***Jane Eyre***

***Chapter 3***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Short Summary:***

Jane awakens in her own bedroom, surrounded by the sound of muffled voices. She is still frightened but also aware that someone is handling her more tenderly than she has ever been touched before. She feels secure when she recognizes Bessie and Mr. Lloyd, an apothecary, standing near the bed. Bessie is kind to Jane and even tells another servant that she thinks Mrs. Reed was too hard on Jane. Jane spends the next day reading, and Bessie sings her a song.

After a conversation with Jane, Mr. Lloyd recommends that Mrs. Reed send her away to school. Jane is excited about leaving Gateshead and beginning a new life. Overhearing a conversation between Miss Abbot and Bessie, Jane learns that her father was a poor clergyman who married her mother against her family's wishes. As a result, Jane's grandfather Reed disinherited his daughter. A year after their marriage, Jane's father caught typhus while visiting the poor, and both of her parents soon died within a month of each other and left Jane orphaned.

***Short Analysis:***

Chapter 3 opens with Jane remembering a nightmare image of "a terrible red glare, crossed with thick black bars." For Jane, red has become the color of a hellish nightmare, in which she is jailed behind impenetrable black bars. But this negative connotation soon dissipates, because Jane realizes that the red is simply the glare from her nursery fire. From a sign of evil and hellish fires, red has been transformed into a nurturing, warmth-giving glow. Thus, the significance of symbols and colors in this novel is not static; instead, they change to reflect Jane's emotional and social situation.

To improve Jane's spirits, Bessie sings a song that Jane has often delighted in. Now, though, the song suggests only sadness, so Bessie begins another ballad. Like Gulliver's Travels, this tune tells the tale of a desolate traveler. The narrator of this song is a "poor orphan child," who has wandered a long way, through wild mountains and dreary twilight. Just as in the previous chapter, Jane meditated upon the purpose of her suffering, the speaker in this song wonders why he or she has been sent "so far and so lonely." The only hope for this lost child is in heaven because God will provide mercy and protection. Implicitly, Bessie suggests that Jane should become a spiritual traveler, looking toward heaven for solace, rather than worrying about her troubles in this world. Jane feels meager comfort in the song's message because she longs to find happiness on earth. Jane's interactions with religious figures and their promise of spiritual salvation will be repeated throughout the text. Should we focus on heaven to the exclusion of earth? In general, Jane doesn't believe humans should be so focused on heaven that they forget the pleasures available for them here on earth.

The narration in this section reminds readers that the tale is being told by an older, wiser Jane remembering her childhood experiences. For example, there are frequent interjections by the older Jane, explaining or apologizing for her feelings. At one point, she says, "Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I own some fearful pangs of mental suffering. But I ought to forgive you, for your knew not what you did." Jane says she "ought" to forgive Mrs. Reed, but she doesn't necessarily do it. Similarly, this older narrator explains that children are often unable to express their feelings in words; therefore, the reader shouldn't be surprised by the meagerness of Jane's response to Mr. Lloyd's question about the source of her unhappiness in the Reed household. The frequent intrusions of this older voice increase sympathy for Jane, providing more insights on Jane's motivations. Notice that the novel's full title is Jane Eyre: An Autobiography and that the title page claims that it was edited, rather than written, by Currer Bell.

***Summary in detail:***

Jane wakes up, confused and disoriented. Someone is holding her gently; she’s never been held gently before.

She starts to realize where she is—in her own bed. Bessie and a gentleman are there, looking after her.

Jane’s glad to see the gentleman, because he’s not one of the Reeds. She looks at him closely and realizes that she knows him. It’s Mr. Lloyd, a local apothecary (sort of like a pharmacist—he can give out prescriptions and medicines, but he doesn’t have a doctor’s training).

Mr. Lloyd gives Bessie instructions about looking after Jane and says he’ll come back tomorrow, then leaves. Jane feels really depressed after he leaves; he’s much nicer to her than anyone else who lives at Gateshead (Mrs. Reed’s home).

Bessie offers to get Jane something to eat or drink and is generally really nice to her. Jane’s pretty confused by this kindness.

Bessie goes into another room, and Jane overhears her ask the housemaid, Sarah, to sleep in the nursery because she’s scared that Jane could die.

Sarah and Bessie come back to sleep in the nursery; Jane listens as they whisper about strange figures and visions that were seen around Jane earlier—something dressed in white, a black dog, lights, noises. They fall asleep, but Jane’s wide awake in terror.

Jane tells us that, even though she doesn’t get sick after this shock, her nerves never really recover. She blames Mrs. Reed, even though she knows that maybe she shouldn’t.

When Jane gets up the next day, she sits by the fire wrapped in a shawl; the Reeds have gone out somewhere, Abbot is sewing, and Bessie’s tidying up. Jane should be happy to be left alone for once, instead of bullied and tormented, but she can’t stop crying silently to herself.

Bessie brings Jane a treat—a tart, and on a beautiful china plate that Jane’s always liked. She can’t bring herself to eat it.

Next Bessie asks if Jane wants a book; she asks for Gulliver’s Travels, which she’s always loved (and thinks is nonfiction). But even reading can’t comfort her now; Gulliver seems lonely and beset by terrible dangers.

As she works, Bessie starts singing a song that Jane has always liked in the past. But this time—can you guess?—yep, it just sounds sad. We’re starting to wonder if Jane will ever enjoy anything again.

Mr. Lloyd comes to see how Jane is doing. She’s not sick, and he starts trying to figure out why she’s so miserable.

Bessie tells Mr. Lloyd things that make Jane sound babyish: that she’s crying because she didn’t get to go out in the carriage with everyone else, and that she was sick because she had a fall. Jane’s pretty indignant about these charges and denies them both—and explains that the "fall" was actually when John Reed knocked her down.

A bell rings and Bessie has to go have dinner with the other servants, so Mr. Lloyd is left alone with Jane.

Jane tells Mr. Lloyd about the ghost, and he finds that pretty silly.

Jane protests that she’s miserable for lots of other reasons: she doesn’t have any immediate family, Mrs. Reed and her son John are cruel to her, and she’s made to feel that she doesn’t have any right to live at Gateshead.

Mr. Lloyd starts asking about different ways Jane could leave Gateshead. Does she have any other family? She’s not sure, but she doesn’t think so, and she wouldn’t want to live with them if they were poor anyway. Could she go to school?

Jane thinks about school. She’s heard bad stuff about school from Bessie and John, but she doesn’t really trust either of them, and she is interested in learning to paint and sing and sew and read French and stuff—the things she knows young ladies get taught in school. Plus, she’d be able to get away from the Reeds.

Jane tells Mr. Lloyd that she does want to go to school, and he advises Mrs. Reed to send her to one.

Jane hears Abbot tell Bessie that Mrs. Reed will send Jane to school, if only to get rid of her. Jane also hears Abbot talk about her (Jane’s) own family: her dad was a poor clergyman (like a minister), her grandfather disinherited her mother for marrying him, and both of them (Jane’s mom and dad) died while taking care of sick people during a typhus outbreak. Well, at least now she knows where she comes from.

Bessie and Abbot agree that they would be able to feel sorry for Jane "if she were a nice, pretty child" (1.3.78) or "a beauty like Miss Georgiana" (1.3.79), but they can’t really feel bad for her because she’s unpleasant and ugly. We think they’re jerks, especially for saying this in front of Jane. Hollywood movies may not show it, but you don’t have to be stunningly gorgeous to suffer, you know.

***Analysis in Detail:***

Chapters 2 and 3 answer questions about Jane's relationship to the Reeds and how and why she came to be at Gateshead. Chapter 2 also reveals the hypocrisy of Mrs. Reed, who not only treats Jane with unfair harshness but is shown to have reneged on the deathbed promise made to her husband. The red-room scene brings in some of the gothic elements often found in popular 18th- and 19th-century novels: an elaborately decorated, cold, dark room where someone has died, a mysterious light, and a raging storm. The atmospherics of the storm reflect Jane's tumultuous emotions, as well as contributing to her fright and profound sense of isolation.

The red-room incident clearly is a traumatic and memorable experience for Jane, and she recalls it later in the book when she reaches personal crises. Being locked alone in the red-room—"no jail was ever more secure," she comments—reflects her feelings of isolation and being trapped by her status as an unwanted orphan. These feelings will emerge later, as she bristles against societal restrictions on her because she is a woman. The red-room is often associated with Jane coming of age as a woman.

Reflecting on the incident and her life at Gateshead, Jane the child is bewildered: "I dared commit no fault," she says. "I strove to fulfill every duty." Yet she is always punished. Bessie's comments that Jane has never behaved like this before back up Jane's contention that she has always tried to be good, showing that she is a reliable narrator. While the child Jane cannot understand her situation, the adult narrator has a better view, based on life experience: "I was a discord at Gateshead Hall; I was like a nobody there." Imprisoned in the room, Jane considers two options to end her misery—escape and starving herself to death. Mr. Lloyd's suggestion provides her with hope for relief. After careful consideration, she decides that the only solution to her problem is to leave Gateshead.

From the very beginning of the book, Bronte uses careful novelistic craftsmanship to position the reader on Jane's side. Not only does the narration occur in Jane’s voice, a fact which automatically makes her a more sympathetic character, but Bronte incorporates all of the tragic facts of Jane’s childhood in the first few pages. From the start, Jane is oppressed; she is sent off while her cousins play. We learn through exposition from John that she is a penniless orphan, dependent on the heartless Reed family but never on an equal level with her relatives; indeed, social class will play an important role in the rest of the novel. Although we do not have a clear sense of the extent of Mrs. Reed’s resentful feelings toward Jane, Bronte emphasizes Jane’s loneliness and lack of familial affection. Bronte also emphasizes Jane’s sensitive nature and inner strength. She is given to flights of fancy while reading, but she also displays a great deal of courage and sense of justice in her defense against John. All of the elements are in place for a classic "Bildungsroman," the literary genre originating in the German as "novel of formation" or, as it is generally known, the "coming-of-age" story. In the Bildungsroman, classic examples of which are Goethe's [The Sorrows of Young Werther](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-sorrows-of-young-werther), Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, and J.D. Salinger's [The Catcher in the Rye](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-catcher-in-the-rye), the young protagonist matures through a series of obstacles and defines his or her identity. The conflicts of social class that were suggested in Chapter 1 become even more prominent in this chapter. Jane is trapped in the odd situation of being poor within a rich family. Moreover, her mother was once a member of a wealthy family, but her choice of husband resulted in her financial ruin and indirectly led to both of their deaths. As such, Jane’s notions of poverty are fundamentally skewed; as she admits, children "have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty - poverty for me was synonymous with degradation." Even though she is unhappy at Gateshead, she freely admits to Mr. Lloyd that she would rather be mistreated in a wealthy home than treated kindly among poor people. Adding insult to injury, Bessie's song, well-meaning though it may have been, emphasizes Jane's status as a "poor orphan child" and isolation in the Reed family. Jane, of course, is poor in both pitiable and pecuniary terms, without anyone to love her and without any money for self-sufficiency. However, Mr. Lloyd’s suggestion about going to school is intriguing, particularly because an education was the one thing that could help a woman strive for financial independence in the Victorian era.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) wakes up in the nursery, cared for by [Bessie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), and by the local apothecary, [Mr. Lloyd](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters). Bessie tells Jane that she thinks that Mrs. Reed mistreated her, nurses Jane, and even sings Jane a song, but Jane is melancholy and unreachable. Jane only feels better when she gets a book—[Gulliver's Travels](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/gulliver-s-travels), a fanciful satire by Jonathan Swift, which she believes is a factual story of distant places.

***Analysis Part 1:***

For her own children, Mrs. Reed would have hired a real doctor rather than an apothecary. Jane takes refuge in her imagination which, as with Mr. Reed's ghost, can sometimes be too powerful and distort the truth.

***Summary Part 2:***

As [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) recovers, [Mr. Lloyd](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) asks her about her health and her well-being. Jane confesses her unhappiness and her regrets about having no family, but says she does not want to leave and become a beggar. Even if she had family, Jane says she would not want to rejoin them if they were very poor.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Poverty has affected Jane deeply enough to challenge her desire for family. Dependents and young women on their own had it rough—they could either work for someone or hit the streets.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Mr. Lloyd](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) asks [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) if she'd like to attend school. Jane gladly says yes. He obtains permission from [Mrs. Reed](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), who is thrilled to get rid of her niece.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Education is necessary for an orphan girl like Jane to create a place for herself in society.

***Summary Part 4:***

Later, [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) overhears [Bessie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) telling [Miss Abbot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) the story of Jane's family. Jane's father was a poor clergyman. Jane's mother, a Reed, married him against her wealthy family's wishes, and they disowned her. Just after Jane was born, Jane's father caught typhus while helping the poor, and both of Jane's parents soon died. Jane's uncle [Mr. Reed](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) adopted her. Mr. Reed also died within a year, but made his wife, [Mrs. Reed](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), promise to raise Jane like one of their own children—[John](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), [Eliza](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), and [Georgiana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters).

***Analysis Part 4:***

Jane's parents are split between the working class and the upper-class gentry (people who owned property). Jane's mother chose love and her own desires over her family's money. Jane will do the same eventually. Like her mother, Jane is determined to earn respect for herself, and for women in general.

***Important Quotations:***

I scarcely knew what school was; Bessie sometimes spoke of it as a place where young ladies sat in the stocks, wore backboards, and were expected to be exceedingly genteel and precise; John Reed hated his school, and abused his master: but John Reed’s tastes were no rule for mine, and if Bessie’s accounts of school-discipline (gathered from the young ladies of a family where she had lived before coming to Gateshead) were somewhat appalling, her details of certain accomplishments attained by these same ladies were, I thought, equally attractive. She boasted of beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers by them executed; of songs they could sing and pieces they could play, of purses they could net, of French books they could translate; till my spirit was moved to emulation as I listened. Besides, school would be a complete change: it implied a long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life. (1.3.70)

***Explanation:***

Jane instinctively embraces the opportunity to go to school—it’s a way to get away from Gateshead, and the fact that people she hates dislike school probably means that she’ll enjoy it. It’s sort of an "enemy of my enemy is my friend" thing.

She’s also really interested in being "accomplished," in learning, and in being a talented, cultured person, which is more than we can say for any of the Reeds. From the beginning, then, Jane’s motives for getting an education are complex: she loves learning for its own sake, but it’s also a way out of a bad living situation and a way to distinguish herself from louts like John.

***Quote 2:***

Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children: they have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty; they think of the world only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty for me was synonymous with degradation. (1.3.63)

***Explanation:***

Jane would refuse to live with poor relatives, even if she had any and they were loving, because the Reeds have taught her that poverty is always accompanied by immorality and unpleasantness. It’s going to take Jane some time to realize that wealthy people can easily be just as degraded as poor ones—or more so.

***Quote 3:***

Bessie, when she heard this narrative, sighed and said, "Poor Miss Jane is to be pitied, too, Abbot."  
  
"Yes," responded Abbot, "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that."  
  
"Not a great deal, to be sure," agreed Bessie: "at any rate a beauty like Miss Georgiana would be more moving in the same condition."  
  
"Yes, I doat on Miss Georgiana!" cried the fervent Abbot. "Little darling!—with her long curls and her blue eyes, and such a sweet colour as she has; just as if she were painted!" (1.3.77-80)

***Explanation:***

Jane Eyre is famous for being a plain-looking girl rather than a beauty, and here we see the unfortunate and unfair consequences of her plainness: the servants find it difficult to sympathize with her just because she’s not cute and sweet and blue-eyed and curly-haired. Compassion and affection are easier for people like Bessie and Abbot to give to pretty girls. Yeah, they’re not shallow or anything.

***Recovery and Despair***

At the start of Chapter 3, Jane regains consciousness in stages. We are not told how long it took someone to find her after she had passed out in the red-room. We see things from young Jane's point of view as she gradually becomes aware of her surroundings. While Jane seems to suffer no lasting physical effects from the horrific red-room events, she does feel a lingering 'unutterable wretchedness of mind.' She spends much of the next day sitting by the fire weeping. She is offered kindnesses and luxuries she has never before been allowed. Not even a delicate tart served on her favorite plate can entice her to move beyond her misery.

***Bessie's Long Overdue Kindness***

In the previous chapter, we saw some slight evidences of kindness from Bessie, the children's nurse, toward Jane. It seemed possible Jane could have an ally in Bessie. However, the third chapter makes it pretty clear that Bessie's slight efforts are too little, too late to be of any use. In this chapter, we see Jane regarding Bessie's kindnesses with confusion and skepticism, illustrating how different from the norm this treatment is for her. When Bessie speaks kindly to her, Jane tells us, 'Scarcely dared I answer her; for I feared the next sentence might be rough.' Furthermore, Bessie's companionship in the nursery and her kind singing do nothing to make Jane feel cared for. It seems Bessie has too long established a pattern of ill treatment toward Jane to be able to dispel it now with a few gentle words.

Jane's reaction to seeing Bessie after her fainting spell is most telling: while she says Bessie's presence 'was far less obnoxious' than Abbot's would have been, Jane finds no comfort in it. In contrast, the relative stranger by her bed brings to her 'an inexpressible relief, a soothing conviction of protection and security', simply because he was 'a stranger in the room, an individual foreign to Gateshead and unrelated to Mrs. Reed.' (Gateshead, we learn, is the name of the estate where Jane lives with the Reed family.) If simply the presence of an outsider is able to elicit such feelings of 'protection and security', poor Jane must be living daily without them. It appears the abuse she habitually sustains at the hands of the Reeds and their staff has left a mark too deep to be rubbed out by a few moments' kind treatment.

***Jane's Family History***

This third chapter reveals a little more to us about Jane's antecedents. When she overhears a conversation between Bessie and Abbot in the nursery at night, we learn, along with Jane, that her father was a poor clergyman. Her mother, marrying him against the wishes of her family, was cut off from the Reed family fortune and left alone in penury. Both of Jane's parents died of typhus, at which point Mr. Reed collected young Jane and brought her to live at Gateshead. The reader is made to feel Jane's isolation in learning that, not only was she an orphan, but she also knew nothing whatsoever about her parents until now, and this she only learns accidentally.