



l.k. rigel

Jane Eyre Retold

episode one

My Mr.  
Rochester

# My Mr. Rochester 1 (Jane Eyre Retold)

Copyright 2013 L.K. Rigel

Published by Beastie Press

Cover design by eyemaidthis

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locales or organizations is entirely coincidental.

Ebooks are not transferable. All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, with the exception of brief quotations used in critical articles and reviews, without written permission from the author. The unauthorized reproduction and distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal.

**[Sign up for email notice when new releases come out](#)**



## Table of Contents

[My Legacy](#)

[Madam Mope](#)

[The Red Room](#)

[Brocklehurst](#)

[Goodbye To Gateshead](#)

[Bishop's Charity](#)

[Helen](#)

[To Hate Him More](#)

[I Scandalize Myself](#)

[News From Gateshead](#)

[Stranger On A Train](#)

Thornfield Righteous Estate

Dusk

The Master



**My Mr. Rochester**  
**( *Jane Eyre Retold* )**

*Episode 1*

**l.k. rigel**



« *Chapter 1* »

*My Legacy*

**Anno Domini 2081**

One rainy afternoon when I was thirteen, I was summoned to the morning room to sit with Mrs. Reed and her two younger children. This was no kindness on Mrs. Reed's part. The vicar was coming for tea. No doubt she meant to show how well she cared for me.

I am an orphan. I belong to no one. My mother died not long after I was born, and it's said my father died of

grief within six months of her death.

According to custom I should have gone to my father's brother. But my mother's brother was an Anointed Elder, well connected and financially comfortable, so I was sent to him at Gateshead Righteous Household near New Bellefleur in the south of Idaho.

Uncle Reed also succumbed to an early death, from a wasting disease no one would ever speak of. When he lay dying upstairs a year after my arrival, he made his wife swear before God to keep me and raise me as she would her own children. Mr. Fleming, the vicar, was witness to her solemn oath.

I didn't mind going to the morning room to see the vicar. Mrs. Reed was

always civil to me in front of visitors, and there were sure to be raspberry teacakes. I didn't particularly like Mr. Fleming, but that was unremarkable. I didn't particularly like anybody.

I didn't dislike him.

In a mood to seek approval, I brushed my hair and secured it in a chignon at the nape of my neck. I changed into my new dress, a soft white cotton and silk blend with a high waist and a scooped neck. The skirt flowed from just below my breasts to mid calf length. I put on my gold cross pendant, my one piece of jewelry and the only memento from my mother.

Mrs. Reed nodded approval when

I entered the room. John Reed scowled as usual then pretended not to see me.

Eliza, two years younger than me, had the honor of pouring Mr. Fleming's tea. As the pot wavered in her hands, Mrs. Reed frowned, making her more nervous. The vicar kindly tried to divert attention from Eliza, and his gaze landed on me.

"How is Jane Eyre coming along?" His smile fell when he really looked at me. If he meant to instigate some pleasant chit-chat, he'd picked the wrong subject. "Not another Georgiana, I see. Not destined for great beauty."

"Another Georgiana?" John Reed snickered and looked at me sideways. "Don't hold your breath, vicar."



John Reed was seventeen and heir to Gateshead, though his sister Georgiana was his superior in age and character. Under the Edicts, Decrees, and Laws of New Judah, a female can inherit only in the absence of a male.

Georgiana was also *my* superior in character. By now I would have murdered John Reed, if not for the inheritance then to rid the world of a meritless pest.

He was tall and thick for his age, with limp hair the color of dirt in August, ruddy skin, and persistent acne. He gorged himself at every meal, resulting in flabby cheeks, a general repulsive softness, and a belly which

spilled over his belt. At the moment, the crumbly evidence of raspberry teacake covered that belly.

“Are you enjoying your sabbatical, John?” I said.

His face darkened, as I’d intended. I felt a small victory in delivering the sting. It was a sensitive subject. He ought to be away at school, but he’d had trouble finding one to accept him.

“Oh, Jane Eyre. Why did you remind me?” Mrs. Reed rubbed the furrow between her eyes. “California, Mr. Fleming. I don’t think I can bear it!”

In accordance with his late father’s final instructions, John had applied to Princeton in the heathen old country. Unfortunately he’d never taken

the trouble to study, relying instead on the legacy position he was sure awaited him. Princeton declined Mrs. Reed's little prince, as did Harvard, Columbia, Brigham Young and several lesser lights. Only one approved university accepted the darling. Pepperdine in the dreaded west.

The vicar said, "I assure you, Mrs. Reed, Pepperdine is an oasis of righteousness. John will receive a good moral education there."

*And not a moment before time,* I thought. I caught Mr. Fleming's eye, and I knew he thought the same.

Mr. Fleming added, "If John is to take Mr. Reed's place on the council of

elders one day, he must graduate from a listed university. Pepperdine is, after all, on the list.”

I turned my face to the window, but John saw my smile in the reflection and scowled at me again. I wished he'd already gone. He'd begged a year off, a sabbatical from study, which his mother agreed to—owing to his delicate health, of course. Everyone could see he was headed for ruin. Everyone but Mrs. Reed.

“The mirrors crack when Jane Eyre walks by.” He returned to the subject of my looks. If he'd been closer, I'm sure he would have kicked me out of habit. “No one can compare her to Georgiana.”

It was true. I have always been plain. My hair is a mystery color, neither brown nor blond. My eyes are hazel, neither blue nor green. My complexion is clear but unremarkable. I was thin even then, not from lack of good food but from lack of appetite.

I was, however, beginning to develop a figure. I'd recently started my courses, to Mrs. Reed's disgust. She sent me to Bessie, the housekeeper, for instruction on becoming a woman. As Bessie described the business, it all sounded like a lot of mess and bother and humiliation without much reward.

Bessie said it proved God meant women for service and not for authority.

I asked her why then did we have authority to run households and care for children and manage so much hard and dirty work? For which cleverness my reward was a slap across the face.

“Jane has her own virtues.” Eliza looked at me kindly. Some innate goodness remained in her—though her brother did his best to drive it out. “But no one’s as pretty as Georgiana. I can’t wait for her to come home.”

Eliza was right about Georgiana. The oldest Reed child was unlike any of her family. I fancied she favored my uncle and not her mother.

Georgiana Reed was quick and clever, and she was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. She had thick

raven hair that followed any pattern Abbot, her lady's maid, tried with it. Her blue eyes twinkled with fun and mischief. Her complexion was like rose-tinged porcelain, and her lips were a perfect shape and color. (She used rouge and lipstick, but Mrs. Reed seemed to believe her daughter's features were struck upon her at birth by angel kisses.)

Georgiana was never cruel to me, and sometimes she was actively kind. Only one thing could explain it. As an infant she must have been switched out of her crib by goblins. I chuckled at the picture of it. Were the goblins disappointed or happy with the sour and mean child they brought back to their

kingdom in Georgiana's stead?

Such philosophical questions sustained me in my loneliness.

“Your sister will be home for the Christmas holiday, my pet.” Mrs. Reed took the pot from Eliza to refill her own cup. “My youngest child is correct, Mr. Fleming. Georgiana's become quite the beauty.”

“Curves enough to tempt but not so much as to intoxicate,” Mr. Fleming said genially.

I thought the coarse remark was shocking. Eliza standing next to him appeared not to hear it, and John grinned and nodded.

Mrs. Reed took no offense. “She gives me no worries. She'll make a



wonderful match.”

“And yet... Harvard?” Mr. Fleming said in honest perplexity. “Curious giving a daughter such an expensive education—and in the United States.”

It was bad enough New Judah was forced to send its sons out to the heathen old country for their degrees. Most good families kept their daughters close to home until marriage. A degree from a local college was sufficient.

It wasn't as if Georgiana would become a physician or engineer or anything so unsuited to a lady of her rank.

“Those dreadful last instructions.”

Mrs. Reed gave the vicar a sharp look. “I’ve carried out my husband’s wishes, even those which cause me grief, as you well know.”

“Yes, Mrs. Reed. Of course, Mrs. Reed.”

“Vaccinations, evolution...” Mrs. Reed grumbled under her breath.

“Troubling things,” Mr. Fleming said. “But Mr. Reed *was* an Anointed Elder. His authority can’t be questioned.”

I turned again to the window, relieved I wasn’t mentioned in the list of Mrs. Reed’s painful obligations. Once I caught her notice, it never turned out well. Georgiana was so lucky.

Don’t get me wrong. I didn’t envy

my cousin's beauty or rank. I envied her freedom and her education—though I wouldn't like to go to the heathen old country, as we all called the United States. Not even for an education.

“Georgiana doesn't complain,” Mrs. Reed said. “She makes the best of things, as usual. She's met what decent people she can find in Cambridge. Useful connections for the future.”

“Perhaps she'll marry a diplomat.” Mr. Fleming frowned at his tea as if searching his cup for a pleasanter response.

“I did consult Bishop Brocklehurst,” Mrs. Reed added. “He found no fault in Harvard.”

“Well done, Mrs. Reed.” A smile broke out like sunshine over Mr. Fleming’s face. “The bishop always knows what’s best.”

Mrs. Reed loved to be caught out at being clever. She drank in everyone’s approving looks until she came to me. All the pleasure drained from her expression.

“As to Jane Eyre. I don’t know what to do with her, vicar. Truly.” She sighed her martyr’s sigh. “It’s so unfair. The daughter of my dead husband’s dead sister. Hardly a real relation.” It irked her so to be bound to me.

Yet bound to me she was. Mrs. Reed was a cruel woman. (She never

allowed me to call her aunt.) She had countless faults. But she was a pious woman. With meanness of spirit and undaunted bitter resentment, Mrs. Reed kept to the letter of her oath.

She had never promised to love me.

We all at the same time noticed Bessie standing in the doorway. "Madam, a package has come for Miss Jane."

The room went silent but for the crackle of an ember on the fire. Everyone stared dumbly at the housekeeper as if some alien language had just danced on her tongue. John Reed and his mother glared at me in indignation. How dare I presume to

receive a gift!

Bessie held, as announced, a package wrapped in maroon paper and tied with a gray jute string. What could it be?

More mysterious, who could have sent it?



« *Chapter 2* »

*Madam Mope*

I hesitated and glanced at Mrs. Reed. Had the vicar not been present, John Reed would have already laid into the package and torn away the wrapping. He'd be taunting me with whatever was inside, holding it over my head or threatening to toss the thing into the fire.

But the vicar *was* present, and we all stared at each other.

“Well, Jane?” Mrs. Reed finally said. “Don’t dawdle. See what it is.”

Too much to hope she'd let me escape to open it in private.

Bessie brought the package to the side table near me. Her eyes sparkled with curiosity. I felt she was happy for me to have received any kind of present while the others were consternated and more than a little angry.

“Bessie, go to the kitchen and fetch more hot water for the tea,” said Mrs. Reed. “And send someone in with another log for the fire.”

Inside the paper was a dark gray cardboard box with a white oval on the top. Within the oval, gray letters read *Harvard Book Store Since 1932*, and beneath the oval in white letters, *1256*



*Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge  
Harvard Square.*

I felt a smile curl my lips as I ran my fingers over the words. What would the inside of a hundred-fifty-year-old bookstore be like? I'd always heard they read with technology in the United States, on little flat slabs where the words changed automatically and there were no pages to turn. But of course a university would have real books.

“Well, Jane? What is it?” Mrs. Reed said. “Who is it from?”

“It's a book.” I could have said more. Of course I knew who it was from, though I was baffled as to why Georgiana would send me anything. I opened the cover and found a loose

sheet of paper lying inside.

“Read us the note, Jane,” Mr. Fleming said. “There’s a good girl.”

I obeyed.

*“Jane. I know you’ll be gobsmacked to receive this package from me, but let me tell you what it is. A brilliant insight struck me this morning as I browsed the campus book store. Jane Eyre shall become a teacher! The idea must have come from your guardian angel, Jane; otherwise I can’t*

*explain why I thought of you at all. Let this Atlas of the World mark the beginning of your career. Say hello to my brother and sister, and give Mama my love. –Georgie.”*

Mrs. Reed paled. “Georgie!” She forgot to be flummoxed that Georgiana would send me a present, let alone such an expensive one. “Did you hear that, vicar? *Georgie*. Oh, dear. Why did we let our sweet girl go to that heathen land?”

“There, there, madam. All young people go through phases.” Mr. Fleming

touched Mrs. Reed's hand, which she didn't withdraw. "It's nothing, I'm sure."

"May I be excused?" I hugged the precious gift to my chest.

"Yes, go. Leave me to my distress, selfish creature." Mrs. Reed waved me on.

I felt rather than saw John Reed rise to follow, but his mother came to my inadvertent rescue. "Oh, John," she cried. "Come hug me. I'm so glad you've stayed home this year."

I closed the door behind me and skipped away with my present, punching the air in victory.

On her return to the morning room, Bessie caught me thusly dancing. Her

mouth fell open, and I thought sure she'd report my behavior. I jerked my finger to my lips and shook my head, silently pleading with her to say nothing.

Sweet Bessie nodded and waved me on with a grin.

I rushed to the library and climbed into the window seat and closed its curtains. As was my ritual in that cold space, I stuffed one of the pillows behind my back, tucked my feet under my skirt, and pulled the coverlet over my lap.

I was free and safe, with John Reed detained in the morning room for as long as the vicar stayed.

Sitting cross-legged in my

hideaway, I opened my new treasure. In one section, maps of North America before and after the Great Secession faced each other. I traced the outlines of New Judah and found New Bellefleur in Idaho, the state farthest northwest. The United States bordered our country in larger masses than I'd imagined, especially in the east.

I found Cambridge, Harvard's home in Massachusetts. Pepperdine was in the southwest on the California coast. John Reed's campus-to-be overlooked the ocean. How wonderful.

It was interesting to compare the current maps with the one country of two generations ago. Spokane had been part of the state of Washington. Reno was

part of the state of Nevada. Half the Sierra Nevada Mountains were part of California! That made no sense. Our westernmost state, Jefferson, was carved out from parts of Oregon, California, and Nevada. A strip of United States little more than a hundred miles wide ran along the Canadian border. Why did they do that?

I was in my glory leafing through the pages. Europe might as well be Mars. I'd met people, visitors to Gateshead, who'd been to Canada and the heathen country and missionaries at church who'd returned from Mexico and Ecuador and Argentina. But not Europe. Or Asia, for that matter.

Of all the places in the world, why did God place me at Gateshead? I was out of tune here. Surely somewhere existed where I could sing a happy song and breathe free. I returned to the map of North America. I closed my eyes, made a circle in the air three times, and pointed to a spot on the map.

My finger landed a few hundred miles from Gateshead in the state of Jefferson in a county called Millcote. I turned to Jefferson's county maps. Millcote was farm country, spread over foothills and valleys. There were three Righteous Households: Fairfax, Ingram, and Wade—and one Righteous Estate, Thornfield. I traced the county



perimeter.

*Yes.*

A sense of well-being glowed within me. Surely my guardian angel had guided my hand. Right then I adopted Millcote as my true home, my soul's home. It didn't matter if I never saw it. I knew now such a resting place existed in the world. It would be the theoretical anchor for my adrift self.

Had Georgiana done me a favor, sending the atlas? I was glad she did. Somehow it made me like the heathen country a little better. How funny was that? I turned to the county page for Cambridge to look for Harvard.

Someone had written on the page. Scandalous! The lettering was tiny, but

when I held the atlas up to the window for better light the writing was clear:

*Hamlet 1-3-78*

I set the book down and drew my knees to my chest, mulling the inscription over. *Hamlet 1-3-78*. It must be a topographical reference, but Cambridge was far larger than a hamlet. A town, at least. A city, I thought. Anyway, a pox on whoever defaced such a beautiful book!

With my arms wrapped around my legs, I leaned against the cold windowpane and watched the rain fall silently on the world outside. Leaves fluttered and bent and popped up again, gathering and dropping the small weight

of raindrops.

In the ivy that clung to the window's Juliet railing, two tiny brown sparrows sheltered from the weather. One tilted his little head inquisitively, and I wished for my drawing pad and charcoal pencils. I tried to capture his features in my memory.

The library door opened.

“Ha! Madam Mope, I've got you!” John Reed cried, as if he'd pounced upon the object of his search—me. He paused, having found the room empty. “I know you're in here, Jane Eyre. The choker's gone, and I'll seek until I find.”

*Choker.* John Reed and his friends called all clergymen chokers after the white cravats tied so tightly in fanciful

knots around their necks.

“Where the hell is she?”

If only Mrs. Reed could once overhear her darling boy’s foul swears.

“Eliza!” he called out. “Jane isn’t here. Tell mother she’s run out into the rain. She’s in trouble.”

I closed my eyes and thanked my guardian angel for giving me the presence of mind to close the curtain. I prayed John wouldn’t find me. That I wouldn’t hiccup involuntarily.

“She’s in the window seat. I’m sure of it.” Eliza came into the room in answer to John’s call. “She’s always there.”

I’d give him no satisfaction of

discovery and no opportunity to drag me out. I threw back the curtain and stepped down to the floor. “What do you want?” Though my heart raced a hundred miles a minute, I tried to affect utter indifference.

“Say: *what do you want, Master Reed.*” He sat in the armchair by the unlit fireplace and pointed at the floor. “I want you to come here, and bring that book.”

Bile rose in my throat. By accident of birth, I was expected to submit to this bully? “No.”

Eliza gasped.

“Come here, charity case,” John Reed said. “I don’t think you understand the precarious nature of your position.”

I laughed. “Do you even know what that means? You’re repeating something you read in a book.”

“Jane, do be careful,” Eliza said.

She was right. I had no defense against him. He’d bamboozled his mother, and there was nothing anyone could do to correct him. The servants were terrified of him. I was too, but my contempt ran deeper than my terror.

He held out his hand, palm up, as if he really expected me to give him my book.

“It wasn’t Georgiana’s to give,” he said. “You know that, Jane. All the wealth of Gateshead flows from me. You have no business accepting this

book. You're my dependent. You have no money. Your father left you nothing. You ought to work in a factory or beg on the streets of a town before you live in this fine house with an anointed's children. I can't believe my mother lets you eat at the same table with us. All your fine clothes are at my expense."

"Mrs. Reed buys my clothes."

"From my inheritance. I'll teach you. Go face the wall, away from the windows."

I glanced at the wall, but I didn't move.

"In three months, I'll be eighteen. Do you know what that means, Jane Eyre? My trustee will be gone, and things will change. All will be done

according to my will. My mother's good nature will protect you no longer. And if you persist in modeling such an evil example to my innocent sister, you'll force me to have you removed to the workhouse."

"John!" Eliza said.

"However reluctantly," he added. He turned his palm downward and pointed to the spot he'd indicated before. "Now come here, Jane."

"No."

"You impudent girl!" Mrs. Reed was there in the center of the library. I never saw her come in. She was enraged and blundering toward me, her eyes bulging like a caricature of a human



being. “You ingrate! You Lilith! You Jezebel!”

She raised her hand to strike, and I raised the atlas as a shield. She stole it away from me, crying *aha!*

Mrs. Reed ran to John and I chased after her. He grabbed the book and held it over my head, taunting me as I’d known he would if he got the chance. I charged at him and beat his chest with my fists.

“Help!” he cried. “She’s a wild animal!”

“Take her away,” Mrs. Reed told the servants, for Bessie and Abbot had come to see what all the noise was about. “Take her to the Red Room and secure her there.”

Four hands immediately seized me.

John Reed crowed triumphantly, my beautiful atlas clutched in his fat, teacake-smudged hands.

“No!” I screamed. “Not the Red Room. I didn’t do anything wrong!”

But Bessie and Abbot were strong working women, and I was a frail girl. Though I kicked and twisted, I was swept off my feet, helpless, and borne away.

“Not the Red Room!” I cried. “It’s not fair! Oh, it’s so not fair!”



« *Chapter 3* »

*The Red Room*

Bessie let go of one of my legs, and my heel struck the hardwood floor.

“Ouch!”

She opened the door to the Red Room and dropped the chatelaine back into her apron pocket. She and Abbot dragged me over the threshold and flung me onto a hard-backed chair placed on the wood floor beyond the red Persian carpet. I immediately lunged forward, headed for the door.

“Stop now, Miss Jane.” Bessie grabbed me. “Don’t make us treat you harsher than need be.”

“Harsh is exactly what needs be with this one,” Abbot said.

I lunged again. They caught me again. I kicked Abbot in the shin.

“I’ll take down the bed stays,” she said. “We’ll have to truss her to the chair.”

“No, don’t! For God’s sake, have pity.” I broke down in tears, my shoulders shaking with my sobs.

Bessie sat on my lap to hold me on the chair while Abbot collected what cords she could find.

“For shame,” Abbot said. “*You’re*

the one who should have pity.” She tied my ankles to the chair legs and removed my shoes, tossing them away to the corner. “What shocking conduct, Jane Eyre, to strike the young gentleman, your master.”

“Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?”

“You’re less than a servant.” Abbot yanked my arms behind the back of the chair and bound my wrists together. Bessie stood up then. She did nothing to prevent Abbot from tying a cord around my waist to the chair to bind me more securely. “You do nothing to earn your keep,” Abbot continued. “Sit there now and think about your wickedness.”

“Do you think I’m wicked?” I asked Bessie.

She looked down at her hands then at Abbot. “She’s never been wicked before.” At last somewhat of a defense, but too late. I was immobilized.

“It was always in her,” Abbot said. “I’ve told madam my opinion, and she agrees with me.”

“You’re just mad because Georgiana went away and didn’t take you with her,” I said. “It’s not my fault you’re a housemaid now. Don’t take it out on me.”

Abbot’s face reddened, but I wasn’t sorry for saying it.

“You ought to be mindful, Miss

Jane,” Bessie said. “Think of your obligation to Mrs. Reed. She keeps you in kindness. If she were to turn you out, you’d have to go to the workhouse just as Master Reed said.”

I could say nothing. The words weren’t new to me. I’d heard similar whisperings all my days. This litany of my dependence had become a vague sing-song in my ear, painful and soul-crushing.

Abbot joined in. “And don’t think yourself equal in rank with the Reeds, even if you are above me and Bessie. Mrs. Reed kindly allows you to be brought up with her children, but they will have a great deal of money, and you will have none. You should be humble.

You should try to make yourself agreeable to them.”

“We tell you this for your good.” Bessie’s voice softened. “If you were useful and pleasant, you’d have a home here all your days. But if you’re passionate and rude, you’ll be sent away. I’m sure of it.”

“Good,” I said. I thought of how rudely John Reed had spoken to me, how he’d taunted me and hurt me all my life. I might be poor and plain and insignificant, but I was a human being. The prospect of living out my life in this cruel manner, with people who hated me, was insufferable. “I desire it above all things.”



I wished I could be sent to Millcote—to my Hamlet 1-3-78.

“You don’t mean that, Miss Jane,” Bessie said.

“Never mind,” said Abbot. “God will punish you. He might strike you dead in the midst of a tantrum, and then where would you go? To the pit of everlasting fire.”

I hadn’t thought of that.

I hadn’t thought of ever dying. Which was odd, considering how so many had died all around me.

“Come, Bessie,” Abbot said. “Let’s leave her. Say your prayers, Miss Eyre. Repent.”

They left. I started to be nervous

when Abbot popped her head in for one last piece of advice. “Repent or something bad might come down the chimney and fetch you away.”

“No, no,” I said. “Don’t go. Don’t leave me here alone.”

The key turned in the lock, and I was alone in the Red Room. Couldn’t they hear my beating heart? I wanted to run to the door and pound on it, but I was tied to the chair.

Abbot’s last admonition rang in my ear, and I glanced at the fireplace. All my fancied bravery slipped away. The cold hearth was quite large. I could fit in it. Something *could* come down the chimney and fetch me away.

It struck me then that I’d been

entirely obtuse in my relationship with God. If brutally honest, I had to admit I'd offended more than pleased him.

But it wasn't my fault! I never meant to insult God, but only to rail against injustice. I had believed the world and heaven too loved justice. I suddenly saw all with new eyes.

I looked around at my prison, a square bedchamber, the largest and stateliest in the mansion but never slept in. The bed's massive mahogany pillars were hung with deep red damask curtains, now hanging loose for lack of binders. The bed stood in the room's center like the stage of a theater in the round.

It was a corner room. Red curtains shrouded four large windows in two walls. The Persian carpet had a red, burgundy, and maroon design. The cedar trunk at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth. The wallpaper was a soft pink blush color. The wardrobe, dressing table and upholstered chairs were of dark polished mahogany.

The room was cold. There was never a fire here, and the natural gas vents used in the morning room (and, I suspected, in the Reeds' bedrooms) on the bleakest days of winter were never opened here. The housemaids came only on Saturdays to dust and clean the

mirrors and interior windows.

I started to go a little crazy, convinced a ghost or some sort of specter watched me from under the barren fireplace grate. I very nearly swooned. I made myself recall the time I'd secretly followed Mrs. Reed when she came in here. She'd survived the experience, and I had too.

I'd tracked her so quietly, half terrified she'd turn and discover me and half thrilled by the adventure. She unlocked a drawer in the wardrobe and rifled through several rolled-up parchments then withdrew her jewelry box and a miniature of her deceased husband, my dear uncle (with all my heart I believe he was dear).

And that's why the Red Room was so terrifying to me. That great bed, center stage, was my uncle's deathbed. There he died. There he lay in state. For some reason, it had taken Mrs. Reed three days to find an undertaker to bring a coffin and bear away the body.

The Red Room was a chamber of death and sorrow.

Something did move beneath the grate. It couldn't be smoke—more likely the wisp of a dark spirit.

I strained against my bonds to no joy. John Reed's violent tyranny, his mother's aversion to me, the servants' partiality—all the insults of my days grew in my disturbed mind, a pile of

resentments I'd been long collecting.

Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to even try to win anyone's favor?

John Reed was the cruel one, and I was tied here to this chair. "Unjust! Unjust!" said reason within me. *Send me to the workhouse*, I thought. Anything would be better than this.

I was out of harmony at Gateshead. I was nobody. I might as well not exist. I had nothing in common with Mrs. Reed or her children. They did not love me. I did not love them. How could they feel affection for a Jezebel, as Mrs. Reed had so uncaringly

called me?

The key turned in the lock, and Bessie came through the door. Hurray! She'd taken pity and had come to free me.

But no. John Reed was on her heels. He pushed past her and came directly at me, and I thought how his appearance, disgusting and ugly, so keenly matched his inner core.

As if he read the review on my face, all at once he struck me. The room spun, and Bessie shrank against the door.

“That was for speaking back to my mother,” he said.

He hit me again before I could regain my equilibrium. “And that was



for your sneaky way of getting behind curtains.”

Again. “And that for the look in your eye just now, you rat!”

A warm, salty taste filled my mouth. I looked down and saw blood on my white dress.

“What were you doing behind the curtain?” he asked.

“Reading.”

“I don’t believe you. My mother was right. You’re a Jezebel. You’re a wanton. You were doing nasty things in there. Looking at yourself. Touching yourself.”

What was he talking about?

“Master Reed!” Bessie exclaimed. Her utter shock stopped him a

moment, as if he just took notice there was someone else in the room, witness to his manic ravings. “Get out.” His voice was like ice.

“But Master Reed, should you...” Bessie’s protest faded. She withered under his glare and did as she was told.

I was alone with the monster, and immobilized. He walked over to the corner, kicked my shoes away and pulled back the curtain. He stared out at the world, and I could see the wheels spinning in his brain. He turned back to me, his lip curled slightly as it did when he embarked on some new tease of his little sister or torture of an insect he’d caught.

“What are we to do with you, Jane Eyre?”

My hatred turned to fear. Instinctively, I strained against my bonds until the ropes burned my wrists and ankles.

“My aunt—”

“Never call my mother that!” He screamed at me.

Pain seared into my cheek. The room tilted again. He slapped me so hard! I wasn't breathing, but there didn't seem to be anything I could do about it.

“She is Mrs. Reed to you, and you should thank God every day she had the kindness to take you in and keep you off the streets.”

I choked and sputtered, desperately dragging air back into my lungs, as John Reed paced back and forth.

“Now Jane, you must never mind about that book.” His tone modulated, and his false reasonableness made my blood run cold. “I’m sure Georgiana’s motives were sincere and pure. She has no appreciation of your inherent wickedness. But no matter. I’ve taken care of it.”

“What? What have you done?”

“It’s gone,” he said. “The atlas. If you must know, I’ve burnt it.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“It’s in the kitchen ovens. They’re

baking bread just now, and the flames are good and hot.”

“Oh, John Reed, I hate you. I hate you so!”

His hand was raised, poised to slam once again across my jaw. I closed my eyes and braced for the blow. But it didn't come. Instead, his warm fat hand rested softly against my cheek.

“Oh, Jane,” he said. “Jane.”

Thick and moist lips pressed against mine. As my eyes popped open in shock, his tongue thrust into my mouth. I jerked my head back, repulsed.

“Jane.” He said my name urgently. “I'm sorry. I'm sorry about what I said before. I don't think you're plain.” He moaned with such agony, you'd think he

was the tortured one. My heart raced with disgust and fear. He kissed me again, and his hand moved from my cheek to my throat.

He let go my throat and I relaxed slightly as he gripped my shoulder, but then his hand slid down to my breast and he squeezed me hard. Bessie's lecture on womanhood crowded into my brain.

I screamed. Not in pain. Not in shock.

I screamed in abject terror.

I screamed the world down to our feet. I screamed all the red of the Red Room into a swirling ball of rage and screamed that rage into John Reed's fat face. The door flew open and I saw his

backside lumber away as he fled. The chair I was bound to tipped, and the hardwood floor came rushing toward my face.



« *Chapter 4* »

*Brocklehurst*

It felt like coming out of a nightmare. Someone lifted me to a sitting position and propped me against my pillows. I was in my bedroom, dressed in my nightgown. It was daylight, but I couldn't tell if it was morning or well into afternoon.

On one side of my bed Bessie watched me anxiously. I turned my face away, unwilling to accept her false show of concern after she abandoned me to



that monster John Reed.

The gentleman who'd lifted me hovered over me, examining my eyes, and I felt a rush of relief. A stranger in the house, guarantor of safety and civil treatment. Not truly a stranger—I knew who he was—but someone not belonging to Gateshead Righteous, and therefore not Mrs. Reed's creature.

Or John Reed's creature either. I had to consider that now.

“Well, do you know who I am?” the man asked.

“Dr. Lloyd,” I said, and he smiled at my correct answer. “But why are you here, sir?”

A dull ache nagged at my right temple, and my wrists and ankles were

sore, but I couldn't imagine Mrs. Reed calling in a doctor. She'd never called one for countless other wounds and scrapes I'd suffered under her guardianship.

“Bessie asked me to see you as long as I was here,” Dr. Lloyd said. “I was called to attend poor Mrs. Reed and her brood.”

I smiled at the way he said *brood*, drawing out the *oooo* sound. My resentment of Bessie eased somewhat.

“Something they ate, I believe.” Dr. Lloyd shook down a thermometer and stuck it in my mouth. “Someone dropped a picture book into the oven fire while the bread was baking. Fumes from

the burning ink did no wonders for the loaves, I daresay.”

He winked at me, as if it was a joke only he and I could understand.

“She’s to have liquids only,” he told Bessie. “Broth, tea. A little brandy.”

“Dr. Lloyd!” she said, scandalized, and my eyes grew wide.

“No brandy?” the doctor said jovially. “I suppose not. The tea then, with honey and lemon.”

“Yes, sir.” Bessie smiled. She appreciated his good nature too. She was really quite pretty when the sweet side of her personality held sway.

Dr. Lloyd seemed pleased with the thermometer results. “Well, Jane. I’ll

come again tomorrow, how is that?"

"Oh, sir!" I grabbed his arm. "What is to become of me?"

I couldn't let him go. I wanted—no. I *needed*—to feel this pleasant conviviality for a few more minutes. Just a few more minutes! Even if only to discuss my dreary fate.

He squeezed my hand. "I'll tell you what's to become of you, Jane. You are to eat what Bessie gives you and sleep all day and the whole night through. You've had a slight concussion, but nothing that won't be put to rights by this prescription. Tell me you'll be a wise young lady—"

So glad he didn't tell me to *be a*

*good girl.*

“—and do as I say.”

“Yes, Dr. Lloyd.”

At that moment the bell rang for the servants' meal. It was noon then. Bessie anxiously looked at the door then back again. Dr. Lloyd understood her dilemma. If she didn't eat on time with the others, she would get nothing until late tonight. “Go ahead, Bessie. I'll talk with my patient a few minutes more and let myself out.”

“Yes, sir,” she said. “Thank you, Dr. Lloyd.”

“Now Jane,” he said when we were alone. “Has someone hurt you? Are your injuries not from an accidental fall? Tell me what's truly troubling

you.”

*Never.*

If I told the world John Reed had accosted me in...in that way, I'd be called Liar and Tease (which how could both be true at the same time?). I'd be branded fallen for the rest of my life. John Reed and Mrs. Reed had both already called me Jezebel.

Still, I was sorely in need of sympathy.

“I was knocked down,” I admitted. “But that’s not it.”

“What is it then?”

“I was shut up in a room where there is a ghost.”

He smiled then frowned to cover

it. "Ghost. So you're a child after all, afraid of ghosts."

"Of Mr. Reed's ghost. You may not know this, but my uncle died in that room. He was laid out there. No one will go into the Red Room at night if they can help it. It was cruel to shut me up there. I'll never forget it."

"Are you afraid now, in daylight?"

"No. But night will come again. And besides, I'm unhappy. Very unhappy, for other things."

"What other things? Can you tell me some of them?"

I was afraid to go on—for I might never stop. No one had ever asked me what I thought, how I felt. To be sure, I'd given out my thoughts and feelings

freely, but none had ever cared about them or wanted them. Oh, how my heart ached!

“For one thing, I have no father or mother, no brothers or sisters.”

“You have a kind aunt and cousins.”

“But John Reed knocked me down, and my aunt shut me up in the Red Room.” At this point, I withdrew my arms from under the covers and thrust my wrists out together.

“Hm.” Dr. Lloyd looked at the red marks. Then he looked at my nightgown, and I felt he considered it too thin and my blankets too few. He looked back to the door and at the cold grate in my



fireplace. After another minute he said, "Don't you think Gateshead a very beautiful house?" he said. "Aren't you grateful to live in such a fine place?"

"It isn't my house. Abbot says I have less right to be here than a servant."

"Pooh! Are you silly enough to wish to leave then?"

"If I had anywhere else to go, I'd be glad to. But I'll never get away until I am a woman. A grown woman."

"Have you any relations besides Mrs. Reed?"

"I think not, sir."

"None belonging to your father?"

"I asked Mrs. Reed once. She said I might have some low relations called

Eyre, but she knew nothing of them.”

“If you did, would you like to go to them?”

I had to think about that. I'd called the workhouse preferable to Gateshead, but that was theatrics. I didn't want to be poor. Who does? I'd seen the magazines at church with pictures of heathen cities and calls for missionaries. Poverty was ugly and cruel. Perhaps crueler even than John Reed.

“No,” I said. “I don't want to belong to poor people.”

“Not even if they were kind to you?”

I shook my head. “Mrs. Reed says if they exist they're beggars or criminals.

That would be worse than..." I began to see. My only hope was to live on as I was until I did reach adulthood. Marriage would offer no escape—no one would want to marry me—but there were other ways.

As if he read my mind Dr. Lloyd said, "Would you like to go to school?" Like lighting a candle in the midst of my dark thoughts.

"That was Georgiana's idea!" I told him. "She wrote only yesterday that I should become a teacher." I had cast the idea aside. No. I hadn't even picked it up, thinking it impossible.

"Perhaps Miss Georgiana's Harvard education is good for something after all." Dr. Lloyd collected his bag,

and at the door he said, “Now let go of fanciful thoughts of ghosts and red rooms and imagined unkindness. Rest, Jane. Doctor’s orders. I’ll come see you tomorrow.”

The next day at noon I was up and dressed and deposited on Mrs. Reed’s sofa in the morning room with a microfiber blanket around my legs and a cashmere shawl around my shoulders. Though I was alone, a good fire burned on the grate. There was tea with toast and raspberry jam, for when Dr. Lloyd had come in the morning to see the Reeds he left orders I was to have tea with toast and jam, and I was not to be allowed to take a chill.

I was somewhat bewildered by the treatment. At times I thought I might be dreaming, like the little princess.

I had never forgotten it. On Georgiana's thirteenth birthday, Mrs. Reed had the Movie Man in for the party. He set up a screen in the garden and showed a movie about a little princess who'd lost her father. She was poor and hungry, but her dreams were so powerful that one night she dreamed of good food and a warm shawl and slippers, and when she woke up the next morning they were there!

Mrs. Reed did not enjoy the movie. (No surprise there; the horrid Miss Minchin in the story was rather

like her.) The Movie Man never came again.

But I loved the story—not for dreams of food and clothes. It was unthinkable then that I could ever be without those things. I loved the story for the affection the little princess's father had for her and because she found happiness in the end.

Until yesterday that was my great hope, the thing I lived on, what I expected from a just world: happiness in the end.

A tear rolled down my cheek, and the raspberry jam turned sour in my mouth. Happiness in the end no longer existed in my world. A great sob poured out of me, just as the door to the morning

room opened.

“What’s all this?” Dr. Lloyd entered behind Bessie. He put his doctor bag on the table, shrugged his shoulders helplessly, and winked at her. “I’m losing my self-confidence as a doctor.”

“Oh, Dr. Lloyd!” I was more tragic than necessary, for I was embarrassed at being caught feeling sorry for myself. “I’ll never be happy again!”

“Tosh. You’ll be happy again today. Within the hour, I’ll wager.”

Now he was teasing me, and that was the cruelest thing of all.

“The Reeds aren’t here, if you’ve come to see them.” I pouted, but he

would not let go of his smile. “They’re all gone for a ride in the carriage to take in the fresh air.”

“Not all. John and Eliza are upstairs in their rooms, still recovering,” Dr. Lloyd said. “Mrs. Reed and I had an agreeable discussion this morning. About you, as it happens. She’s gone out, but she told me she’ll return sometime after noon.” He pointedly looked at the clock on the mantel which was about to strike the hour.

My heart leapt to my throat.

Bessie understood. “Would you like to move to this chair by the fire, Miss Jane?”

“That’s precisely what I would like.” Dr. Lloyd had worked magic on



Mrs. Reed, but not miracles. I had no intention of occupying her sofa when she returned.

I'd barely made it to my new station when the clock struck twelve and the lady swept into the morning room with a severe-looking man dressed all in black but for an overly large white cravat. *Choker*, I thought.

"Good day again, Mrs. Reed." Dr. Lloyd's smile vanished as he nodded to her companion. "Brocklehurst."

"Lloyd." The man took the chair beside the sofa.

I didn't know the face, but I knew the tall man's name. Bishop Brocklehurst, whose opinion Mrs. Reed

doted upon so much. I'd always imagined him god-like, fair-haired and blue-eyed, stern but kind, driving a theoretical chariot of fiery justice.

This man was dark and rough-looking, larger physically and smaller psychically than the champion of my imagination. He had long thin brown hair that covered his shoulders like a wispy shawl.

“Jane Eyre, stand up,” Mrs. Reed said.

I did as she commanded. She examined me with a look of resignation and defeat, while Bishop Brocklehurst seemed to look right through me. The imp of self-pride grabbed hold of me. I waited them both out.

The bishop spoke first.

“Dr. Lloyd has told Mrs. Reed you wish to go to school,” he said.

“Oh!” I glanced at Dr. Lloyd. I wanted to show my gratitude, but he was staring at his feet.

“Perhaps Providence looks kindly on the wish,” the bishop continued. “Mrs. Reed and I had a prior engagement in New Bellefleur this morning to discuss John Reed’s educational plans. I’m not averse to considering her niece’s welfare at the same time.”

I expected Mrs. Reed to wince at the reference to our relationship, but she glowed as if he’d called her Lady

Bountiful.

Bessie made a quick, silent curtsy and slipped out of the room. I think Dr. Lloyd would have joined her if he had been anywhere close to the door.

“How old are you, Jane Eyre?” Bishop Brocklehurst said.

“Thirteen, sir.”

“That much?” He stared me over, head to toe and back up again, lingering over my emerging breasts. “Hm.” My face burned as I remembered John Reed’s groping in the Red Room.

“And are you a good girl, Jane Eyre?” Bishop Brocklehurst said.

“Most assuredly not,” Mrs. Reed answered for me.

“You evil woman!” I cried

involuntarily. “What would my uncle say to you if he were alive?”

I say I cried out involuntary because my tongue took over without my brain’s permission. I should have been submissive in front of this potential savior, a man who could ensure I was sent to school. But self-pride is a power. When constantly knocked about and disallowed all expression, though it may sleep awhile, it grows stronger. My pride had awakened. I wondered if it would ever sleep again.

“What did you say?” Mrs. Reed turned white, not with anger but with shock. She gazed at me as if she really wondered if a fiend possessed me.

The dam of self-control burst within. It was all or nothing.

“My Uncle Reed is in heaven and can see all you do and think,” I said. “And so can my father and mother. They know how cruelly you treat me, how you shut me up in the Red Room, and how you wish me dead.”

“Then you are *not* a good girl.” Bishop Brocklehurst affected a doleful manner, but I do believe he delighted in finding me bad rather than good. “Do you know where the wicked go after death?”

“They go to hell,” I said readily.

“And what is hell? Tell me that.”

“A pit full of fire.”

“And should you like to fall into that pit and burn there forever?”

“No, sir.”

“What will you do to avoid it?”

I deliberated a moment and looked at him square on. I could see they all awaited my answer—Mrs. Reed because she knew it would condemn me, Dr. Lloyd because he hoped it would redeem me.

I squared my shoulders. “I must keep in good health, sir, and not die.”

Dr. Lloyd barked a short laugh and tried to make it sound like a cough.

“Shocking!” Mrs. Reed glared at Dr. Lloyd. “You see, bishop? Deceitful, wicked girl.”

“I am not deceitful, Mrs. Reed. If I were deceitful, I’d say I loved you and that you were the sweetest aunt in the world. I declare I do not love you. I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed. I am glad you are no relation of mine. I will never come to see you when I am grown up. If any one asks me how I liked you or how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick and that you treated me with miserable cruelty.”

“How will you keep in good health, Jane Eyre?” The bishop’s eyes seemed to jitter in their sockets. It sent a chill through me. “Children younger than you die daily. Why, I buried a mother



and her infant only yesterday. That newborn's pure soul is now in heaven. I fear the same cannot be said of you were you called."

He said nothing of the mother's soul. I cast my eyes down and sighed, wishing myself far, far away. In Hamlet 1-3-78—or Millcote. I smiled inwardly upon remembering my touchstone.

"I hope that sigh is from the heart, and that you repent of ever having insulted your excellent benefactor."

In my mind, I ran to him and kicked his shins and cried out against a world that called Mrs. Reed my benefactor.

In reality, I stood still and said nothing.

“Do you say your prayers night and morning?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you read your Bible?”

“Sometimes.”

“With pleasure? Are you fond of it?”

“I like Revelations. The book of Daniel. Genesis and Samuel. The story of Jael in Judges. Some parts of Kings and Chronicles, and Job and Jonah.”

I meant to impress upon him that I did indeed read my Bible. I added Jael in there as a provocation, but he didn't react.

“And the psalms? Of course you like them.”

“No, sir.”

“Shocking!”

I had never been so shocking. It was becoming my career.

“I have a little son who knows six psalms by heart,” Brocklehurst said. “If you asked him if he’d prefer a cookie to eat or a new psalm to learn, he’d choose the psalm.”

“Psalms are uninteresting,” I said.

“You do have a wicked heart. You must pray to God to change it.”

I opened my mouth with an excellent rejoinder, but it was lost to fate.

“Sit down, Jane Eyre,” Mrs. Reed said.

I obeyed.

“She should be brought up to something suiting her prospects,” the lady said. “Make her useful and keep her humble. My eldest daughter thinks Jane Eyre will do for a teacher. If you agree, I have no objection. Vacations she will spend, with your permission, at Lowood.”

Dr. Lloyd knitted his eyebrows together and ran his hand through his hair as if some dreadful bargain had hatched before his eyes, a train wreck he couldn't prevent. I wanted to go to him, throw my arms around his shoulders, and kiss him for standing in the stead of the father I had lost. Dr. Lloyd had looked

out for me and secured for me a chance I never dreamed I would get.

For I didn't care that Bishop Brocklehurst was a bad man. Yes, I could see it even then. At that moment I was in raptures. I was to escape Gateshead forever.

Lowood could not possibly be worse than Gateshead Righteous Household.



« *Chapter 5* »

*Goodbye To Gateshead*

Early one morning soon after Bishop Brocklehurst discovered the wickedness in my heart, I danced over Gateshead's threshold and out to the courtyard. Last night's clouds were gone. Fresh snow covered the ground and gates, and the light of the carriage lamps gave all a mystical glow.

My clothes were new, a calf-length gray wool dress, black velvet cloak, and flat-soled black leather boots

laced up to my knees. Kid gloves lined with soft microfiber matched the sky-blue mohair slouch hat and scarf Bessie had given me not twenty minutes earlier when she shook me awake.

*Make sure she's well-outfitted for the journey, a credit to Gateshead,* Mrs. Reed had ordered. Never mind that nothing in my trunk was new or particularly fine.

With a surge of optimism I threw out my arms and spun in a circle. “Goodbye to Gateshead!”

“Hush girl.” Bessie bit her lower lip to hide her smile.

The Reeds had barely spoken to me since the Night of the Red Room, and they didn't leave their warm beds now

to send me off. Bessie and the carriage driver were the only witnesses to my escape, but the stars in the black sky winked and blinked at me, and I thought the low-hanging crescent moon looked on approvingly.

Invigorating cold air burned into my lungs. I climbed into the carriage where Bessie set the foot warmer on the floor between us. She spread a blanket over our laps, and we were on our way.

“You look quite the young lady, Miss Jane,” she said.

There was a tear in her eye, but I couldn't stop grinning. I felt quite sophisticated in my traveling clothes, ready for an adventure I never expected



to have.

“You’ll forget your Bessie before the train takes you round the first bend,” she said. “You’ll never think of us again.”

“I’m glad to leave Gateshead Righteous,” I said. “But I’ll never forget you, Bessie. You and Dr. Lloyd were the only people ever kind to me in my life.”

“We’ll see you home again when you’ve finished your studies, I’m sure.”

“I’ll never go back to Gateshead!” I said, more violently than I meant to. “I’m going to be a teacher.”

“Oh, Miss Jane.”

I softened my voice. “Don’t cry, Bessie, please. Be happy for me.”

“Child, you would throw away

comfort and security for a hard and lonely life.”

*Comfort and security? No, prison!* I thought.

“I’m lonely *now*, Bessie. I’m tired of not belonging. I’m no servant, but Abbot was right; I’m no mistress. At Gateshead I’m nothing. A charity case. I can’t bear it.”

She recoiled at the words *charity case*. We turned north off Gateshead Road onto Keystone Highway. It was quiet in the carriage until the blast of a train whistle sounded through the air. We were nearing Gateshead Halt. My heart soared. To my mind, the whistle shouted my triumph to high heaven.

Bessie dug my ticket out of her bag and handed it to the ticket master. A porter took my trunk, and we followed him through the train to my compartment. When he left us, Bessie let out a great sob and hugged me fiercely.

“Oh, Miss Jane. I’ve raised you from an infant. I feel like I’m losing my own dear girl.”

Right. Bessie was as likely as any to slap me for a clever remark or put me in the corner to contemplate my faults. And yet...she was the only one who ever seemed sorry to do it. I kissed her cheek and we said goodbye.

She stayed on the platform as the train pulled away, and as we waved to

each other she grew smaller and smaller. Then the train rounded the bend and she was gone.

It was full dawn now. The trees showed distinctly against the brightening sky, and a storm approached from the east. The porter came by with a breakfast trolley and let me choose anything I liked. There was coffee, scrambled eggs with cheese, bacon, potatoes and onions, and toast. It all smelled wonderful, but I was too excited to eat.

“How long does it take to get to Lowood?” I said.

“Three to four hours to Lowood Halt—if the tracks are clear and stops aren’t delayed. Then another ten miles to

the institution by carriage.” He lowered a tray on the seat across from me and left a small pot of coffee and some toast and marmalade. “You might want something.”

I chewed on half a piece of toast and watched the world go by. With the train’s subtle rocking I relaxed, shedding the fitful excitement which had kept me awake all night. We passed Lake Bellefleur, the farthest I’d ever been from Gateshead mansion. We stopped for half an hour in a real town with tall buildings lit up inside and out, and through the window I watched the workmen load coal onto the train.

The train continued on, and soon I

yawned and lifted the dividers on the bench seat so I could lie down and close my eyes, just for a few minutes.

“Jane Eyre!” someone called out in my dream. “Jane Eyre for Lowood!”

But it wasn't a dream. The train was stopped. Someone had truly called for me. “I'm here!” I cried, afraid he'd leave me.

Lowood Halt had no ticket house. It was no more than a rectangular platform with train tracks on one side and a cobblestone road on the other. At one end an iron bench sat beneath a three-sided rain shelter. Beyond the platform waited a one-horse cart.

“Well?” A man walked by with my trunk. A boy, really, not much older

than John Reed. “Get in.”

I climbed into the back of the cart beside my trunk on the flat bed. The driver jumped up to his bench and urged his horse on. The sun was low in the west, hidden by clouds. What sights had I missed, sleeping the day away? My stomach growled. I wished I'd eaten more than two bites of toast.

“Go a little faster, please,” I told the driver. “I don't want to miss supper at Lowood.”

He looked over his shoulder with a raised eyebrow. I prepared for an insult, but his face changed. He had the same look as John Reed did when I was tied to the chair in the Red Room.

I instinctively clutched my cloak at my throat. He grinned—not nicely—and turned back to his horse. “Git, Daisy,” he said with a chuckle. “Walk along sprightly there now. Madam don’t want to miss her supper.”

We traveled miles and miles through remote foothill country. Occasionally we’d pass a private lane, and I might spot a grand house set up the hill well away from the road. The clouds followed us, and a few sprinkles came down. We stopped at an iron gate in a stone fence at a turnaround where the cobblestone road ended. Without ceremony the driver dropped my trunk at the gate then pushed a button recessed in



the wall.

I climbed out of the cart, stiff from the jolting ride. Beyond the gate, a long drive led to a cottage, and behind the cottage two mansions faced each other, each as big as Gateshead.

“How marvelous!” I stuck my head through the gate’s bars, hardly believing my eyes. At the end of the drive near the cottage was a powered limousine automobile.

My Uncle Reed had owned an automobile, though not one so large. I never saw it—Mrs. Reed sold it after he died. But John Reed had its picture. I believe the only reason he wanted Anointed status was for the privilege of owning and driving such a vehicle.

“Droppin’ off.” The cart driver spoke to the wall. “I got one Jane Eyre here for you.”

“Why do we stop here?” I said. “The drive is plenty wide enough for the cart.” I blinked away a single fat drop of rain.

“No man is allowed past this point.” He absently pulled his hat brim forward to shield his eyes from the rain. “Not if he ain’t a choker.”

I smiled inwardly. How it would irritate John Reed to hear this driver of low rank using his same slang.

The driver walked over to me and leaned close, his moist warm breath on my neck. “I could come to you the back

way, if it gives you pleasure.”

I wanted to slap him, though he was twice my size. We were interrupted by the sound of locks turning, and the gate began to open of its own accord, a wonderful remote mechanical trick.

The driver uttered a nasty laugh and jumped into his cart. “Git, Daisy,” he said to his horse. “You don’t want to miss your supper.”

From somewhere near the gate, a disembodied female voice said, ‘Enter, Jane Eyre!’”



« *Chapter 6* »

*A Bishop's Charity*

Dusk descended suddenly as the sun dipped behind the trees. In the intensifying rain, I ran up the drive with my trunk. I couldn't resist looking at the limousine, but its windows were darkly tinted and covered with beading raindrops. I couldn't see inside. While I debated which building to enter, the voice from the gate again called out to me.

“Come, Jane Eyre.”

This time the voice was contained within a human being, a stout dark-haired woman. She beckoned to me from the cottage door. I followed her inside to a small parlor where there was a fire. "Take off your hat and cloak and wait here."

I draped my cloak over my trunk along with my hat and scarf. While removing my gloves a strange, unnatural sound startled me. It had to be the limousine's engine. I ran to the window and pulled back the curtain to see the vehicle drive away, red lamps glowing.

The woman returned with a tray and left it on a small table set for two people near the fireplace. The smell of

stew and fresh bread made my stomach growl. I dearly hoped I was intended to be one of the two, but she left the room without speaking to me.

The door reopened, and in came a woman of maybe thirty with thick dark hair pulled back in a French braid. An old-fashioned light brown frock was draped over her arm as well as a white pinafore-like apron. She set aside the clothes and greeted me.

“Hello, Jane. What a pretty dress.” Her smile was a little sad, as if she felt pity for me. “I’m Miss Temple, headmistress of Lowood. You’ve arrived too late to eat with the other girls, so you’d better share with me.”

We sat down together, and I put

my napkin over my lap. As she cut a piece of bread for me, I set her mind at ease. “I’m very glad to have come to Lowood. I never thought I’d be allowed to go to school.”

“Why do you want to go to school, Jane?” Miss Temple ladled out a lamb stew with potatoes and carrots and leeks and a wonderful spice I didn’t recognize. There was butter and honey for the bread and a big glass of milk.

There was no point in telling her how unhappy I was at Gateshead, about the Red Room, John Reed’s bullying, that I couldn’t bear to live there another day. Bishop Brocklehurst must have already told the people at Lowood I was

an ungrateful child, so why would she believe me? My complaints would only reinforce such an indictment.

“I want to be a teacher,” I said. “I want to be an independent woman.”

Miss Temple’s eyes twinkled a little. “That’s an achievable goal. If you study hard and pass your exams, you could become a licensed governess.”

“Oh.” I stared at my bowl. That’s not what I meant. Not a governess. The opposite of independence. Georgiana and Eliza had been horrid to our governess. Mrs. Reed never would defend the poor woman.

“Or you might stay on here,” Miss Temple added. “Many of Lowood’s teachers are former pupils. For instance,



Miss Miller who greeted you came to Lowood when she was eleven years old.”

“That’s exactly what I would like, Miss Temple.”

Her smile, still tinged with sadness, faded. “How old are you, Jane?”

“Fourteen,” I answered—with a start. I had forgotten it was my birthday.

I glanced at the lovely slouch hat and scarf on my trunk. Bessie must have made them as a birthday present. If so, she’d likely purchased the yarn from her own savings.

My heart ached. I would miss Bessie. I regretted not being kinder to

her, and it was a novel sensation. I always felt so abused and downtrodden, so often falsely accused of wickedness—it never occurred to me I might have actual faults. I vowed to be a better person from then on.

I was ravenous, and everything tasted like heaven, but I didn't get to finish my meal for at that point we were interrupted by another person.

“Bishop Brocklehurst. I thought you'd left, sir.” Miss Temple rose hurriedly to her feet, and I followed her lead.

“I had.”

At the sight of my nemesis my spirits sank. His expression was as sour as I remembered. I knew his opinion of

me, and I didn't want him to share it with Miss Temple.

"I saw the cart boy on the road. He told me he'd just delivered this girl." He turned his eye on me.

Against my will, I shivered.

"I spoke with your benefactor not three hours ago, Jane Eyre. I was afraid of this." He rubbed my velvet collar between his fingers. "Mrs. Reed no doubt meant a kindness, outfitting you thusly. It's no kindness to encourage a girl to put herself above her station. Is that not so, Miss Temple?"

"Most certainly, bishop." Miss Temple answered out of duty, but not with the bishop's fervor. "A girl or any

person.”

“Remove the dress.”

I gasped, and my hand flew to my throat. I must have heard him incorrectly, for Miss Temple showed no sign of anything being out of order.

“You have a uniform,” he said to her.

“Yes, bishop.” Miss Temple retrieved the dress and pinafore she’d laid aside.

“Take off that dress, Jane Eyre. I’ll return it to Mrs. Reed.”

“Sir, perhaps she could change in my—”

“Miss Temple, I have no time for false modesty or girlish pride. Jane Eyre, do as I say. You were there when

your good aunt pleaded with me to teach you humility. From the pride you now take in material frippery, I can see she was right.”

My face went hot with embarrassment and fury. How dare he! My fingers trembled as I unfastened the top button at my collar. Miss Temple stared at her hands, her expression indecipherable.

I faltered at the second button, and the bishop brushed my hands away and began to do the work for me. I trembled with rage as he proceeded to undress me—rage and some fear, I admit. He fumbled with the buttons at my sternum, and the knuckles of his hands pressed

against my breasts. When he'd opened the garment past my waist, he pushed it back over my shoulders. His gaze lingered at the swell of my breasts at the top of my chemise. For a horrible moment, I thought he was going to touch me.

He stepped away. "You may complete the task. Those boots too. Far too unsuitable." He addressed Miss Temple. "The box?"

I handed Bishop Brocklehurst my dress and quickly bent down to unlace my boots. Miss Temple dropped a box of secondhand shoes at my feet. I kept my head down to hide my tears. I'd give him no satisfaction. I tossed my boots in Brocklehurst's direction and turned

away toward the fire, surreptitiously wiping my eyes.

Miss Temple was at me in a flash with the uniform. She gently wrapped it around me and found the hole for its inset belt. “It’s a little big now, Jane,” she murmured, “but you’ll grow into it.”

There were no buttons, no hooks, not even a zipper. The dress was made for no one in particular, designed to wrap and tie in order to expand or contract to a wearer’s growing frame. Miss Temple helped me with the pinafore. It felt like she was a dresser in a theater, and I’d been cast the part of a ten-year-old child in a play.

I was the little princess who’d lost

everything—except I'd had no father, no protector, to begin with.

Bishop Brocklehurst added my lovely hat and scarf to his plunder. When he'd gone for good, Miss Temple called for Miss Miller and instructed her to show me to my bed in a dormitory in one of the large buildings.

I don't remember if the wind howled through the trees that night or the rain raged against the dormitory's window pane. I don't remember if I was awakened several times by girls crying softly in their beds. I don't remember if my teeth chattered with cold because my blanket was so thin. All those details are part of the memory mosaic contained in my brain, labeled *Lowood*. None set the



first night apart from any night I spent there.

But I will never forget Bishop Brocklehurst's assault on me, an experience distinct and fixed. He had risen to the top of my list. I hated him then more than I hated Mrs. Reed and more even than John Reed. I believed it was impossible to hate him more.

I was wrong.



« *Chapter 7* »

*Helen*

Lowood was electrified in ways that made me loathe the invention. When the Great Secession restored a slower, simpler life more suited to human dignity, someone forgot to tell Lowood's administrators. If electricity was used like this in the heathen old country, it's no wonder the old country cracked up.

A caustic unceasing bell drove me from sleep, and the dormitory glared with unnatural fluorescent light. Other

girls were out of bed, putting on uniforms like the one given me the night before. The nightmarish bell stopped when I was halfway through tying on my pinafore, but it echoed on in my brain.

It was bitter cold. I washed at the end of a line of six girls and held out my hands for inspection. The bell rang us down to the dining hall where we sat, ranked according to age, on long hardwood benches at tables arranged in two rows with a wide aisle between the rows.

Breakfast came out in two big pots which the servers placed on a high bench before the head table. The teachers there immediately wrinkled their noses, and their hands flew to

faces.

“Disgusting!”

“The porridge is burnt again!”

“Shhh!”

We said grace, a variation of the prayer said at Gateshead:

*Bless, O Lord, this  
food to our bodies,  
And make us grateful  
to thy bounty.  
Keep us ever fit for  
your service,  
And mindful of the  
needs of others.*

The stench of the burnt porridge reached my nostrils and wiped out all thought of the needs of others. At the end

of the prayer, one of the older girls stood and recited the eleventh psalm.

I suppressed a smile and looked down at my hands. I told Bishop Brocklehurst I didn't like the psalms, but it didn't mean I didn't know them. Psalm 11 was my nemesis. It had made me bitter and turned me away from God. I still loved Jesus, but in my book God could suck eggs.

The girl finished:

*“Upon the wicked he  
shall rain snares, fire,  
and brimstone,  
and an horrible  
tempest:  
This shall be the*

*portion of their cup.  
For the righteous Lord  
loveth righteousness;  
His countenance doth  
behold the upright.”*

Right. Not at Gateshead. There the Lord rewarded wicked John Reed on a daily basis, and not with snares and brimstone.

A young girl from another table stood to recite Psalm 12.

“We hear ten psalms every morning,” the girl beside me whispered in a serious, no-nonsense manner. Like all of us, her hair was hidden behind a white scarf tied in a knot at the nape of her neck, but a few red curls had

escaped. "They'll give you one to learn."

"Burns!" A teacher charged through the tables toward us. She was about the age of Miss Miller, thin and hard-looking, with round wire-rimmed glasses and a furrow between her eyes.

The girl stood up and bent her head forward. She clasped her hands behind her back, as if she was used to some solemn ritual about to be carried out.

The teacher wore the same uniform as the other teachers, a plain black Jersey dress, calf-length, with three-quarter-length sleeves. A white lace collar draped over her shoulders came down in two points over her

breasts. She raised an instrument above her head that looked like John Reed's riding crop and brought it down over the girl's shoulders.

Outrageous! I started to protest, but the girl's sharp look stopped me.

"Return to your seat, Burns," the teacher said.

"Thank you, Miss Scatcherd," the girl said.

"And maintain silence."

Miss Scatcherd returned to her place at the head of the teachers' table, and Burns—if that was her name—returned silently to her seat beside me. The sting of the injustice was maddening. She'd only meant to be nice.



After eight more girls recited a psalm, we lined up in two rows holding our bowls. My stomach alternated between growls of hunger and revolt against the smell. I sat down again amidst stifled moans of complaint from every table.

My stomach turned while my nose twitched. *O, for yesterday's eggs and cheese on the train!* I hazarded a spoonful of the gruel, retched at the taste, and a chorus gave harmony to my retching.

“Silence!” From the head table, Miss Scatcherd gave us all the evil eye. Miss Miller was there, but I didn't see Miss Temple.

Miss Miller left the dining hall just before the damn bell rang again to send us off to our first class. Yes. Already, I could spew swears to rival John Reed. We'd lined up to be let out when Miss Temple came in with Miss Miller following. Everyone went quiet as Miss Temple walked straight to the pot, picked up a spoon, and tasted the creamed rice.

“Ugh!” She grimaced.

“Disgusting!”

In the teachers' murmuring I heard the words Brocklehurst and bishop uttered in disapproving tones. Miss Temple frowned and shook her head at them, but she made no effort to check

their general wrath. I was glad to know my disdain for the man was shared.

“Never mind.” Miss Temple addressed us all. “It’s a lovely morning. The girls may spend an hour in the garden. You may draw or sew or hear a story from Miss Miller. I’ll have bread and cheese sent in for you to take outside.

“Hurray!” A general cheer went up.

“Silence!” Miss Scatcherd said. “Keep to your lines!”

Discipline prevailed, and why not? Miss Temple had saved us.

Seen now in the light of day she was pretty, with a sweetness I could never maintain in her position. Her thick

hair was again bound in a simple but elegant tight French braid. Her dark purple dress trimmed with a draping collar of black lace gave her an air of handsome competence.

My heart surged with fellow feeling. One day I wanted to be like Miss Temple.

We waited in our lines for the bread and cheese then each took her portion outside. I looked for Burns, but she had disappeared.

In the garden between the two large buildings, I ate my little share in small bites to make it last. I wandered from group to group, lighting on none, and moved on to several rows of

miniature garden plots, each assigned to a girl for cultivation. Green seedlings were beginning to emerge from the earth, but it was too soon to tell if they were vegetables or flowers.

No one took notice of me. I felt lonely, but I'd been lonely all my life. It didn't signify. I drew my grey mantle close about me and tried to ignore the cold and my lingering hunger. I turned a corner and found Burns on a stone bench near a cluster of rose bushes.

She was absorbed in a book by Samuel Johnson called *Rasselas*. She turned a page and, brushing another wayward curl out of her eyes, she happened to look up at me.

"I'm sorry I got you in trouble," I

said.

“It wasn’t your fault,” she said. “I spoke when I shouldn’t have.”

“But how could you bear it to be beaten? You should have shoved her away.”

“Then she would have beaten me harder,” she said. “And I would have deserved it. Miss Scatcherd only means to correct my faults. I don’t blame her.”

“Is your book interesting?” I had to change the subject or I’d surely say something wrong.

She looked at me half a minute before answering, “I like it.”

“What’s it about?”

She offered me the book to look at,

a work of philosophy. There were no princes or princesses, witches or wizards. I handed it back and gave up the idea of borrowing it.

“Do you like the other teachers here?” I asked hastily, to stop her returning to her book. I’d starved for conversation with a kindred spirit far longer than I’d been hungry for food.

“I like Miss Temple,” she said. “If only she was truly in charge here, but she answers to Bishop Brocklehurst. He pays for all our food and our clothes. He won’t be happy about the bread and cheese.”

“Does he live here?” I dreaded the answer.

“No, miles away. His mother

established Lowood, and he's the administrator of her will."

"Do you think he's a good man?"

"He's an Anointed Elder. Some say he does a great deal of good. He's not often here."

"I call that good," I said.

She didn't comment but she smiled, and for the second time this morning a sense of fellow-feeling raised my spirits. Perhaps Lowood's virtues would balance its shortcomings.

"How long have you been here?" I said. "Do you go home on holidays?" I felt my face go red. I didn't want to admit my aunt had sent me away, never to return.



“My father was a soldier on the border,” she said. “He died when I was young. Later my mother married another man, an Anointed Elder, who sent me here.”

“Was your father of low rank?” She’d said soldier, not officer.

“Yes, but that wasn’t it. My stepfather sees me as a living reminder that my mother once belonged to another man.”

*Belonged to another man.* I’d never thought of marriage in that way, perhaps because I didn’t really know any married people. The idea of belonging to a man was repellant, as if you were his property. As if he could do

anything he wanted to you. Marriage was forever. What if you married someone who turned out to be like John Reed, someone who'd hit you...and do other things...while you were tied to a chair?

“Miss Scatcherd is hasty.” Burns rescued me from those dark thoughts. “Take care not to offend her.”

“Miss Temple is the best, I think.”

“Miss Temple is good and clever, above the rest in rank and education. She could easily find a more congenial place.”

“Are you happy here?” If Burns could be, it was possible I could be also.

“Now *that* is a question.” She looked at her book, as if it held the

answer.

The infernal bell rang, calling us in from the garden. As we walked back I said, “Is your name really Burns?”

“Helen Burns,” she said.

All at once a cacophony of female chattering spilled into the garden behind us. I whirled around to see the source of the joyous and unexpected noise, but Helen grabbed my arm. “They’ve come out too soon. Don’t look!” She pulled me along. “Come!”

I let her lead me, but I twisted in the sound’s direction, nearly tripping over my own feet, and gasped.

Thirty girls at the very least poured out of the large building across

from ours, ranging from my age to about twenty. They babbled and laughed gaily as if they were daughters of rank and privilege on holiday. Most wore flowered dresses, but two were in pants and sweaters. One girl wore a one-piece coverall like a farm hand. Their hair was loose, falling over their shoulders or held back by ribbons. A few had bobbed haircuts, curls barely touching their earlobes.

All were in various stages of pregnancy.

I closed my mouth and let Helen drag me into our building.



Mrs. Reed had employed a series

of Licensed Private Instructors, and despite my indifference to scholarship my homeschooling set me well ahead of my age group at Lowood. The history lecture that day on the Great Secession offered nothing new, and I struggled to stay focused on Miss Scatcherd.

I'd learned about the Keystone Rupture, how in the turmoil our New Patriots broke free of the old heathen country and established the righteous society our founding fathers originally intended.

“New Judah started fresh with the Edicts, Decrees and Laws,” Miss Scatcherd said. “We didn't have to tear out the permissive liberality that ruined the old country. We never gave it root.

Our families have full support in the law. Divorce is illegal. Women are venerated. Fathers are their children's guardians, sons until they're eighteen and daughters until they marry or reach their majority at twenty-one."

"Miss Scatcherd?" I stood respectfully to ask a question, as my governesses had taught me. The instructor seemed shocked by the interruption, and the other girls looked at their hands. But there I was, stuck in my error. My pride wouldn't let me back down. "Why are girls adults at twenty-one but boys are at eighteen?"

None of my governesses ever had a satisfying answer, but Miss Scatcherd

was more than a governess. She was a certified instructor. She must know.

“Insolent girl!” she cried. “Hold out your hands, Jane Eyre.”

I did as she asked, unsure what she was about. My fellow students hunched their shoulders and shrank in their seats, and Miss Scatcherd came at me like a hound after a fox. She raised the short crop she carried and brought it down hard on my fingers.

“Ah!” I cried out in pain.

“Silence!” Miss Scatcherd brought the crop down again, this time drawing blood. “Go to the wall, Jane Eyre. Face it and consider your faults.”

I was mortified. No one looked at me but Helen, and she frowned with

disapproval. Confused and betrayed, I moved to the wall as ordered.

“Husbands are required to support their wives and children,” Miss Scatcherd resumed her lecture. “And the wives and children of their deceased brothers.”

I was the example of that. If my Uncle Reed had hated me, he was still bound to care for me in the absence of a more suitable guardian. His wife was not, however—hence the solemn vow he’d required of her. The EDLs had saved me from certain poverty.

“Orphans and the poor are cared for as God intended, through private acts of benevolent charity. Lowood



Righteous Institution is a prime example of such charitable philanthropy.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Miss Scatcherd indicate a lady’s portrait on the wall at the front of the class. The same portrait hung in our dormitory and in the dining hall, and I’d seen it in Miss Temple’s parlor above the mantelpiece.

“Naomi Brocklehurst was one of the great ladies of Idaho. You poor girls may have lost one parent or both, but you are not friendless. In love and charity, you’ve been provided a home and an education. Lowood will render you fit for righteous work.”

The tableau vivant of the laughing girls danced into my mind. Where did they come from? Had they no guardians?

If Lowood's charges were the orphaned or unwanted daughters of men of rank, why were such fallen females allowed to walk among us? I didn't for a moment believe those girls had husbands.

I couldn't wait for the end of the day when I could get Helen aside and ask her about it.

“Stand up, Helen Burns!”

Miss Scatcherd's shrill order jolted me from my thoughts. There was no telling what sin Helen had committed, but she now stood before Miss Scatcherd and the terrible crop. The whip came down across Helen's back. She made no sound and didn't grimace. It came down again. Helen nodded her

head a little but stared ahead with a benign expression, as if she was looking into another world.

How could she bear it so quietly, and with such dignity?

We were kept busy with classes until dinner at five o'clock. After evening prayer we were set free for half an hour before bedtime. I found Helen in the music room. Two girls practiced a duet on the piano, some played backgammon, and some knitted or embroidered. I sat down on a sofa beside Helen and waited for her to look up from her book.

“I’m sorry Miss Scatcherd was so cruel to you today,” I said.

“Cruel? She only wants to correct

my faults.”

“If she struck me with that rod, I’d take it from her and strike her back with it.”

“I doubt it. If you did, Bishop Brocklehurst would expel you. That would grieve your relatives. It’s better to endure something no one else feels than to be hasty and bring harm to those connected with you. Besides, the Bible tells us to love our enemies.”

More proof the Bible wasn’t perfect. “But to be hit like that in front of everyone—when she struck my hands I could hardly bear it.”

“It’s our duty to bear it. It’s silly to say you can’t bear what you must

bear.”

I couldn't understand her. Had she no pride? No self-respect? Endurance and forbearance were fine and good, but not in the face of injustice.

Still, I suspected she was right to return good for evil, and I was wrong to love justice more than forgiveness. But I could go no farther into that realm. My mind revolted. I retreated from philosophy and put the question off for another time when I'd be better equipped to defend my position.

I feared she would advise me to love Mrs. Reed and forgive John Reed—both obviously impossible!

Helen Burns wasn't yet my example. She was a mystery.





« *Chapter 8* »

*To Hate Him More*

The appearance of a thing isn't the thing.

Weeks passed. The food got no better and my bed was no warmer. I grew used to my wrap-around uniform. The blisters on my feet became calluses, and I forgot my shoes fit so badly. Every morning the damn bell blared and the fluorescent lights blasted us out of bed. I was dressed, my face washed, teeth brushed, hair braided into submission

and hands held out for inspection before I was ever fully awake.

Someone looking in randomly on the hunger, the lack of privacy, or the harsh discipline might call me perverse, but I truly preferred Lowood to my former home.

At Gateshead I was abused and tormented on purpose—because I was Jane Eyre, the unwanted poor relation. At Lowood I *earned* the whacks Miss Scatcherd applied to my hands or the back of my neck. I *deserved* the hours standing at the wall, contemplating my faults. My character flaws called discipline down on *me*, not the mere fact of my existence.

A kind of justice informed



Lowood's strict methods. And in justice lay security. For the first time in my life, I didn't live on constant watch against irrational abuse.

I never did approach Hellenic self-denial! But I scaled new heights in self-discipline.

One afternoon in history class my gaze wandered from the girl reciting her lesson to a shape passing by the window. My breath caught in my throat, for the shape was of a tall man wearing a broad round clergyman's hat.

Bishop Brocklehurst entered followed by Miss Temple and Miss Miller. With them were two girls somewhat older than me and a young

boy. I wondered if these were the bishop's children and if this was the boy who loved to learn Psalms.

As Miss Scatcherd welcomed Bishop Brocklehurst, I quashed a smile and looked down at my hands. If those were the bishop's children, apparently he required less self-denial of them than of other people. Their clothing was exquisite, well-tailored, fashionable, and of fine materials.

“Jane Eyre!”

Bishop Brocklehurst's voice thundered over our heads. Against my will I looked at him. “Yes, sir?” What could he possibly have to say to me?

“Fetch that stool in the corner and place it here.” He indicated the spot

beside him at the front of the classroom.

Crossing the silent classroom, I crossed my arms to stop myself from shaking. The anxiety of my days at Gateshead returned. Blood rushed in my ears and made me dizzy.

“Stand on the stool, Jane Eyre, and face your fellow students.”

I automatically raged against the order, but Helen caught my eye. She nodded encouragement. *Be like Helen*, I told myself. *Endure*. With a deep breath I stepped up.

Miss Scatcherd looked to the bishop, ready to take instruction. Miss Miller's eyes were cast down. Miss Temple stared ahead at nothing. By now

I understood her well enough to know she was seething inside, not for my sake but at the usurpation of her authority.

I call it progress that I noted these things. A month earlier, I would have been consumed by my agony, ready to cry out against the injustice before I knew what it was. I could do this. I would recede inside myself until Brocklehurst was gone. I would be serene.

“This girl is a wanton!” the bishop said. “A Jezebel. A harlot.”

I wasn't serene. I nearly fell off the stool.

“Bishop!” Miss Temple said.

“A Salome. Who would think the Evil One could find a servant and agent

in a girl so plain and unremarkable? Yet such is the case.”

*Jezebel.* My heart sank. John Reed had called me that. And Mrs. Reed too. Brocklehurst must have visited Gateshead recently. They hated me so much! Getting rid of me wasn't enough. They had to send slander on my heels.

“Jane Eyre's benefactor sent her to Lowood in good faith,” the bishop said. “That good woman knows nothing of what I've heard in strict confidence. This girl is a temptress, a seductress. She attempted to corrupt even her benefactor's son.”

*What did John tell him?* I flashed back to the Red Room. John Reed's

skinny tongue—for all his girth—poking into my mouth, his hand groping me while I was tied to the chair. He was the unchaste one! He was the molester.

But I was doomed. Brocklehurst would never believe my side of the story.

“This is a sad matter. I will not publish what I know of this girl’s wickedness, for it would hurt a good and decent lady, but it’s my duty to warn you all.” He circled me as he spoke. “Jane Eyre is not one of God’s lambs. She’s a castaway. Exclude her from your company. Shun her!”

So unfair! Shame burned my face, and the stares of my classmates made me want to die.

“Teachers, watch her.” He placed his large hand squarely on my stomach. “Jane Eyre might better belong to Bethany House.”

“Don’t touch me!” I pushed him away, and a collective gasp went up.

Brocklehurst’s face darkened. He raised his hand to strike me, but a commotion among the girls stopped him.

“Miss Scatcherd, Miss Temple. Helen Burns has fainted!”

Everyone rushed to Helen, glad to break off from the subject of the wanton Jane Eyre.

“Helen!” I cried out from my perch. “Helen! What’s wrong? Someone tell me, is she ill?”

“Bring her forward,” Miss Temple said. “Give her room to breathe.”

As Miss Scatcherd and one of the older girls lifted Helen off the floor, she moaned and opened her eyes. “What happened?”

Someone brought out Miss Scatcherd’s chair and they put Helen down in it. She was so pale. Her scarf had fallen away, and her strawberry blond curls fell in a cascade around her face and shoulders. She was like an angel.

“What is this vanity?” Bishop Brocklehurst lifted a lock of the beautiful hair. “Miss Temple?”

“Her hair is naturally curly,



bishop,” Miss Temple said. “She keeps it under her scarf.”

“To hide vanity doesn’t make it virtue. Miss Scatcherd, do you have scissors?”

“I do, sir.”

“Bring them out at once, and remove these undignified curls.”

Miss Scatcherd fetched the scissors from the desk drawer and trimmed the greatest offender, the curl that always fell in Helen’s face when she read. Helen stared into another world, bearing the indignity with characteristic grace.

“Not like that.” Bishop Brocklehurst took the instrument from Miss Scatcherd and went to work

himself. When he was finished, Helen's head was as bare as the shorn lamb. She remained stoic through the process. She didn't cry, but to me she looked very ill.

“Jane Eyre, get back on that stool—no. Return it to the corner and stand there for an hour.” Bishop Brocklehurst said to Miss Temple, “Let no one speak to her until sunrise tomorrow.”

He ushered his children from the silent, stunned room. I climbed up on the stool, glad to face the corner instead of my fellows. Everyone was so quiet. Miss Temple told Helen to go lie down until supper, and I heard Brocklehurst's limousine drive away.

Miss Temple was not pleased.

After this “burnt porridge,” our consolation was more than bread and cheese.



Miss Temple’s answer to Bishop Brocklehurst came the next day. Lunch was delayed, and we were sent outside to work in our gardens while we waited. I was glad because I shared my plot with Helen, and I hadn’t spoken to her since Brocklehurst’s horrible visit.

We set to work weeding the yellow squash. I waited for her to speak, but she was even quieter than usual. She was pale, yet her face seemed flushed to me. “How are you feeling, Helen?”

“Fine.”

“You can’t even tell about your hair,” I said. “Not with your scarf. And it will grow back.” Everything I said made it worse, so I changed the subject. “What Brocklehurst said about me wasn’t true. I’m not...like them.” I nodded toward Bethany House, the building where the fallen girls lived. “I could never.”

“I didn’t believe the bishop.” Helen stopped and sat back on her heels. “But you’re wrong to judge the Bethany girls, Jane. Maybe they thought they were in love. Maybe they were forced. I’m sure not one of them meant to end up in her condition with no husband.”

Contraception was banned by the

EDLs, and at Gateshead parish the vicar delivered regular sermons on the evils of birth control. He said condoning it was like condoning sin. Made sense to me! Why make it easier to follow the wrong path?

But what if Helen was right? What if those girls had been forced? Lucky for me John Reed was an even bigger coward than he was a bully. The thought of bearing his child made me ill. Good lord. I could have been a Bethany girl at this very moment.

“I’m ashamed of myself,” I said. “Those poor girls.”

I first heard their cheerful chattering, and then they were there, walking two-by-two through the rows of

garden beds. They were like flowers themselves in their lovely floral patterned dresses. *Poor girls* wasn't quiet apropos.

“Hello,” a Bethany girl said sweetly to the gaping Lowood girl across from our plot.

What a bout of cognitive dissonance! We were supposed to loathe and judge them, but they were so pretty, so relaxed—so happy. I envied them.

They crossed the garden, and as they disappeared into our building the damned bell rang, calling us in to lunch. I was on my feet in an instant, ready to run with the others, hoping to catch another glimpse of the Bethany girls.

“Helen, let’s go.” I looked back, and my friend was still on her knees. I rushed to her and helped her stand. “Are you ill, Helen?”

“I’m a little weak, that’s all,” she said. “I’ll feel better when I eat something.”

*If only lunch is edible,* I thought. Then we entered the building, and I thought I must be hallucinating. The tantalizing aroma of stew and fresh bread floated out to us like we were in the little princess’s dream—but that wasn’t the amazing thing.

The Bethany girls were in our dining hall seated at a newly added table near the front of the room, chattering like

birds while servers poured milk into large glasses before each of them.

“Be sure to eat all your food today,” I said to Helen.

Miss Temple glowed with triumph. We’d suffered an injustice; now would come the consolation. Whether to soothe our spirits or her own, I never knew.

“Ladies, I’ve invited our neighbors from across the garden to join us for our afternoon meal today.” It was her way of signaling her disapproval of Bishop Brocklehurst’s behavior the day before. He condemned Jezebels. We would break bread with them.

The stew was delicious, and there was butter and honey for the bread. But



there was more. The Movie Man came! I should say the Movie Lady. The operator of the projector was a woman. She set up a screen behind the teachers' table. A bunch of us drew the curtains closed, and Miss Scatcherd turned off the infernal fluorescent lights.

The movie was an epic story set over two hundred years ago during the first attempt to separate from the heathen old country, about a girl blinded to true love by her passion for a married man.

In the scene where Rhett made Scarlett wear a sexy red dress to a birthday party, I felt her pain and humiliation. But Melanie defended her and gave her precedence over the

gossiping biddies.

As the scene played, I caught Miss Temple watching me. She gave me a smile as beatific as Melanie's. I wanted to hug her and tell her thank you. *Thank you for not believing Bishop Brocklehurst.* In my youthful self-centeredness, I believed Miss Temple chose the movie with me in mind.

I realize now she meant it as a kindness to the Bethany girls and a lesson for all of us. The story showed how passion can drive a good person to bad choices. Scarlett learned too late. When Rhett Butler left her and disappeared into the mist, the girls at the Bethany table broke down in tears.

I helped open the curtains, and as

my eyes adjusted to the light I spotted a girl sprawled on the floor. “Miss Temple, help!” I cried. “Helen Burns is truly sick!”



The few who could go home did, and the dormitory was turned into an extended infirmary. Those without sign of illness were sent to Bethany House.

All too late. The measles had come to Lowood, and the only thing that could save anyone—vaccination—had either been done or rejected years ago.

I was sent to Bethany House with the asymptomatics, but I couldn't stand to wait idle without knowing if Helen was all right. I slipped away from the

others, determined to find out for myself.

“Jane Eyre, stop.” Miss Scatcherd stood sentry at the front door. “You can’t break the quarantine.”

“Please, Miss Scatcherd, let me go,” I said. “I’ve been vaccinated. I can help.”

Once more my uncle proved his worth to me. Despite Mrs. Reed’s aversion to the practice, he’d insisted everyone at Gateshead undertake a full course of vaccinations.

“Why am I not surprised?” Miss Scatcherd muttered under her breath. But she relented. “Go. Do what good you can.” As I crossed the threshold, her habitual hard expression softened somewhat and she grabbed my arm.

“You’re a brave girl, Jane Eyre.”

I wasn’t brave. I was desperate to see Helen. After explaining to Miss Temple why I’d left quarantine, I went to the only friend I’d ever had.

“The doctor’s coming,” I said. A rash covered her face and throat. I placed a cool cloth on her forehead and pressed her hand to my cheek. She was burning up. “You’ll be fine.”

“I’m not afraid, Jane. I’m not like you, so eager for life.” Her voice was soft and small, barely there. “I’m ready.”

“Oh, Helen. Please don’t leave me.”

“I want to go. I want to be with my father in heaven.”

I couldn't tell if she meant God or her actual father. "Do you really believe?" I said.

I'd called on my uncle in heaven to send his wrath down on Mrs. Reed. I'd warned her of my parents watching her cruelty from above. But my belief in heaven was more habitual than substantial. Unlike gravity, I'd never tested heaven as an operating force. Now I faced losing someone real to death, not an idea of someone out of a gifted memory.

"God wouldn't destroy what he's created," Helen said. "There's a home with him for all of us."

"Will I see you again when I die?"

She didn't answer. Our little bit of talk had worn her out, and she was asleep. I lay down beside her and held her in my arms. When I awoke hours later, she was gone.

The disease spread like fire through dry hay. More than half Lowood's inmates followed Helen, their bodies already weak from the constant dragging down of near starvation. Several who survived went blind. Many of the Bethany girls miscarried. I thought of Bishop Brocklehurst's words the day I met him: *I buried a mother and her infant only yesterday.* Would he show more feeling for these mothers?

He delivered a memorial sermon

at Lowood Chapel. I was in the second pew behind Miss Temple who sat between Miss Scatcherd and Miss Miller.

It felt good to know Miss Temple was there. She was my ideal. After so much death and sorrow, I needed her to be a touchstone, brave, resolute, ultra competent, and ready to meet any foe with strength and grace. Her French braid hung loosely down her back, and her shoulders were hunched forward. Her head was bent, but not in prayer. She seemed defeated, and it broke my heart.

The bishop stood above us in the pulpit, hatless, his long thin hair spread like a shawl of hay sticks over his



shoulders. An ornate white cravat sprouted at his throat and spilled over his black robe down to his waist.

“This scourge of your unfortunate schoolmates is a reminder of the inevitability of holy judgment.”

I expected no great consolation from the *choker*, but his want of compassion depressed me. He adjusted his cravat fondly, as if proud of its beauty, and cleared his throat.

“It is an exhortation from the powers above to aspire to a more righteous—”

Miss Temple leapt to her feet so fast she startled Brocklehurst out of his sentence. The chapel fell quiet as bishop

and superintendent locked eyes on each other. Brocklehurst's face was filled with burning resentment. I couldn't see Miss Temple's expression, but I so wanted her to admonish him!

Without a word she turned away. She walked up the aisle and out of the chapel, and I never saw her again.

The measles epidemic scandalized the ladies of Lowton parish. Many had known Naomi Brocklehurst, and all made a religion of her memory. They insisted the bishop install a board of supervisors—composed of their members—to oversee the school's day-to-day operations. As he was running for public office at the time, he was relieved to disassociate himself from the place.

Under the guidance of the new Ladies Board, conditions improved. To the Lowton Ladies, “self-denial” was a spiritual endeavor that didn’t include freezing or starving. Our shoes still came from the donation box, but their first fundraiser bought an extra blanket for every bed, and our meals became nutritious and ample.

For five years Lowood was my home. When I was seventeen, I passed the state exams to become a certified instructor with both public and private licenses.

When I was nineteen, I woke up.



« *Chapter 9* »

*I Scandalize Myself*

**Anno Domini 2085**

Bells jingled on the door like magic as I crossed the threshold into Blackstone's. A fire crackled on the grate in a corner of the cozy shop. Shelves lined the wall to my right from ceiling to floor, covered with shoes, boots, small purses, satchels, and wallets.

“Out in a moment,” Mr. Blackstone called from the back room.

“Feel free to look at anything you like!”

Those who've had money all their lives don't know what a delicious feeling it is to carry undedicated cash in a normally empty purse. The power in it. The control. *I choose. I decide. I say no or yes.*

I'd never had money of my own, and my teacher's salary of \$1500 seemed like a fortune. Still, in my first year I'd ripped through my paycheck every Teacher's Day—what the merchants in Lowton called our quarterly paydays when we swarmed into the village with our small vouchers and our little desires.

At first it was all about provisioning.

Once free of the dreadful brown frocks and white pinafores supplied to students, I had to buy teaching uniforms, two navy calf-length dresses with three-quarter-length sleeves. I was also required to own a good dress for Sundays of any modest color. In honor of Miss Temple, I had chosen a simple purple jersey (the low-cut neckline hidden by a black lace collar), covered with tiny pink and yellow roses.

And shoes! My very own shoes that fit. I hadn't let myself dwell on it, but the worst aspect of receiving Lowood charity was the utter powerlessness in it—symbolized in my mind by wearing another person's cast-

off shoes. I bought new ready-made flats and a pair of dark violet pumps for Sundays. I hadn't owned two pairs of shoes at one time since leaving Gateshead.

Then there were the incidentals: a supply of black and white lace collars, underclothes, and whatnots like gloves and hats for church. I splurged on candies and colored pencils for my students, and in a shocking moment of weakness and vanity I bought a shawl for myself. The black jersey knit with red, blue, and green paisleys and black fringe made me feel invincibly stylish.

Between the shoes and the shawl, I considered myself quite spoiled.

After deductions for my room and

board, by year's end I'd saved \$17.45. The second year I fared only a little better. Lowood never provided enough supplies for my art class, and I liked to keep candies and notions in my pockets as treats for my students. At the end of the year, I'd saved two hundred dollars and change.

No matter. I didn't want the money. I wanted the sense of self spending it gave me.

Today was Teacher's Day at the beginning of my third year. Earlier I'd dressed in my purple and dared to leave off the collar as a symbol of my independence. The Board Ladies had descended upon Lowood in all their



benignity to supervise the girls and dispense the largesse of their latest fundraiser. Playing Lady Bountiful, they made their carriages available to take us into Lowton for the day.

“Miss Eyre, come with us, won’t you?” Miss Miller had collected Miss Scatcherd and Miss Roy, the teacher of homely arts. “This one has room for four.”

We were off for a day of self-indulgence. After depositing our checks at the bank, we moved on to the champagne brunch waiting for us at the inn, compliments of the Board Ladies.

“Take warning.” Miss Roy covered her champagne flute as a waiter tried to refill it. “The so-called

*complimentary* champagne is a ruse. The shopkeepers of Lowton are in cahoots with the innkeeper to loosen our self-control and thereby our purse strings.”

“But Miss Roy, we want loosening,” Miss Miller said.

“It’s what we came for.” I laughed with the others and nodded my ascent to the waiter.

Miss Scatcherd said, “We all know what you came for, Miss Roy. Canning jars and pectin.”

“And a new boiling pot besides,” Miss Roy said good-naturedly.

“Is this yours?” I held up the hot scone I’d spread with a wonderful

raspberry lime marmalade. Miss Roy not only taught homely arts, she made fabulous jams and jellies and sauces. The inn and the grocer bought such a steady supply from her that she had a good side business going.

“It is,” she answered with pride. She never spent but on her business and on good things for her beloved pet birds. I suspected Miss Roy would retire with an enviable nest egg.

“What are you after today, Miss Eyre? Paints, caramels?” Miss Scatcherd looked pointedly at my exposed collarbones. “Lace?”

I blushed. My hand flew protectively to my uncovered throat, and I fingered the gold cross pendant Miss

Miller had given me upon passing my licensing exams.

Miss Scatcherd moved on to Miss Miller. “I suppose you’ll visit the heathen bookshop.”

The clinking of knives and forks halted with the conversation. *She’d do it, too*, I thought. In taking Miss Temple’s administrative place, Miss Miller had adopted her courage as well.

“What would be wrong in that?” she said. “Mrs. Dean has books her grandfather didn’t carry, and I want to see them. Lord knows it would be a pleasure to read something new.”

“I wouldn’t patronize that foreigner with one penny,” Miss

Scatcherd said. “She has an entire section devoted to witchcraft, you know.”

“I didn’t know, Miss Scatcherd. How do you?”

“I believe I heard something from the kitchen.” Miss Scatcherd turned red and looked down at her plate. “Cook said she has the Harry Potter books.”

“Oh, those are wonderful,” I said.

All heads jerked in my direction, as if I’d admitted to a deviant crime.

“What?” I said. “They are. People who denigrate those books haven’t read them. My uncle had a complete set, and he was an Anointed Elder. *The Arabian Nights* also.”

I didn’t mention his secret books

kept in the Red Room behind a locked glass door. If only I'd had the courage to look for the key when I had the chance! I never missed Gateshead, but I did miss Uncle Reed's library.

“Harry Potter is all about love of others and self-sacrifice,” I said. “Christian themes, if I'm not mistaken. I'm surprised Lowood doesn't teach them.”

At that Miss Scatcherd spilled a little of her champagne.

“That shall be our guide,” Miss Miller said. “An Anointed Elder! I want to see what this American has done with her grandfather's store, and I don't think the Gytrash will get me for having a

look.”

“Maybe your Gytrash will in fact be your fairy godfather,” I said.

Sadly, as no one else had read *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, none understood my reference to the mysterious great black dog, a shapeshifter who turned out to be Harry’s guardian.

A sense of claustrophobia came over me. I was so different from these women, yet in that moment I saw my future: bit by bit and with each passing year, I would chip away at my sharp edges. I would modify myself to fit in. I would become less like myself and more like them.

Despite my purple dress with its low neckline and a mind that once read

scandalous books.

I turned down Miss Miller's invitation to go with her and Miss Roy to the bookshop. It felt good to get out of the inn and go my own way. Anyway, today I had a plan. I meant to splurge, not on candies or paints. My salary had been raised, and I'd kept out half my quarterly \$500 to spend on a pair of custom-made boots at the cordwainer.

Blackstone's felt more like someone's parlor than a place of business, but for the display samples on the wall. While I waited for Mr. Blackstone, my gaze went straight to a pair of black leather knee-high lace-up boots.



I couldn't help myself. I lifted a boot from its stand, caressed the leather and inhaled its rich smell. The interior was lined with soft, soft microfiber. How warm the boots must be!

“Will I measure you for a pair then?” said a deep voice behind me just as I became aware of a masculine presence at my back. I turned around, but the gray hair and twinkling blue eyes I expected weren't there.

I caught my breath. My eyes were level with a young man's broad chest. He wore a dark forest green cotton shirt with the long sleeves partly pushed up exposing muscular forearms. The shirt buttons were open to his breastbone. He

had the scent of a man who'd been working physically. My heart raced, and my breathing was shallow.

I looked up to the amused expression of a man not much older than myself. He had large dark eyes and thick eyebrows, wonderful cheekbones, a square jaw, and full lips. He brushed his loose brown hair off his face and smiled.

“You did come in for shoes, miss?” His voice was like a dream, deep and rumbling. I wanted to answer, but I'd forgotten how to speak.

“Where is Mr. Blackstone?” I finally managed to get out.

“My dad's not feeling well today, I'm afraid. But I can help you. I'm

Gideon.”

“You were away.” I grabbed on to a piece of intelligence I’d heard in the kitchen about Mr. Blackstone’s son. “On border duty.” Having a topic of conversation brought me back to my senses. Gideon Blackstone was the current fascinating thing in the gossip factory known as the Lowood kitchen. The descriptions of his beauty hadn’t come close.

“You’ll love this boot,” he said. He took me by the elbow and led me to an overstuffed chair by the fire. I’d never been touched like that before, not with kindness. Not by a man near my age. Not by a prince in a fairy tale.

Pulling a stool close to my chair, he sat down in front of me and lifted the skirt of my dress over my knees.

“What are—”

“To fit you, miss.” He spoke matter-of-factly and went about his business. An ember on the fire snapped as he slipped off my shoes. His hands were nearly as large as my feet. He left my stockings alone—I didn't know if I was grateful or disappointed.

“Was the border awful?” I could hardly believe this was happening. “Did you have to...” *Good lord, Jane!* I very nearly broke the unspoken commandment: *Never ask about the border.*

Of course he might have had to kill

someone. At the very least, he'd caught runners who'd be sent off to hard labor in the hellish factory farms of Carolina or worse, to clean contaminants along the dead zone of the Keystone spill.

"I'll be right back." He let my foot down gently and fetched his tools. He sat down again as I stuffed my dress between my legs, and his mouth twitched with a smile. "A deep purple boot would look well with that dress, miss."

But not much else. "I'd like black, please." I didn't say I could afford only one pair which had to go with everything. "I think it's wonderful that you went for citizenship," I said. "Your father must be proud."

To earn full citizenship and secure voting rights, a young man not joined to a Righteous Household or Estate had to serve two years in the New Judean militia. If he was lucky, he'd be garrisoned in the interior, risking nothing more than a pulled muscle while drilling for war with the United States that everyone knew would never come.

The unlucky ones got border patrol.

“My father didn't want me to go,” he said. “Didn't think it was worth it.”

Before I could be shocked by the idea, he lifted my left foot firmly in one hand and ran the other down my calf. *Oh!* Butterflies flitted across my

stomach...and I felt hot in other places.

He measured my feet, the diameter of each calf, the lengths from my heels to just below the backs of my knees.

“Perfect,” he said. “It will be a pleasure to boot you.” He wrote in his order book, still holding my foot absently in one hand. Then he closed his book and touched my knee. He ran his fingers over the top of my thigh and leaned forward. His eyes were so deep and beautiful, and against my will my lips parted.

I trembled as he kissed me, so strong and so soft at the same time. His tongue pushed in, and I didn't mind. Far from it. I liked the way he made me feel, even as it frightened me. I pushed him

away.

“Mr. Blackstone.”

“Call me Gideon,” he said.

“You’re so lovely.”

He moved to kiss me again, but I regained my senses.

“Mr. Blackstone, don’t tease me. I know I’m not pretty.”

“Aye.” He agreed readily and sat back on his heels. I felt like a fool.

“You’re no flower. But don’t sell yourself short, Miss Eyre.” He leaned close to my ear, and his voice was husky and low. “There’s a spark inside you I’d love to blow into a roaring blaze.”

I snatched up my purse and slipped into my shoes. As I hurried



away, scandalized by my own actions, Gideon Blackstone's laugh echoed behind me. At the door the magical bells jingled as he called out, "Your boots will be ready next Thursday."

That was the day I woke up. Back at Lowood, it struck me: teaching there wasn't far different from being a student. I was in a play on a never-ending run, the same actor cast in different roles. Jane Eyre as student. Jane Eyre as teacher. In the future perhaps Jane Eyre as superintendent—with a lover from the village she thought she kept hidden but was fodder for the kitchen's gossip.

It didn't have to be like this. I was not some puppeteer's marionette. I had agency. I was a free human being. I had a

marketable skill. I could break free. Go into the world. Teach in a different school.

I advertised my services—and received one answer.



## « *Chapter 10* »

### *The News From Gateshead*

A few weeks later after my last class ended, Miss Miller summoned me to the superintendent's cottage. She handed me an elegant fawn brown envelope of heavy linen stock post marked from the state of Jefferson, addressed to *J. Eyre, Lowood Righteous Institution, Lowton, Idaho.*

My heart raced as I opened it and read the letter inside. "It's from a Mrs. Fairfax at Thornfield Righteous Estate,"

I said. "In Millcote County, Jefferson."

*Millcote.* I'd never forgotten the name. *My true home, my soul's home.* Where my guardian angel had guided my hand that day in the library window seat. It was a sign! I'd taken the right course.

"But who do you know in Jefferson?" Miss Miller said. "Who do you know anywhere?"

*Exactly,* I thought. "She's offered me a position teaching her daughter." I stared at the word *governess* but couldn't bring myself to say it.

"What an idea!" Miss Miller chuckled, as if the offer was an insult. "Homeschooling would hardly suit."

"I think it would suit me very well." I showed her the letter. "The pay

is double what I receive from Lowood.”

She read thoroughly—or I should say she stared at the page for a while. “I’ll miss you, Jane,” she said finally, and I was surprised by her truly sad expression. “I’ll write to Mrs. Reed this afternoon.”

*What?* “What has she to do with it?”

“You’re not twenty-one,” Miss Miller said. “You can’t change employment without your guardian’s approval—and you certainly can’t move to another state without it.”

So unfair! For two years, I’d earned my own living, and now I had to ask permission? All my hope came

crashing down. Mrs. Reed would never agree to anything if it would make me happy. For five years, I'd had no contact with her. All my vacations were spent at Lowood. She'd never visited me. I'd had no letter or message from anyone at Gateshead.

In fact, aside from the occasional walk to Lowton, I'd had no real interaction with the outer world.

I had to get out, away from Lowood—more to the point, away from Gideon Blackstone. Dread crept over me and took hold. It would be two years before I was twenty-one. Two years before I could try again. I couldn't deny Gideon for two years. I had the presence of mind to know I didn't love him. The

feelings he'd sent coursing through my body were pure lust. But they were real, and they were too strong to fight.

“Please do, Miss Miller.” I was desperate. “Send a request to Gateshead.”

I spent a nerve-addled ten days before the curt answer came, scrawled on a postcard: Jane Eyre could do as she pleased. Mrs. Reed had no further interest in her whatsoever.

To compound the surprise, Bishop Brocklehurst wrote a more than adequate separation review with the post script that I was welcome to return to Lowood should I ever leave Mrs. Fairfax's employ.

Miss Miller got over her sorrow. Now she was delighted for me. She prattled on about my coming adventure more than I did.

“You must have some decent dresses made. Thank goodness you ordered those boots, and I thought them lavish. A Righteous Estate in Jefferson! It must be grand. You can’t wear your teacher’s dresses there, even as an LPI.”

She couldn’t say governess either. Oh, no. Jane Eyre was going out to be a Licensed Private Instructor.

“I can’t afford a new wardrobe.”

“Nonsense, you’ve had two years’ salary,” she said.

“I’ve saved little more than \$300,”



I said.

“But you never go anywhere. Aside from those boots and your shawl, you’ve shown no extravagance. What could you spend your money on?”

I shook my head, laughing inside. She had no idea how meagerly the Board supplied Lowood’s teachers. After room and board were deducted, an art teacher could spend three times the balance on paints and brushes, charcoals and canvases and easels. One new “best” dress would have to do, and I bought a new cloak—and one extravagance I told no one else about.

When I went to Lowton for the cloak, I stepped into the bookshop. I was the only customer in the store, and as I

headed toward what Miss Scatcherd had called the witchcraft section, Mrs. Dean said hello.

I had wanted to know her better. She wasn't much older than me, and I'd love to know about life in the United States. I wondered where her husband was. Now I would never know.

The Rowling books were there, and above them a handwritten notice: *Anointed Elder Approved*. I smiled and ran my fingers over the spines. Then my heart sank. On the shelf below was an empty space in place of the three books I'd come for—books forbidden at Lowood.

The trilogy was among the

volumes locked up in the Red Room, and I'd been thrilled to see that Mrs. Dean carried them. My coming train journey would give the perfect opportunity to read them at last. But they were gone.

*Jane, you fool.* I had stared at them longingly at least three times before, and every time I'd walked away.

“Are you looking for *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman?” Mrs. Dean joined me.

“I guess I missed my chance,” I said. “Another customer was braver.”

“Censorship makes cowards of us all.” Her eyes sparkled. “Come with me.” She led me behind the counter and through a door to a store room.

“Oh!”

Boxes and stacks of books filled the room, and it dawned on me that the books I wanted weren't the only ones missing from the shelves in the store. Something had seemed off when I entered the shop, but I was so intent on myself I'd missed it.

“Are you leaving Lowton?” I asked.

“Yep.” She went through a stack on the floor. “Back to Washington. I can't take it here. I thought I wanted the slower life of New Judah, but no. I can live without television, but the lack of communication and no internet is driving me crazy.”

She found the three books and

handed them to me: *Northern Lights*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*.

“How wonderful.” I hugged them to my chest. “The books, I mean. I’m sorry our pace of life doesn’t suit you.”

It was one of the things the Secessionists fought for. Along with the right to our religious freedom, the New Patriots also won our freedom from the constant bombardment of images and propaganda—information overload, they called it—that made a righteous and serene life nearly impossible.

“The slow pace suits me fine,” Mrs. Dean said. “It’s the slow minds I can’t stand.”

I bristled, but said nothing.

Another freedom Secession gave us all: no need to argue. The heathens had their country, and we had ours. “I’m sorry you’re losing your lovely store, though.”

“I’ll be all right,” she said. We went out to the counter where I paid for the books. “I’ll open a new one in Seattle. Brocklehurst paid a great deal for the shop.”

“The bishop?”

“His daughter and new son-in-law want to run it.” She motioned over her shoulder toward the stockroom and laughed. “He turned down most of the stock. His loss.” She wrapped the trilogy in brown paper and handed it to me.

“Thank you, Mrs. Dean.”

“It isn’t Mrs. Dean,” she said.

“Not Mrs., anyway. I’m not married.”

“But...” Goodness. What would Miss Miller say? *What would Miss Scatcherd say?*

“I wonder how you Judeans get the courage to marry at all with no divorce allowed.”

“Marriage is a sacrament of God,” I said. “It can’t be rent asunder by man.”

“Amazing.” She seemed amused, as if I’d said something childish. “When I was preparing to take over my grandfather’s store, his lawyer told me no one in Lowton would accept a single woman as anything but nurse, teacher, or

secretary. I didn't believe him. I thought it must be one of those things people just give lip service to, but he was right."

I walked back to Lowood, partly shocked that not-Mrs. Dean had lied to everyone, partly admiring her cleverness, and completely mystified by her statements. She didn't understand.

The Edicts, Decrees, and Laws protected the weak in society. Gone were the days of divorce when men cast their wives aside for younger partners. I was grateful that Mrs. Reed was bound by her oath to raise and educate the helpless infant she despised. In the United States, I would have been sent to an orphanage. Of course I wished Mrs. Reed had brought kindness to her task,



but love is beyond legislation.

Like a bookend, the cart boy who'd delivered me from Lowood Halt to the institution's gate returned me to the train in his one-horse conveyance. Five years hadn't worn well on him. He seemed down in spirits, all business and no talk. This time he didn't offer to come to me the back way.

At dusk the train passed through the factory city, its buildings lit up inside and out, factories and barracks alike. I didn't think it wonderful this time. This time I understood fluorescent light, and I was better aware of factory workers' lives. Brocklehurst regularly threatened to ship Lowood's kitchen staff or

gardeners off to a factory.

Factory work was how those in the poorhouse earned their keep, all the daylight hours spent on their feet at assembly lines or bent over sewing machines drenched in that damned fluorescent light. The life was hard. But all life is hard if your father isn't a bishop or lord or Anointed Elder. I pitied the factory workers not for their hard labor but for the constant glare of those lights.

I'd celebrated the day I left the student dormitory for a teacher's apartment. I still had to share a bedroom, and with Miss Gryce who snored, but we had the luxury of oil lamps and candlelight.

I had a stopover at Gateshead Halt to wait for the California Transcontinental Zephyr, the train which ran from Chicago in the United States through the western regions of New Judah and on to the west coast. The station had expanded. There was now a café, busy with people waiting for the Zephyr, and I ordered something to eat. The coffee was strong, but nothing cream couldn't fix. I'd just finished a bowl of chicken soup when a familiar person approached my table.

“Miss Jane, is it you? Don't say you've forgotten your old friend.”

“Bessie!” I jumped up and threw my arms around Gateshead's

housekeeper. "I could never forget you."

"Why, you're all grown up," she said. "Not a beauty, but we didn't expect that. Still, you're quite a young lady."

"It's wonderful to see you." Bessie looked much prettier than I remembered, but I couldn't bring myself to say so after so blunt a reminder of my plain looks. "Will you join me? Why are you here?"

"Why to see you, Miss Jane."

We sat down. "But how—?"

"Let me explain." She ordered a pot of tea from the waiter. "James and I visited Mrs. Reed last night. Miss Georgiana was there, visiting from Harvard. She's leaving for California today, and when Mrs. Reed mentioned

that you were going away to live in Jefferson, Miss Georgiana said wouldn't it be something if she saw you on the train."

"Oh," was my brilliant response. I looked around, but there was no Georgiana in sight.

Bessie went on, "So I thought: there's only one transcontinental each week, and Gateshead is the hub. It could well happen you'd change trains here. Why not see if I could catch you?"

"I'm so glad you did, Bessie." I looked around the busy café but there was no sign of Georgiana. "But who is James?"

"Who is James? Why, he's Dr.

Lloyd, Jane. Did you forget him?"

"Never. But I didn't know his first name." I looked at her again. She was not only prettier. She was happier, and better dressed. She'd truly changed. "And yet you use his first name freely."

Her eyes lit up, and she showed me her wedding band. "Of course, you wouldn't know. Dr. Lloyd and I were married a year after you left us. We have a child now, a little girl named Jane."

"Oh, Bessie." A lump rose in my throat. So she did care for me all those years. I really was terrible at recognizing affection. "Then you're no longer at Gateshead."

"I'm my own mistress now, though I let James think he's master. What with

him and Janie to care for, I'm busy enough. It's a good life."

"That's wonderful. I'm so happy for you." I couldn't stop myself asking: "And how are things at Gateshead?"

"Mrs. Reed is very unhappy," Bessie said. "Georgiana refuses to stay at home. She's going on to graduate school, can you believe it? She's in medical school. She's going to become a brain surgeon! Mrs. Reed is scandalized, though James assures her women make fine doctors. John Reed cut off Georgiana's funds, but she won a scholarship."

*Good for you, Georgiana!* I imagined her living happily at her

Hamlet 1-3-78. “And what of John Reed? Did he get his degree?”

“No, he’s turned out very bad,” Bessie said. “The moment he came into his money he left the university and moved to Beverly Hills. Mrs. Reed says he’s fallen in with the wrong crowd, but I think *he’s* the wrong crowd, if you know what I mean.”

I knew all too well.

“So Georgiana is going to California to check up on him. He keeps promising he’ll visit Gateshead, but he never does.” Bessie leaned closer and whispered, “I hear he’s become an actor.”

We both laughed.

“Bessie, I have to tell you



something. Thank you for my hat and scarf. You probably won't remember, but they were sky blue and so soft and lovely. You gave them to me the morning I left Gateshead—only later, I realized they must have been a birthday present, and you likely paid for the yarn yourself.”

“True, Jane. It was my pleasure.”

“You're the only one who ever loved me, Bessie. Bishop Brocklehurst took them away with all my decent clothes, but I've never forgotten your kind gift.”

“I'm glad, Miss Jane. For look what I have here for you.”

She brought the hat and scarf out

of her bag and handed them to me. I buried my face in their softness.

“When I saw that sad pile of your nice things on the table in the morning room, I wanted to scream,” she said. “The bishop told Mrs. Reed to give them to the poor box at church, and Mrs. Reed ordered me to take them away. I did nothing wrong to save these two items for you, since they never did belong to Mrs. Reed. I knew—or hoped—I’d see you again one day.”

A whistle blew and the board flashed, announcing the Zephyr’s arrival. I left Bessie with all my best wishes. As my train pulled away, I felt happy. I wasn’t alone in the world. Bessie cared for me. So had Miss Miller in her way.

And Helen Burns. I wondered if Helen's spirit conversed with my guardian angel in heaven. Were they watching over me now?

I was a hundred miles away from Gateshead before I realized I'd forgotten to ask about Eliza. If only I could forget Mrs. Reed and her son so easily.



« *Chapter 11* »

*Stranger on a Train*

My accommodations on the Zephyr must have cost a couple thousand dollars. Mrs. Fairfax provided the ticket, but I expected the amount would be deducted from my grand new salary. No rational person who works for her living travels first class, but I put aside my irritation at the extravagance. There was nothing I could do about it now.

In the private compartment, two plush seats faced each other and a

window ran the length of the space. The United States-based Zephyr was limited to civilized speeds within New Judah's borders, but it was impossible to hide away its heathen amenities.

The compartment was electrified. The porter showed me how to turn on the lights and extend the seats into beds. The refrigerator contained wine and cheese and fresh fruit. One machine made food instantly hot, and another brewed a single cup of fresh coffee or tea. The lighting was soft and easy on the eyes—far better for reading than candlelight. This was the seductive side of technology.

I could live with it.

My light lunch didn't stay with me

long, and I was hungry by time for the evening meal. The dining car would be full of Americans, and I changed into one of my navy teacher's dresses and put on my plainest white collar. The uniform announced that I belonged somewhere, that I was under someone's protection.

I moved through the dining car, hoping to find a genial New Judean party with an open seat, ideally someone who liked to talk and knew something of Millcote County. I should have arrived earlier. The only empty seat was at a table with three sour-looking clergymen, by their hats two rectors and a vicar. They wore their white cravats as I did my collar—defensively. I was about to

sit down with the chokers when someone called my name.

“Jane!” A hand shot up near the far end of the car, and an American rose. “Jane Eyre! Come join me!”

The woman was about twenty-four years old with dark hair cut to her jaw line and thick bangs over arching eyebrows. Her face was painted like a China doll, and her pink and black earbobs danced as she grinned and waved. “Come, Jane. Don’t you know me?”

“Georgiana Reed.”

I wouldn’t know her without Bessie’s heads-up. No one would take her for a New Judean. She wore shiny black pants and a loose pink cotton

sweater with a low scooped neckline. Her lips made me smile. Candy-apple red. She always did like makeup.

“It’s Georgie now. I’d know *you* anywhere, Jane,” she said. “I hoped I’d see you on the train. Turn around. Let me look at you.”

She fixed on my one vanity. I wore my hair in a French braid, the style adapted from Miss Temple. I’d let the braid fall to my waist instead of tucking it in.

“Deluxe.” She made the X into a *kssss* and flashed her eyes. “You’re plain as ever, but don’t let anyone tell you plain is ugly. You’re like a little sparrow. You’ve got great thick hair,



such a lovely honey color—and look at that figure!”

I felt my face go hot and quickly sat down.

“And still proud, I see.” Georgiana refilled her wine from the bottle on the table. She poured some for me and raised her glass to mine. “Congratulations on your licensure. I’m gratified you considered my advice.”

I drank, if only to afford myself some space. She was so effervescent!

“Bessie tells me you’re going to be a doctor,” I said.

“I *am* a doctor,” she said. “But I’m training in a specialty.”

“A surgeon.” My brain twisted into a pretzel, trying to reconcile its

template of a doctor with this picture of Georgiana.

“Surgeon.” She smiled. “Is that what Bessie said?”

I certainly remembered that ironic smile, a sign of Georgiana taking private amusement in notions that escaped me.

“Now, where are you going, Jane? Mother told me it’s somewhere in Jefferson, but I don’t recall the name.” She picked up a hard flat device from the table and touched it, repeating my answer, “Thornfield Righteous Estate.”

I noticed then the other Americans in the dining car—identifiable by their clothes—all had similar tablets which drew their attention from their dinner

companions. The aura of disconnection floated about them—as Georgiana was distracted from me now, looking at her instrument.

“This is the internet,” I said. “But it’s not supposed to work in New Judah.”

“It’s the Zephyr,” Georgiana said. A map appeared on the device. “All transcontinentals have satellite links to provide a signal local to the train.”

She touched the tablet again, and the map changed to a photograph. She spread her fingers over it, and a spot at the center grew until it showed a mansion in the center of rolling fields of corn and wheat.

What a wonder. What else could

the device show?

“Impressive estate.” She examined me again. I felt somewhat violated, like being looked at by Gideon Blackstone. Her gaze lingered on my collar. “*The governess*,” she said. “No doubt you’ll attract the attentions of the young master—or worse, the old one.”

I looked away and took another drink of wine.

“How will you stop yourself, Jane? Hot blood has always run beneath your cold surface.”

What did she mean? Had her brother told her the same lies he told Bishop Brocklehurst? I was saved from responding by the dinner trolley’s

approach. Georgiana chose something called lamb curry. I wanted to appear sophisticated and chose the same.

What had I done? Not about the curry, but about Thornfield. I'd cut myself off from the only life I knew—and for what? Georgiana had a point about masters and servants. The hoped-for something *else* could well turn out to be something *worse*.

“Oh, that’s good.” The lamb brought back my courage. The meat was tender and the spices exotic and delicious. *Yes, Jane. Something new can be something good.* “This is wonderful, Georgiana.”

She ignored her food, digging through the bag on the chair beside her.

“Here, take these.” She pulled out a paper card with four tablets sealed in little pop-outs and put it by my plate. “It’s a year’s supply. One every three months.”

“Good lord. Put those away.”

“You’re in America now, little bird. No worries. The Zephyr is sovereign to the United States. Birth control is legal here.”

She didn’t lower her voice. She showed no shame because she felt none.

“I won’t have my cousin end up somewhere like Bethany House. Yes, I know all about that place. I gave Mother hell when she told me where she’d sent you. Brocklehurst is a piece of work,

helping his fellow lords hide their dirty work.”

“But they’re dangerous. The pills affect a woman’s body.”

“And pregnancy doesn’t?” Georgiana said. “The lies you Judeans tell yourselves to justify the bondage of women.”

“You’re New Judean.” But was she still? She’d adapted the American habit of saying our name wrong, with an added sneer.

“Look, you may never need them.” She avoided the question in my statement. “You say your boss is a woman. You might encounter no man at Thornfield—how sad would that be? But if temptation comes, take the first pill

within forty-eight hours after you surrender and the others three months apart.”

I stared at the packet, afraid to touch it. Afraid to admit the potential need. And anyway, I'd taken care of the threat. Every hour put more distance between me and Gideon Blackstone.

“Are you going to California to see John?” I needed a change of subject. “Bessie said he's become an actor.”

“So Mother believes.” Georgiana lost her crusading tone. “If only that was the worst of it. I've heard from friends he's becoming an alzhed.”

“I don't know what that is.”

“Of course you don't.” She filled



her glass again. "Alz is a street drug. They say the high is better than any opiate and more addictive. I see alzheads all the time at the hospital. The drug eats away at the brain, destroys the personality. Judgment goes first—though John never had much of that. Self-control, curiosity. It steals away the civilized human being and leaves a violent creature in its place."

"Good lord."

"Nothing good about it," she said.

"And Mrs. Reed hopes you can help him." I would never not hate John Reed, but I wouldn't wish such a fate on anyone.

"Her fair-haired boy," Georgiana said. "The only person she ever loved

beyond herself. But if it's alz, there's no help for him in this world. The damage is irreparable. I doubt he'll follow my advice, but I promised Mother. I'll try to get him into a sanitarium, but he'll probably end up in prison or worse."

I decided not to bring up the fate of the atlas. No need to make her feel worse about her brother.

The packet still lay on the table when we finished dessert, and Georgiana's words repeated in my mind: *helping his fellow lords hide their dirty work*. I could swear nothing like that would ever happen to me, but it would be a lie. The world was full of John Reeds and Gideon Blackstones. The

John Reeds I could fight. As for another Gideon Blackstone, I'd stay out of the company of handsome and charming men.

Georgiana walked back with me as far as my quarters. "Goodbye, then, little bird. I change trains at an ungodly hour, and I won't see you again." She hugged me. "Remember, Jane: It's all very well to be truly righteous, but be on your guard against self-righteousness."

Brushing my teeth in my little lavatory, I saw the bright red mark on my cheek where Georgiana had kissed me. I wiped it away and washed my face, still thinking of her as I changed into my nightgown.

I'd known Georgiana all my life,

yet she was a stranger to me now. So bold. Self-contained. And yet isolated. She'd spoken of no one with love. No friends. Certainly not her family. I'd forgotten to ask about her Hamlet 1-3-78, but I feared the answer. The way she'd said *you Judeans*, made me think she'd never come home.

I didn't want that kind of independence. Maybe it was because of the hole in my orphan's heart, but I craved to belong to someone, to some place. Somewhere I was respected and equal.

The touch of a button extended one of the seats into a bed, and I lay down to watch the world roll by. The train

rounded a bend and entered a tunnel then came out the other side into dark unpopulated country, its sky sparkling with unlimited stars. An ascending half moon hung low and serene. I turned on the overhead reading light.

A few hours later, many chapters into *Northern Lights*, it struck me: for the first time in five years, I was alone. My thoughts were uninterrupted, my reading uninterrupted.

The absence of other voices was heaven.

I stayed in my compartment all the next day, savoring the solitude, stretched out to read my precious forbidden trilogy. By afternoon I was well into *The Subtle Knife*, and I understood the

novels' threat. The tale of dust pried open a little further the Pandora's Box within, first unlocked by Gideon Blackstone.

The train traveled through hours of sublime mountain scenery. Pine trees, waterfalls, and rushing streams gave way to oaks and foothills and down to a panorama of rolling farm country, the oaks mostly cleared away, the fields now bordered by willows and thorn trees.

It was past sundown when the train dropped me at Thornfield Halt. A man waiting beside a one-horse carriage touched the brim of his hat in salute. "Are you Miss Jane Eyre?"

“I am.”

“Well, you’d best get in then.” He smiled pleasantly as he put down the step and opened the door. “I’ll get your trunk.”

“How far is the journey to Thornfield Hall?” I said.

“Six miles, miss, not far. About an hour and a half.”

The carriage was very well built, with pneumatic springs, and the seat was comfortable. The ninety minutes could provide a good nap, but I was too excited to sleep. Soon I’d meet the people I would share my life with in the years to come.

Beyond the one daughter who was

to be my pupil, I hoped Mrs. Fairfax had no other relatives living in the house. Hoped. Not expected. Thornfield was a Righteous Estate, and there were bound to be many living there. There would surely be Mr. Fairfax and likely more of the family and who knew how many servants, retainers, and hangers-on.

I began to feel a bit sorry for myself. I'd lived among fine people before, and I was miserable with them. What if Mrs. Fairfax turned out to be another Mrs. Reed! Yes, I wanted to belong somewhere, but belonging to the wrong people—people who didn't like me, who didn't understand me—was worse than being alone.

Then we passed through Millcote,



and I remembered my guardian angel had guided me here, if only in my fancy. At once I felt better. I'd come to my Hamlet 1-3-78.

After the promised hour and a half, we stopped at the bottom of a hill. The driver got down and opened a large double gate fashioned of two iron gryphons facing each other. We ascended a long drive and stopped at the front of a mansion, foreboding in the dark but for a light in one window.

“Good evening, Miss Eyre.” A housemaid carrying a kerosene lamp greeted me. “Mrs. Fairfax sends her apologies for not meeting you personally. She’s gone to bed. I’m to

show you to your room.”

She led me over the threshold into a square foyer and up a wide staircase. As with the carriage, the house wasn't ornate, but all was of good quality and well cared for.

The maid showed me to a room in the middle of a long corridor, and the driver followed us in with my trunk. He left it on a bench at the end of the bed. He tipped his hat again, not in subservience but as a friendly gesture, and said goodnight.

“The bathroom is there.” The maid gestured toward a door. “And the closet and sitting area.”

“How many am I to share with?” There was only one bed but a rather

large one. Three could sleep in it without running into each other, though I didn't savor the prospect.

“No one shares a room at Thornfield.” The maid practically sniffed with indignation. She opened a drawer in the bedside table and withdrew a fat beeswax candle. “These are yours.” She put the candle in a lamp, lit it with a match, and returned the matches to the drawer. “The supply will be replenished when you begin to run low.”

“Thank you. I can put away—”

“We're not stingy with candles and matches either,” she hastened to add. “If you need a candle through the night—”

for any reason—no one will mind.”

“I’ve kept you up late enough,” I said. “I’ll take care of my things.”

The room was wonderful. There was indeed an adjoining sitting room, and the bathroom had a deep claw foot tub. I changed into my nightgown and put away my clothes. The closet could have housed all Georgiana’s dresses—if she still wore them. My four looked forlorn hanging in a place so grand.

Transferring incidentals from my purse to a dresser drawer, I pulled out a cardboard card with four pop-outs. The pills! Georgiana must have slipped them in. I looked around with the sudden feeling I was being watched. *Good lord, Georgiana. What were you thinking?*

The drugs were as illegal in Jefferson as they were in Idaho, and Jefferson was notoriously fervent about the EDLs. I couldn't throw them away—they could be found and traced to me. I had to hide them where they wouldn't be discovered during cleaning.

Someone ran through the hallway outside my door, and I froze in place until all was silent again. My gaze landed on the bed, and I thrust the contraband between the mattresses, as far in as I could. I crawled in under the covers and hoped they'd be safe until I came up with a better plan.

The bed was heavenly. Firm and soft at the same time. I had an abundance

of pillows, a down comforter and a lovely quilted coverlet. I leaned over and blew out my candle. The crackle and pop of the dying fire serenaded me to deep sleep, and I dreamed.

In my dream I heard an insistent pounding, pounding, of an approaching monster. A magnificent black horse burst into my presence, ridden by a cloaked stranger. Horse and rider passed me by and metamorphosed into a thundering train. Its whistle blasted, and the train's scream became a woman's tortured wail.



## « *Chapter 12* »

### *Thornfield Righteous Estate*

I awoke nearer to lunch than breakfast time. Someone had lit a fire on the grate and opened the chintz curtains. I sat up in the oh-so-comfortable bed with a smile on my face. My little chamber was the picture of coziness.

Late autumn sunshine poured in over the floral pattern on the papered walls and the thick Persian carpet on the buffed cherry wood floor. I wasn't in Lowood anymore!

I rose and dressed, eager for the day. I felt my life was embarking upon a new and better epoch, one with flowers among the thorns. *Thank you*, I said silently to my guardian angel.

To meet my new employer and pupil, I chose one of my navy teacher's dresses and a medium-sized linen collar with lace trim that covered my shoulders. Georgiana had called me plain, and the description fit.

I am no martyr, titillated by a hair shirt. I wish I were pretty, with rosy cheeks and a pert nose. That my lips were full and dark—or at least more than a mere horizontal line above my chin. I'd like to be tall and stately. It was



a mistake of my genes that I'm so little and so plain. A sparrow without, a cockatiel within.

No. That is waxing on.

In truth I'm comfortable as a little bird, as Georgiana called me, a sparrow. I only resent being unremarkable when I'm not marked and wish to be. A contradiction in my nature I have never resolved.

The hall, the gallery, the staircase—all of Thornfield looked different in the daytime—less foreboding. Everywhere parted curtains let in the late October sun. There were good pictures on the walls, serigraphs and *giclees* as well as signed paintings and prints.

As I reached the bottom of the stairs, a grandfather clock tolled the hour. Ten in the morning! No wonder I felt so rested. The front door I'd come through the night before was in the foyer to my right. I turned left into a parlor. The furniture wasn't new or stylish, but all was made of good quality woods and fabrics and well cared for.

A horde of maidservants went at the carpets, curtains, and windows with dusters and cleaning rags. A relieving sign. Antibiotics hadn't been effective in a generation, and prevention was the best weapon against infection. I always believed Mrs. Reed employed so many maids not to provide work for the local

people but out of fear for her own health.

I continued on through the open pocket door at the end of the room into a larger, more cheerful room. “Where can I find Mrs. Fairfax?” I asked a maid dusting a Steinway grand piano.

“In the garden, miss. Past the lilacs.” She curtsied and indicated a glass-paned French door.

I straightened my collar and went outside. I found myself on a broad and wide pressed concrete veranda surrounded by a marble stone half wall. Ceramic pots as high as my waist were scattered in the corners, empty now. I imagined them bursting with flowers in summer, a quartet playing at one end of the veranda and fine people dancing

under the stars. I took the marble steps, crossed the cobblestone drive that came around from the front of the house, and walked through a set of spindly lilac bushes holding onto the last of this year's leaves.

On the lawn I found a lady in her fifties or sixties wearing a black dress and a white widow's cap. She stood up from one of two wicker chairs. A tuxedo cat meowed in protest at losing her lap. It arched its back, examining me resentfully.

"Miss Eyre, it's so good to meet you," the lady said. She had the very look I'd hoped for: relaxed and efficient with an air of kindness. "I'm afraid I

don't stay awake as late as I used to. I hope you didn't have a tedious ride from the halt. John drives so slowly."

"Mrs. Fairfax?" It felt odd being treated so graciously by my employer. I felt she didn't expect a curtsy, so I nodded my head to show respect. "Everything is more comfortable than I could have wished. My room is lovely."

"I'm glad you like it." She asked me to take the other wicker chair and offered coffee and teacakes from the little table between us. "I put you near my room in the west wing. Mr. Rochester's room is also in that corridor, but don't concern yourself about that. He's hardly ever in residence. The servants sleep in the east

wing. The front rooms do have finer furnishings, but they're so solitary. I didn't want you to feel set apart."

"Who is Mr. Rochester?" I said.

"Why, Mr. Rochester is the owner of Thornfield Righteous Estate."

"Then you aren't my employer?"

"Heavens, what a thought!" Mrs. Fairfax said. "Although I am related to the family. Mr. Rochester's mother was a Fairfax, you see. Second cousin to my husband. But I never presume upon the relationship. I'm so glad you've come. I've felt lonely here without an equal to talk to."

I found out that the men at Thornfield worked in the gardens and

fields. The inmates of the house were female, all but John who served as a handyman and driver. He was married to Martha, the cook, and they had an apartment in the servants' wing where the unmarried females, such as Leah who showed me to my room, slept. The other married employees lived in little cottages on the estate.

“Mr. Rochester seems an extravagant employer.”

“In some ways, I suppose,” Mrs. Fairfax said. She patted her lap, and the cat jumped up again. She scratched under its chin and repeated, “We see him so rarely.”

“When was he here last?”

“About two months ago, when he

brought Adele. He was here for the day, long enough to give the order to hire a governess for her. Then he was gone again. The child speaks more French than English. I hardly know a thing about her.”

How curious. Was Adele Mr. Rochester's bastard? Or perhaps a charity case, as I had been.

Mrs. Fairfax proposed to show me over the rest of the house. I followed, admiring all as we went.

“Before Adele came,” I said, “how long had Mr. Rochester been away?”

“Before? Oh. Let me think. I believe before this last time he hadn't



been to Thornfield in more than a year. He travels all over the world, you see. Once he was gone for four years. When he returned, I'd closed half the house and let most of the servants go, thinking to economize. He was furious."

"I don't understand."

"Exactly! I thought I'd be praised for good management. Mr. Rochester ordered everyone hired back and their relatives too if they needed work. He said Thornfield must be kept spotless and ready. That he might descend upon us at any moment with a party of Anointed Elders and their ladies and retinue of politicians and vicars and bishops, and wouldn't we be ashamed if all wasn't as it should be."

I smiled and said nothing but held to my first opinion. Mr. Rochester was an extravagant master. And an eccentric one if he took his duty to provide good employment so seriously.

“But do you know? He’s never once done as he threatened.” She looked at me with wonder. We live quite alone at Thornfield. It’s a world unto itself.”

Indeed it felt different than any place I’d lived. Thornfield Hall seemed a living thing with its own personality, kept in a state of suspended animation.

“Is Mr. Rochester an Anointed Elder then?” I said.

“No, he isn’t married. The Righteous designation came when his

grandfather built Thornfield just after the Great Secession. Mr. Rochester's older brother inherited, but that poor man and his wife died in a measles outbreak."

"Horrible disease," I muttered. "Were you here then?"

"Not yet. My husband was living then, but the measles took him too. Our Mr. Rochester heard of my loss not long after he inherited and asked me to come run Thornfield for him. It will be ten years next spring, and I believe he still grieves for his brother and sister-in-law. You'll understand how relieved I was to read in your qualifications that you've been vaccinated. Mr. Rochester insists on it for everyone on the estate. No, Mr. Rochester may appear peculiar, but

allowances must be made for his sorrows. He's a good master, for all that we so rarely see him."

We'd reached the wing where she and I had our rooms. My door was the first we came to on the left. "I'm here," Mrs. Fairfax said at a second door on the left. We started back, and she pointed out the only door across the corridor, an equal distance between her room and mine. "Mr. Rochester sleeps here when he's at Thornfield."

We'd passed my room again and were near the end of the corridor when Mrs. Fairfax looked at me sideways. She hesitated, and with an impish smile pushed against the wood-panels on Mr.

Rochester's side of the wall.

A door popped open. Mrs. Fairfax opened it further, a twinkle in her eye. For an instant I saw the playful child she once must have been. "I'll show you my favorite view."

I followed her into the dark small space and up a narrow stairway.

"Mrs. Fairfax, this is wonderful!" I stood at the parapet at the edge of the roof. I could see Millcote in the distance to the east, the gryphon gates at the end of the drive, and the road that led away from Thornfield up the hill to the west.

Mrs. Fairfax said, "I always think if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt."

"Then you have no ghost," I said.

“How sad is that?” My words recalled Georgiana’s. *You might encounter no man at Thornfield—how sad would that be?*

“None that I know of.” Mrs. Fairfax chuckled.

“Is that Thornfield’s church?” Near the top of the hill, the hour tolled from the white-washed belfry of a small church.

“It is. Mr. Wood gives very nice, very short sermons.”

I was going to like Mrs. Fairfax.

A servant must have closed the secret door at the bottom of the stairs, for coming down again there was no light. We descended the stairway

carefully with only the feel of the wall for a guide. A few treads down, I caught my breath. The woman's wail from my dream sounded from somewhere in the house.

The sound of Mrs. Fairfax's footsteps continued unaltered, as if she'd heard nothing. When she opened the door to the corridor, the cry changed to loud and coarse laughter. The light of day streamed in, and I easily found my way down to her.

“Didn't you hear that?” I asked.

“What is it?” she said. “What did you hear?”

“Someone crying. Or laughing, I think.” Now I felt foolish, and I was grateful Mrs. Fairfax didn't ridicule me.

“Oh, I’m a little hard of hearing, my dear,” she said. “I suppose it’s a blessing in this old house. I’m sure it makes plenty of noises. You heard one of the servants,” she answered. “Most likely Grace Poole.”

“You didn’t hear her at all?”

“No, but I’m sure you did. She’s a special hire, another of Mr. Rochester’s projects.”

I felt sure she wanted to add *like Adele* but thought better of it.

“Grace Poole was here when I first came to Thornfield. She does odd work for Leah, sewing and such. She doesn’t mix with the others. Leah usually brings up her meals, and sometimes



they're noisy about it.”

The laugh repeated, louder this time, preternatural and tragic. I still couldn't tell where it came from. Then all was silent again, and I wondered if Mrs. Fairfax had been mistaken. That Thornfield did indeed have a ghost.

“Grace!” Mrs. Fairfax said, speaking to the secret door.

The door opened, and a servant came out, a woman between thirty and forty, robust-looking, with a hard, plain face. Surely no one less romantic or ghostly ever lived—or died. But where had she come from? There must be another room in there, hidden in the dark, perhaps behind the stairs.

“Too much noise, Grace,” said

Mrs. Fairfax. "Remember your orders!"

Grace curtsied, with a tinge of insolence, and went back in.

"Now, Miss Eyre," Mrs. Fairfax returned to me pleasantly, as if nothing odd had just happened. "Adele is with her nurse in the library. There must be no lessons on your first day, but would you like to meet your pupil?"

Adele Varens was ten years old, not at all clever, and she'd been taught badly. Her education before Thornfield seemed to have consisted of mimicking her errant flirtatious mother, now deceased. Communicating in French, I learned she was an orphan. On that account, she won my affection

straightaway.

“See what you can find out about her,” Mrs. Fairfax said. “Mr. Rochester told me nothing of her origins.”

I asked the girl how she knew the master.

“Adele says only that Mr. Rochester is the best man in the world who always brought her a *cadeau*—a gift when he came to visit her *maman*. I don’t believe she understands anything more than that.”

Mrs. Fairfax and I established a satisfying routine. She rightly held herself above the household staff in rank, but she treated me as her equal and often joined me during Adele’s lessons then stayed for coffee and conversation when

they were over.

My days were idyllic, though I'd never associated that state with winter. All was peaceful and congenial. I worked with Adele. I conversed with Mrs. Fairfax. I had time to draw and to read what books I liked from the unlocked shelves in the library which served as Adele's schoolroom.

M y *new epoch* was well underway, and I was happy.



« *Chapter 13* »

*Dusk*

**Anno Domini 2086**

When I first came to Thornfield, a carpet of pink and yellow roses covered the fence outside Mr. Wood's little church on the hill. The season was turning then from autumn to winter, and a closer look showed blooms fading and the last of the fat lush blackberries running underneath the roses.

Now four months later, winter refuses to give way to spring. Halfway

to Hayton, I stop a moment in the lane. The wood fence stands lonely, as naked as the winding sticks of wisteria crawling over the rectory door. The dirt shoulders of the lane are as hard with cold as the cobblestones. Clouds hang low and darken the sky, but there's no rain.

The bell in the whitewashed belfry tolls the hour: four o'clock. A chilly gust of wind rushes up the lane and through the bare branches of the willow at the edge of the church graveyard. I pull my cloak closer and watch the dissipating mist of my breath.

Past the church there's a stile accessing the field I like to cut through. I sit down to rest and look back the mile

I've walked. In the vale below I can see Thornfield Hall, like a citadel at the center of its working farm. Sometimes when Adele plays with her nurse and Mrs. Fairfax busies herself with household matters, I climb the secret staircase—which does have a locked door behind it. The view is more expansive from Thornfield's roof than from the top of this hill, but from both places the view is as serene as my current days. Peaceful, at times dull.

Not the nights.

I have the train dream several times a week. Sometimes it drives me from sleep. I think I hear a woman's cries in waking life, but they never

repeat once my head is clear. I once followed the noise into the corridor, but all was still.

Mrs. Fairfax promised to again admonish Grace Poole to be quieter in her work, but I wonder why she has to work at all so late in the night.

From my place here in the stile I see Millcote. Millcote fancies itself a village, I've learned, but the imagined metropolis contains only five buildings: the local mill and the miller's cottage, the Jefferson Inn with ten rooms to let, and attached to the inn a public garage and stables.

It's more hamlet than village. *My Hamlet 1-3-78*, I think fondly.

My goal today is Hayton, an actual



village yet another mile on the other side of this hill. Mrs. Fairfax missed the morning post, and I agreed to carry the letter to the post office, not merely for the exercise but for the solitude.

Today I long for something different. I'm impossible. Only four months into my entirely satisfactory new life, I'm restless with it. I leapt at the chance to get away.

Something inside me will not be quiet, still, tranquil. I can't be happy with my most outrageous good fortune. Would I go back to the sterile austerity of Lowood or the cruel luxury of Gateshead?

Never.

I have so much. I want something more—but what it is, I don't know. Fire where there is a chill? Feeling where there is composure? I feel I'm going crazy with ingratitude, but I don't know how to stop myself.

What would I alter? I've exchanged discomfort for comfort, tolerance for appreciation, endless chatter for a mix of quiet and conversation. Mrs. Fairfax treats me as her equal, and teaching fills my need for creative occupation.

In truth these months at Thornfield have been the most tranquil and secure epoch of my nineteen years. And yet I jinx it. Today I'm antsy for a temporary

escape. I've grown complacent in my comfort. I long for something out of the ordinary, something different—*something interesting*—to happen.

I don't know if the clouds sank into the earth during my reverie on the stile, but they're gone. A freakish mist swarms at my feet. Above the hilltop the flat disk of the moon rises, full and eerily brightening against the late afternoon sky, while the wispy mist snakes like a living thing about the hedges and rocks and trees.

A wind gust agitates fallen leaves, pushing and pulling them up into a swirling dust devil on the lane. The gust folds and rolls over, multiplies, and repeats its dance on and on through

every vale and over every hill beyond my sight.

I'm pierced by an unexpected feeling of eternal well-being, a profound connection with all life.

But a rude noise breaks through my bliss. A *tramp, tramp, tramp*, and metallic clatter. My heart races a little. A horse is coming, I can't tell where from. The bend of the lane yet hides it. On it comes. I leave the stile but keep to the shoulder, prepared to let the beast go by.

I am an educated adult of nineteen, but childhood's magical thinking still influences my mind. Fairy tales and Sunday school fables still dance in my

brain with other rubbish. I'm still forming my life's journey, still sorting real and true from claptrap fed to me by unloving tricksters or controlling piety freaks.

Onward the horse comes. I watch for it through the low mist, thinking of Gytrash, the gigantic ghost dog of the Canadian tundra.

Gytrash is said to haunt solitary byways and seize on lone travelers. At the time of the Great Secession, so my cousin John Reed said, Gytrash was seen as far south as Utah and Colorado and as far west as here in Jefferson State where Thornfield Hall lays.

I laughed at John Reed for believing such stuff and received a

thwack across the back of my legs in return. I still have the scar to show for my impudence.

Now mixed in with the *tramp*, *tramp*, *tramp* of horse's hooves, a rushing *thump-a*, *thump-a* sounds behind the hedges. The traveler isn't on the road but somewhere among the trees. All at once a great black dog bursts through—exactly in the form of the Gytrash! A lion-like creature with long hair, a white blaze on its huge forehead, and glittering black eyes.

It thunders past me. I am nothing to it.

The anticipated horse follows. The substantial blue-black steed bears a

rider on its back. The man—the human being—at once breaks the spell that's captured me. Nothing ever rides with the Gytrash. It's always alone. This is no supernatural beast, only a man. A traveler taking the shortcut from Millcote.

As with the great dog, I'm nothing to man or horse. They pass, and I resume my errand.

But the eerie sound of animal despair stops me. The man calls out, "What the devil?" I turn to see horse and rider fall in a terrible crash to the ground, slipping on thin ice which has glazed the cobblestones.

The dog comes bounding back, frantic over its master's predicament. It

barks until the hills echo the sound. Then it runs again to me, the only help at hand. My heart races, but I can see the poor animal is no danger to me. It's only worried about its master. The man struggles vigorously to right himself. He can't be hurt much.

Still I ask, "Are you injured, sir?"

He swears at earth and sky and keeps at it for a few sentences.

"Can I help at all?" I hide my amusement.

"Stand here beside me." He gets to his knees and throws his cloak back for easier movement. He's a large man, with broad shoulders and thick arms, and for the first time I think of him that way: as a



man. He rises to his feet, and I falter.

“Come here, girl!” he cries. “Are you deaf?”

I do as he says. He uses me to stay standing, his forearm pressing down on my shoulder. My heart pounds at his touch.

In my life I’ve suffered violent responses to unwanted touches. This feeling is no less violent, but I can’t say the touch is unwanted. I’m not afraid. I’m aroused.

We’re serenaded by the horse’s heaving, stamping, and clattering, and the dog joins in with barks and whimpers. The animal noise frightens me and sends me some yards away from the man’s grip. But I can’t be driven

away completely until I see him safe.

“Down, Pilot!” He silences his dog, stoops and feels his foot and leg. He is hurt after all. He stumbles a bit over to the stile where I had rested and takes the seat himself.

I’m in a mood to be useful, and my curiosity about the man is stronger than my fear of dog and horse. “If you’re hurt, sir, I can go for help, either from Thornfield Hall or Hayton.”

“I’m fine.” He doesn’t look at me. “Nothing’s broken, I think.” His voice is deep, strong, and gruff. There’s no effort at civility. Again he stands and tries to walk, but winces with pain.

It’s dusk now, but the moon is full

and bright. I see him plainly.

His black finely tailored riding cloak now covers him properly. Its fur collar is thrown back over his shoulders, making them appear even broader. His serious face has stern chiseled features, the shadow of a beginning beard, and heavy brows. His dark eyes and frown give him a frustrated look. He isn't young, but not yet middle-aged. He might be thirty-five.

I feel no fear of him, only a little shyness. Had he been handsome or heroic-looking, I don't think I could have interrogated him as I did or offered up my services so freely. I'd only ever had one handsome man so close to me, and that didn't go well.

I have a theoretical reverence for beauty, elegance, gallantry. *But really*. If ever again I meet those qualities incarnate in masculine form, I won't deceive myself. I'll know instinctively they can never have to do with me.

I shun lovely people as one avoids fire, lightning, or snake bite. The aversion isn't instinctive but by training. Almost from my beginnings I've received the catechism: *You, Jane Eyre, are a small, unworthy creature; dare not to associate with beautiful people, for the universe will laugh at your darling, mistaken assumption of entitlement.*

If this stranger had smiled at me

and been good-humored, I would have recoiled in suspicion. If he had deflected my offer of assistance pleasantly and with thanks, I would have gone my way and thought of him no more.

Instead his frown and grumbling roughness sets me at my ease. I can want nothing from him; therefore, he can deny me nothing. He waves me off, and my resolve to help strengthens.

“I won’t leave you, sir, not in the fading light in this solitary lane. At least not until I see you’re fit to mount your horse.”

Until that moment he’d hardly turned his eyes in my direction. When he looks at me I have to catch my breath. His gaze pierces my entire sense of

myself.

He sees me. I am a person to him.

“You should be at home,” he barks. “If you have a home nearby. Where are you from?”

“Just below. But I’m not afraid of being out. I can run over to Hayton for you, with pleasure. Indeed, I’m on my way there to post a letter.”

“You say you live below. Do you mean at that house with the parapets and battlements?” He points to Thornfield Hall, where the fading light casts a gleam and brings it out, distinct and pale against the woods beyond.

“That’s it, sir.”

“Whose house is that?”

“Mr. Edward Rochester’s, sir.”

“And you know Mr. Rochester?”

“I have never seen him.”

“He’s not in residence then.”

“No.”

“Can you tell me where he is?”

“I cannot, sir.”

“You’re not a servant there, I’ll wager.” He runs his eye over my simple outfit, the new brown cloak, the old brown bonnet, neither even half fine enough for a lady’s maid. He frowns. “You’re...”

On a whim I take pity and help him. “I am the governess.”

There. I’ve said the word. Until now I’d called myself a school teacher.

An independent professional. But these last few months I'd forfeited my independence little by little as I grew fonder and fonder of Thornfield. I looked back at the mansion, formidable in the twilight. It had changed me, worked its way into my heart, without my knowing.

"Ah, the governess," the man repeats. "Devil take me, I'd forgotten." Again my clothing undergoes scrutiny. He rises from the stile and grimaces upon his first step.

"I won't ask you to fetch help," he says. "But you may help me a little yourself, if you'd be so kind."

"Of course, sir."

"Do you have an umbrella or



something I can use as a stick?”

“I don’t.”

“Then try to get hold of my horse's bridle and lead him to me. You're not afraid of that either, I'll wager.”

I most certainly am afraid to touch the horse, but his tone is so commanding I obey almost against my will. I go to the tall steed and endeavor to catch the bridle. It's a spirited thing and won't let me come near its head. I make effort on effort, careful to avoid its trampling feet.

After some time the stranger bursts out laughing, a weird sound, incongruous coming out of that grim figure. “Give it up,” he says. “At this rate the mountain will never come to Mohammad. You'll

have to aid Mohammad to go to the mountain. Come here.”

I obey.

“Pardon my familiarity.” Again he lays a heavy hand on my shoulder. “Necessity compels me to make you useful.”

Again his massive body pushes against me, his arm around my neck, his strength denied only by a sprained ankle. With no choice, I lay my arm across his back to further support him. His size comes all from muscle, his strength from muscle and will. My emotions churn, and an image invades my mind. I see this stranger doing what others have done against my wishes, but I feel no anger.

I want him to kiss me.

We shuffle and limp to his horse. Catching the bridle on first attempt, he springs to his saddle, grimacing in the effort. "Now hand me my whip," he commands. "It lies there at the fence."

I seek the instrument and find it, hand it up to him. Our eyes meet. Perhaps an electric current passes between us. Perhaps I imagine it.

"Now make haste with your errand to Hayton." He turns away from me. "And return to your home as fast as you can." At the touch of his heel, the horse starts and rears. Then the stranger bounds away, away from me with the dog Pilot rushing in his traces.

All three vanish. I am alone and

my world is again silent. The bright moon stares at me serenely—and I believe a star or two winks.



« *Chapter 14* »

*The Master*

The incident on the road has happened and is gone, a thing of no moment, no romance, and no interest. Yet I have had my wish, the answer to the very purpose of my outing. The encounter with the stranger made a quarter hour's change in a monotonous life.

My help had been needed and claimed. I had given it. I was pleased to have done something. Something trivial

and transitory, yes, but something active, an opposite in my all-too-passive existence.

And the new face will be useful to me, a new picture in the gallery of my memory, unlike any hanging there. Masculine, strong, stern. And though his face was infused with judgment, it's a kind of judgment new to me: fair judgment. Intelligent discrimination.

I'm eager to draw that visage.

I carry the face before me when I enter Hayton and slip the letter into the slot at the post office. As I retrace my steps homeward, the brow grows less severe and more heroic. The dark eyes become rich with understanding. The broad shoulders and trim waist are more

dangerous to contemplate.

When I come to the stile, I stop a minute and look around, listening for a horse on the lane. I wait for a rider in a cloak and his Gytrash-like Newfoundland dog.

I see only wild vegetation to my left and the church ahead on my right. The willow rises up to meet the moonbeams in the coming night. The faintest waft of wind gently teases the tree's hanging bare branches.

I glance down in the direction of Thornfield Hall where there's a light in a window. It reminds me I am now late, and I hurry on. I come back through the open gryphon gate—though I could

swear I'd closed it earlier.

I linger at the gate. I linger on the lawn. I pace back and forth on the pavement. I now linger at Thornfield's door. I find I don't want to go in.

To pass over its threshold is to return to normalcy. To stagnation. I will cross the silent foyer and ascend the dark staircase. I'll enter my lonely room and wash away the dust and sweat that evidence my little journey. I will spend a tranquil evening with Mrs. Fairfax, quashing entirely the excitement awakened deep within me.

I will slip again into Thornfield's placid existence, whose very privileges of security and ease I've become incapable of appreciating. The door's



glass shutters are closed, but I don't need to see inside to know what awaits me.

Both my eyes and my spirit are drawn from the gloomy house to the night sky above, a cobalt sea absolved from taint of cloud, the moon ascending in solemn march, seeming to look upward as she aspires to the fathomless depth and measureless distance of space.

The trembling stars celebrate her course, and they make my heart tremble. Once again I sense the continuity and infinite relationship of all things. I can't bear to lose this bliss.

A little thing recalls me from the sublime. The grandfather clock in the

hall strikes seven times. *Jane, Jane, Jane, Jane, Jane, Jane, Jane.* I turn from moon and stars, open the door, and go in.

In the foyer, the high-hung bronze wall sconce is lit. Yet a brighter light issues from the parlor whose pocket door stands open. Within, a homely fire burns in the grate, revealing people near the mantel. There's a cheerful mingling of voices, including Adele's eager childish tone.

The door closes.

I run to Mrs. Fairfax's office. There is a fire there too but no lamp and no Mrs. Fairfax. Alone on the rug before the fire lies a great black long-haired dog with a white blaze on its forehead. The very double of the Gytrash of the

lane.

It is so like the other that I step forward. “Pilot?”

The thing gets up and comes to me and sniffs at me. I pet him, and he wags his great tail, but still he’s an eerie creature to be alone with. I ring the bell for a lamp, and I hope too for an account of this visitor.

“What dog is this?” I ask Leah who answers my call.

“He came with Master.”

“With whom?”

“With Master. Mr. Rochester. He is just arrived.”

“Thank you, Leah.”

I hurry for the staircase. This is

terrible! I will stay in my room, and perhaps by tomorrow morning he'll be gone again. I cannot live in the same house with that man. He is too...he is too much. I'm three quarters of the way up when the pocket doors below slide again into the wall.

“Jane, there you are,” Mrs. Fairfax calls up to me. “Come down at once. Mr. Rochester is here. He wants you.”

## **My Mr. Rochester**

*Episode 1*

**l.k. rigel**

[get episode 2](#)



# Sign up for notice of future episodes

Also by LK Rigel

## *Contemporary Romance*

Kiss Me Hello

Love Scars

## *Fantasy Romance*

*Tethers Series*

Give Me – A Tale of Wyrld and Fae

Bride of Fae

## *Science Fiction*

*Apocalypto Series*

Space Junque

Spiderwork

Firebird