

# JANE EYRE



CHARLOTTE BRONTË

# Jane Eyre

*Charlotte Brontë*

1816-1855

*Simplified by  
Evelyn Attwood*

## Longman Simplified English Series

This book has been specially prepared to make enjoyable reading for people to whom English is a second or a foreign language. An English writer never thinks of avoiding unusual words, so that the learner, trying to read the book in its original form, has to turn frequently to the dictionary and so loses much of the pleasure that the book ought to give.

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<sup>1</sup>The 2000 root words of the *General Service List of English Words* of the *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection*. In 1975 the General Editor of the series compiled an appendix deleting some low frequency words and adding words whose frequency seems to have increased since the General Service List was first published.

## Introduction

CHARLOTTE BRONTË, born in 1816, was the daughter of an Irishman who married a Cornishwoman and became a priest of the Church of England. He had charge of a church in a wild part of Yorkshire. There were six children. Four of the girls, including Charlotte and her sister Emily (who later wrote the novel *Wuthering Heights*) were sent to a school at Cowan's Bridge: this school is described in Chapters 6-11 of *Jane Eyre*. Helen Burns in the story is an exact picture of Charlotte's elder sister Maria and of her unkind treatment at this school. Charlotte afterwards went to another school at Roehead, and later became a teacher there. Having the idea of starting a school of her own, she went to Brussels to study French: she draws a picture of this part of her life in her novel *Villette*. Her school was a failure. Her father began to go blind; her brother became a heavy drinker; her sister Emily developed a disease of the lungs. At this time Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre*. Her other novels were *The Professor*, *Shirley* and *Villette*. She married Arthur Nicholls (a priest of the Church of England) and died one year later, in 1855.

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## Chapter 1

### Gateshead

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had, indeed, been wandering in the leafless garden for an hour in the morning, but since dinner, the cold winter wind had brought with it such dark clouds and such heavy rain that further exercise out of doors was impossible.

I was glad of it. I never liked long walks, especially on cold afternoons. Coming home in the twilight was terrible to me—with frozen fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the scoldings of Bessie the nurse, and by the consciousness of how weak my thin little body was, compared with those of Eliza, John and Georgiana Reed.

Eliza, John and Georgiana were now gathered round their mama in the drawing room at Gateshead, their home. She lay resting by the fireside, and with her loved ones near her, for the time neither quarrelling nor crying, she looked perfectly happy. She had dismissed me from the group, saying that she regretted she was forced to keep me at a distance, but that until I tried earnestly to develop a more friendly and attractive nature, she really could not admit me to pleasures intended only for contented, happy little children.

‘But what have I done?’ I asked.

‘Jane, I don’t like questions or objections. Children should not speak to their elders in such a way. Sit down somewhere, and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent.’

A small breakfast room lay next to the drawing room. I crept in there. It contained bookshelves, and I soon took possession of a book, making sure that it should be one full

of pictures. I climbed on to the window-seat, and gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged. There, having drawn the red curtains, I felt doubly sheltered.

Every picture told a story, mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding, yet always deeply interesting—as interesting as the stories that Bessie sometimes began on winter evenings, when she happened to be in a good temper, holding our eager attention with memories of love and adventure taken from old songs and stories.

With the book on my knee, I was happy. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon.

The voice of John Reed called me. Then he paused. He found the room empty.

‘Where in the world is she?’ he cried. ‘Lizzy! Georgy!’ he called to his sisters. ‘Jane is not here. Tell Mama she has run out into the rain. Bad animal!’

‘It is lucky that I drew the curtain,’ I thought, and I wished with all my heart that he might not discover my hiding place. Nor would he have found it out for himself, as he was neither sharp-sighted nor intelligent, but Eliza put her head in at the door, and said at once:

‘She is in the window-seat, surely, John.’

I came out immediately, because I trembled at the idea of being dragged out by John.

‘What do you want?’ I asked.

‘Say, “What do you want, Master Reed?”’ was the answer. ‘I want you to come here.’ Seating himself in an armchair, he made a sign to me to approach and stand before him.

John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years, four years older than I, large and fat for his age, with an unhealthy skin, coarse features and thick arms and legs. He ought now to have been at school, but his mama had taken him home for a month or two, ‘on account of his delicate health’. His schoolmaster said that his condition was the result of greed, but his mother’s heart turned from such a severe opinion, and she preferred to believe that he worked too hard and missed his home.



John was not very fond of his mother and sisters, and he hated me. He treated me badly, and punished me, not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually. I had no protection from him. The servants did not like to offend their young master, and Mrs Reed never appeared to see him strike me or to hear him insult me, though he did both sometimes in her presence—more frequently, however, behind her back.

Being by long habit obedient to John, I came up to his chair. He spent about three minutes in putting out his tongue at me. I knew that he would soon strike, and while I waited fearfully for the blow, I considered his disgusting and ugly appearance. I wonder whether he read the thought in my face, for suddenly, without speaking, he struck sharply and hard. I almost fell, and on recovering my balance, drew back a step from his chair.

‘That is for questioning Mama,’ he said, ‘and for creeping like a thief behind curtains, and for the look you had in your eyes two minutes ago, you rat!’

I was so accustomed to John Reed’s insults that I never had any idea of replying to them. My care was how to receive the blow that would certainly follow.

‘What were you doing behind the curtain?’ he asked.

‘I was reading.’

‘Show me the book.’

I returned to the window and fetched it in silence.

‘You have no right to take our books. You are a poor relation, Mama says. You have no money. Your father left you none. You ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals as we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense. Now, I’ll teach you to interfere with my bookshelves, because they *are* mine. All the house is mine, or will be in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows.’

I did so, not at first realising his intention, but when I saw him lift and balance the book and stand in the act of aiming it, I sprang aside with a cry of alarm. Not soon

enough, however. The heavy thing was thrown, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, and the pain was sharp. My extreme fear had passed its limit, and changed to other feelings.

‘Wicked and cruel boy!’ I said. ‘You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the evil rulers of ancient Rome!’

‘What! What!’ he cried. ‘Did she say that to me? Did you hear her, Eliza and Georgiana? I’ll tell Mama! But first—’

He ran straight at me. I felt him grasp my hair and shoulder. He had attacked a dangerous thing: I really thought him a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head running down my neck, and my sense of suffering for the moment conquered my fear. I fought him madly. I don’t very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me ‘Rat! Rat!’ and wept aloud. Help was near him. His sisters had run for Mrs Reed, who had gone upstairs. Now she came upon the scene, followed by Bessie and by Abbot, her maid. We were separated. I heard the words:

‘Oh! What a wicked little thing, to fly at Master John like that!’

‘Did ever anybody see such evil temper!’

Then Mrs Reed commanded:

‘Take her away to the red room, and lock her in there.’

## Chapter 2

### The red room

I resisted all the way. This was a new thing for me, and an act that greatly strengthened the bad opinion that Bessie and Abbot tended to hold concerning me.

‘Hold her arms. She’s like a mad cat.’

‘For shame! For shame!’ cried the lady’s maid. ‘What terrible behaviour, Miss Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your guardian’s son—your young master!’

‘Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?’

‘No, you are less than a servant, because you do nothing to support yourself. There, sit down, and think over your wickedness.’

They had got me by this time into the room named by Mrs Reed, and had pushed me on to a chair. I began to rise from it like a spring. Their two pairs of hands prevented me instantly.

‘If you don’t sit still, you must be tied down,’ said Bessie. ‘Miss Abbot, lend me your belt. She would break mine at once.’

‘Don’t do that,’ I cried. ‘I will not move.’

‘Take care that you don’t,’ said Bessie, and when she had made sure that I really was becoming quieter, she loosened her hold on me. She and Abbot stood with folded arms, looking darkly and doubtfully at my face.

‘She never did this before,’ said Bessie at last, turning to the lady’s maid.

‘But it was always in her,’ was the reply. ‘I’ve often told Missis my opinion about the child, and Missis agreed with me. She’s a deceitful little thing.’

Bessie did not answer, but, before long, she addressed me and said:

‘You ought to know, Miss, that you should be grateful to Mrs Reed. She supports you. If she were to send you away, who would look after you?’

I had nothing to say to these words. They were not new to me. I had heard many suggestions of the same kind before, very painful and wounding to my pride, but only half understood. Abbot joined in:

‘And you ought not to think yourself equal to the two Misses 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 is your duty to be humble, and to try to make yourself pleasant to them.’

‘What we tell you is for your good,’ added Bessie in a milder voice. ‘You should try to be useful and to please

them. Then, perhaps, you will have a home here. But if you become passionate and rude, Missis will send you away, I am sure.'

'Besides,' said Abbot, 'God will punish you. He might strike you dead in the middle of your fury. Come, Bessie, we will leave her. Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, because if you are not sorry for your wickedness, something bad might come down the chimney and take you away.'

They went, shutting the door, and locking it behind them.

The red room was a square room, furnished in dark wood, with a heavy red carpet, and a huge bed and red curtains always drawn across the windows. This room was cold, because it rarely had a fire; silent, because it was far from the nursery and the kitchen; solemn, because it was seldom entered. It was here that Mr Reed had died nine years before.

I was not quite sure whether they had locked the door, and when I dared move, I got up and went to see. Ah, yes! No prison was ever more firmly fastened.

My head still ached and bled from the blow and the fall that I had received. No one had blamed John for striking me without cause. 'Unjust! Unjust!' I thought. I began to plan some escape, such as running away, or never eating or drinking any more, and letting myself die.

Daylight began to leave the red room. It was past four o'clock, and the cloudy afternoon was followed by a gloomy twilight. I heard the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window, and the wind crying in the trees behind the house. Gradually I became cold as a stone, and then my courage sank. All said that I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so.

My thoughts turned to my uncle. I could not remember him, but I knew that he was my mother's brother, that he had taken me as a parentless child to his house, and that before he died he had received a promise from his wife, Mrs Reed, that she would look after me as one of her own children.

A strange idea entered my head. I never doubted that if

Mr Reed had been alive, he would have treated me kindly, and now, in the growing darkness, I began to remember stories of dead men, troubled in their graves by disregard of their last wishes, revisiting the earth. Perhaps Mr Reed's ghost might rise before me. This idea, instead of comforting me, filled me with terror. At this moment, a ray of light shone on the wall. Probably it was from a lamp carried outside across the lawn, but to my shaken nerves, prepared for horror, it appeared like a sign of someone coming from another world. My heart beat fast, my head became hot. A sound filled my ears, which seemed like the rushing of wings. I ran in despair to the door and shook the lock. Footsteps came hurrying along the outer passage, the key was turned, and Bessie and Abbot entered.

'Miss Eyre, are you ill?' said Bessie.

'What a terrible noise! It went right 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?' Bessie demanded again.

'Oh, I saw a light, and I thought a ghost had come.' I had now got hold of Bessie's hand, and she did not take it from me.

'She has screamed out on purpose,' declared Abbot in disgust. 'And what a scream! If she had been in great pain, there would have been some excuse for it, but she only wanted to bring us all here. I know her wicked tricks.'

'What is all this?' demanded another voice sharply. Mrs Reed came along the passage. 'Abbot and Bessie, I believe I gave orders that Jane Eyre should be left in the red room till I came to her myself.'

'Miss Jane screamed so loud, ma'am,' replied Bessie.

'Let her go,' was the only answer. 'Loose Bessie's hand, child; you cannot succeed in getting out by these means. I hate tricks, especially in children. It is my duty to show you that they will not succeed. You will stay here an hour longer, and it is only on condition of perfect obedience and quiet that I shall let you out then.'

'Oh, Aunt! Have pity! Forgive me! I cannot bear it! Let me be punished in some other way!'

'Silence! This violence is most disgusting.' She did not believe me. She thought that I was pretending.

Bessie and Abbot having gone away, Mrs Reed, impatient of my wild cries, roughly pushed me back and locked me in without further speech. I heard her go away, and soon after she had left, my head seemed to go round and round, and I fell to the ground in a faint.

## Chapter 3

### Illness

The next thing that I remember is waking up with a feeling as if I had had a fearful dream, and seeing before me a terrible hot red light, crossed with thick bars. I heard voices, too, speaking with a hollow sound. Uncertainty and fright confused my senses. Then I became conscious that someone was lifting me up more gently than I had ever been raised before. I rested my head against a pillow, and felt comfortable.

In five minutes the cloud of confusion melted away. I knew quite well that I was in my own bed, and that the red light came from the nursery fire. It was night. A candle burnt on the table. Bessie stood at the foot of the bed with a basin in her hand, and a gentleman sat in a chair near my pillow, leaning over me.

I felt an inexpressible relief, a feeling of protection and safety, when I knew that there was a stranger in the room, a person not belonging to Gateshead, and not related to Mrs Reed. Turning from Bessie, I examined the face of the visitor. I knew him. It was Mr Lloyd, who kept a shop for the sale of medicines, and who was sometimes called in by Mrs Reed when one of the servants was ill. For herself and her children she employed a proper doctor.

'Well, who am I?' he asked.



I spoke his name, offering him my hand at the same time. He took it, smiling and saying, 'You will be better soon.' He then addressed Bessie, warning her to be very careful that I was not disturbed during the night. Having given some further directions, he left, saying that he would call again the next day.

'Do you feel as if you could sleep, miss?' asked Bessie, rather softly.

I scarcely dared answer her, as I feared that her next sentence might be rough.

'I will try.'

'Would you like to drink, or could you eat anything?'

'No, thank you, Bessie.'

'Then I think I will go to bed, but you may call me if you need anything in the night.'

Bessie went into the housemaid's room, which was near. I heard her say:

'Sarah, come and sleep with me in the nursery. I daren't be alone with that poor child tonight: she might die. It's strange that she should have fainted so. I wonder if she saw anything. Missis was rather too hard on her.'

Sarah came back with her, and after half an hour of whispering together, they both soon fell asleep. For me, however, it was a night of wakefulness.

Next day, by twelve o'clock, I was up and dressed, and sat wrapped in a rug by the nursery fire. I felt weak in body but my worst trouble was an indescribable misery of mind. Yet, I thought, I ought to have been happy, as all the Reeds had gone out in the carriage. Abbot was sewing in another room, and Bessie, as she moved about the nursery at her work, spoke to me now and then with unusual kindness. Then, too, a cake had come up from the kitchen, on a certain brightly painted plate, which I had loved for a long time, but been forbidden to touch. This precious dish was now placed on my knee, and I was invited to eat. Useless favour! I had no desire to eat. Bessie asked whether I would have a book, and I begged her to fetch *Gulliver's Travels* from the

library. I had read this book again and again with delight, but when it was now placed in my hands, the pictures that had so often given me pleasure, the huge and the tiny men, filled my mind with fear. I closed the book.

Bessie had now finished tidying, and began to sew. Meanwhile she sang. She had a sweet voice, but the song was a sad one, about an orphan child.

'Come, Miss Jane, don't cry,' said Bessie, as it ended. She might just as well have said to the fire, 'Don't burn!'

Shortly after, Mr Lloyd came in.

'What, up already!' he said, as he entered the nursery. 'Well, nurse, how is she?'

Bessie answered that I was doing very well.

'Then she ought to look more cheerful. Come here, Miss Jane. You have been crying: can you tell me why? Have you any pain?'

'No, sir.'

'Oh, I suppose she is crying because she could not go out in the carriage with Missis,' said Bessie.

I answered immediately. 'I never cried for such a thing in my life! I hate going out in the carriage. I cry because I am miserable.'

'Nonsense, Miss!' said Bessie.

Mr Lloyd appeared a little puzzled. He fixed his eyes on me very steadily. Having observed me for some time, he said:

'What made you ill yesterday?'

'She had a fall,' said Bessie, again entering the conversation.

'Fall! Why, that is like a baby! Can't she manage to walk at her age?'

'I was knocked down,' was my explanation, drawn from me by my wounded pride. 'But that did not make me ill.'

At that moment a loud bell rang. It was for the servant's dinner.

'That's for you, nurse,' said Mr Lloyd. 'You can go down.'

Bessie would rather have stayed, but she had to go, be-

cause punctuality at meals was strictly enforced at Gateshead.

‘The fall did not make you ill. What did, then?’ continued Mr Lloyd when Bessie had gone.

‘I was shut up in a room where there is a ghost.’

I saw Mr Lloyd smile and look puzzled at the same time.

‘Ghost! What, you are a baby, after all! You are afraid of ghosts?’

‘Of Mr Reed’s ghost. He died in that room. Neither Bessie nor anyone else will go into it at night, if they can avoid it. It was cruel to shut me up alone without a candle.’

‘And is it that which makes you so miserable?’

‘I am unhappy, for other reasons.’

‘What other reasons? Can you tell me some of them?’

How much I wished to reply fully to this question! Children can feel, but they cannot explain their feelings.

‘For one thing, I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters.’

‘But you have a kind aunt and cousins.’

‘But John Reed knocked me down, and my aunt shut me up in the red room.’

Mr Lloyd paused, looking thoughtful.

‘Don’t you think Gateshead is a very beautiful place?’ he asked. ‘Aren’t you very lucky to be able to live here?’

‘It is not my house, sir, and Abbot says I have less right here than a servant.’

‘But you wouldn’t wish to leave such a splendid place?’

‘If I had anywhere else to go, I should be glad to leave it.’

‘Have you any other relations belonging to your father?’

‘I don’t know. I asked Aunt Reed once, and she said that possibly I might have some poor, low relations called Eyre, but she knew nothing of them.’

‘Would you like to go to school?’

I considered. I scarcely knew what school was. John Reed hated his school, and spoke insultingly of his master, but John Reed’s opinions were not mine. Bessie’s accounts of school discipline, gathered from the young ladies of a family where she lived before coming to Gateshead, were rather