

| 1 |

Leaving Gateshead Hall

It was too rainy for a walk that day. The Reed children were all in the drawing room, sitting by the fire. I was alone in another room, looking at a picture book.

I sat in the window seat, hoping that no one would disturb me, when John Reed rudely barged in. He looked about the room and said, “Where in the dickens is Jane? Eliza! Georgiana! Tell Mama that Jane must have run out into the rain—bad animal!”

“She’s in the window seat,” Eliza said.

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

John Reed was 14—four years older than I. He was large for his age and a bully. I shrank every time he came near me.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“You must say, ‘What do you want, *Master Reed*,’” he sneered. “You have no business to take our books. You are a *dependent*! Your father left you no money. You ought to beg, and not live here with us. Now, I’ll teach you to rummage my book shelves, for they are mine. *All* the house belongs to me—or will in a few years. Go stand by the door!”

I did so. Then I saw him lift the book. I turned aside, but not quickly enough. When the heavy book struck me, my head cracked against the door. The cut bled and the pain was sharp—but now my fear of John was replaced by anger.

“Wicked and cruel boy!” I cried.

He rushed for me, grasping my hair and shoulder. I was frantic. When I pushed him away, he yelled out loud.

Mrs. Reed and Bessie, the maid, came in.

“Dear! What a fury to fly at Master John!” Mrs. Reed said. “Take her away to the red room, Bessie, and lock her in.”

As Bessie took me upstairs to the red room, she whispered, “Try to be pleasant, Jane, or she will send you to the poorhouse.” Then she locked the door. The room was dim, with a deep red

carpet and curtains. It was here that Mr. Reed had died nine years ago.

I could not remember Mr. Reed, but I knew he was my own uncle—my mother’s brother. When my parents had died, he had brought me here to Gateshead Hall. In his last moments before death, he had made Mrs. Reed promise she would raise me as one of her own children. Mrs. Reed probably felt she had kept that promise.

In my terror, a strange idea came to me. I wondered if Mr. Reed’s ghost was troubled by the way I was being treated.

Then I thought I saw a ghostly gleam of light on the wall. I screamed and ran to the door. I shook the lock desperately.

Mrs. Reed looked in. “You cannot get out of there with such tricks, Jane! Now you will stay an hour longer!”

“Oh aunt, have pity!” I cried. “Forgive me! I cannot bear it!”

“Silence!” commanded Mrs. Reed. In her eyes, my fear was nothing more than an act.

She pushed me back into the room even though I was sobbing wildly. I suppose I then

had some sort of fit. I fell unconscious.

The next thing I remember is waking in my own bed. A gentleman was bending over me and asking, “Well, who am I?”

I answered that he was Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary. I knew that Mrs. Reed sometimes called him when the servants were ill.

“What made you ill?” Mr. Lloyd asked.

“I was shut up alone in a room where there was a ghost,” I said. Then I went on to tell Mr. Lloyd how unhappy I was at Gateshead.

“This child should have a change of scene,” Mr. Lloyd said to himself.

Some months later, Mrs. Reed sent for me. A tall man in black was with her in the drawing room. He was straight as a pillar, with a face as stiff as a carved mask.

“This is the little girl I wrote to you about,” Mrs. Reed said to him.

“Well, Jane Eyre, are you a good child?” the man asked sternly.

I could not answer yes. Everyone told me I was bad. So I said nothing.

Mrs. Reed said, “Perhaps the less said on that subject the better, Mr. Brocklehurst.”

“There is no sight so sad as that of a naughty child,” Mr. Brocklehurst sighed. “Do you know where the wicked go after death?”

“They go to hell,” I answered.

“And what must you do to keep from going to hell?” Mr. Brocklehurst asked.

“I must keep in good health and not die,” I answered.

Mr. Brocklehurst frowned. “That proves you have a wicked heart. You must pray to God to give you a new and clean one.”

“If you accept her at Lowood School, Mr. Brocklehurst, the teachers must keep a close eye on her,” Mrs. Reed said. “Above all, you must guard her from her worst fault: The girl is a liar.”

“Lying is a sad fault,” Mr. Brocklehurst said. “She shall be watched, Mrs. Reed. I will speak to Miss Temple about her.”

I wiped the tears from my eyes. Now I would forever be a wicked child in Mr. Brocklehurst’s eyes. I would have no chance to prove myself otherwise. Mrs. Reed had crushed any hopes I had for the future.

Mr. Brocklehurst soon left.