unbolted my door, and opened it with a trembling hand.

A lit candle in a holder stood on the carpet. The air in the hallway was dim and smoky. There was a strong smell of something burning!

A partly opened door creaked. It led to Mr. Rochester’s bedroom—and smoke was rushing out from it!

I instantly forgot Mrs. Fairfax, Grace Poole, and the evil-sounding laugh. I dashed into Mr. Rochester’s room. Tongues of flame darted around the bed. The bed curtains were on fire!

Mr. Rochester lay fast asleep in the middle of the blaze. “Wake up! Wake up!” I screamed. I shook him, but he only muttered and turned. The smoke had left him dazed.

Not a moment could be lost—the sheets were ready to go up in flames! I rushed to his washbasin and pitcher. Luckily, both were filled with water. I lifted them up and drenched the bed and Mr. Rochester, then ran back to my room. I grabbed my pitcher and used it on the flames, finally putting them out.

The hiss of the quenched fire, the smash of the pitcher as I flung it away, and the splash of water woke Mr. Rochester at last.

“Is there a flood?” he cried, finding himself lying in a pool of water.