***Jane Eyre***

***Chapter 4***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Short Summary:***

Jane awakes in her own bed in the nursery. Jane cries herself sick, but feels comforted by the small concern shown her by Bessie; however, her spirit is broken. Mr. Lloyd talks with Jane privately and learns of her situation—that she only has some other poor relations who cannot afford to keep her. Mr. Lloyd asks if she would like to go to school, to which Jane replies yes. Mrs. Reed agrees to the proposal. Jane's mother married against the will of her wealthy family to Jane's father, a poor pastor. Both parents died of typhus with a month of each other. According to the maids, Jane's plain looks make it more difficult to gain much sympathy.

***Short Analysis:***

In this chapter, Brontë adds to the reasons for the Reeds' dislike for Jane and her family. Jane's other characteristics are also learned. For instance, Jane loves learning and the idea of going to school. She dislikes the idea of living with poor relatives even if they are kind because she does not want to act or talk like a poor person.

In one portion of this chapter Jane switches from the perspective of Jane the child to Jane the adult. The adult Jane realizes that Mrs. Reed was trying only to rid Jane of what she saw as a tendency to act badly by locking her in the red room. Note in Jane's statement the words which indicate Mrs. Reed did not know what she was doing. These words echo the words of Jesus Christ on the cross.

***Summary in detail:***

Following her discussion with Mr. Lloyd, Jane expects that she will soon be sent away to school. But the only change Jane notices in her status following her experience in the red-room is that the boundary between Jane and the Reed children is more solid. On January 15, after three months of waiting for a change, Jane is finally summoned to the breakfast-room. Here she finds Mr. Brocklehurst waiting for her. Standing like a black pillar, Mr. Brocklehurst interviews Jane about hell, sin, and the Bible. Her aunt's worst suspicions about her moral character are confirmed when Jane declares to Brocklehurst that the "Psalms are not interesting." As a final poke at Jane, Mrs. Reed declares that her niece is a liar, and Brocklehurst promises to alert the other members of the school to Jane's deceitful nature.

Jane resents Mrs. Reed's statements about her character, and when the two are alone together, Jane retaliates against her aunt. Angry and hurt, Jane declares that she is not a liar, that she is glad Mrs. Reed is not her relation, and, finally, that Mrs. Reed is hard-hearted. Jane feels a sense of triumph and exultation, and Mrs. Reed sheepishly leaves the room.  However, she feels a curious letdown afterward and sees the folly of her behavior.

The chapter ends with a conversation between Jane and Bessie. Jane makes Bessie promise to be nice during Jane's final days at Gateshead. Bessie claims she likes Jane more than she likes the Reed children, and confesses that even her mother has noticed how often Jane has been mistreated by the Reeds. In celebration of their new friendship, Bessie tells Jane some of her most enchanting stories and sings her sweetest songs.

***Analysis in Detail:***

Mr. Brocklehurst enters the book in this chapter, ushering in the change that will alter Jane's life. On first seeing this grim man, Jane describes him as "a black pillar! — such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug; the grim face at the top was like a carved mask." A clergyman, Brocklehurst symbolizes Jane's aversion to some of the versions of organized religion. A straight, black, narrow, erect pillar, this man is hard and inflexible in his beliefs, certainly not attributes admired by the adventurous Jane. The "carved mask" of his face suggests his inhumanity, as does Jane's later reference to him as the "stony stranger." Unlike Jane who is associated with fire and energy, this man is cold and aloof as stone, someone with no passion and even less compassion. When Brocklehurst plants her straight in front of him, Jane exclaims, "what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large, prominent teeth!": Brocklehurst has been transformed into the big bad wolf of fairy-tale fame, waiting to devour the innocent Little Red Riding Hood. From his first introduction into the story, one realizes that this spiritual man will offer Jane little comfort and no salvation.

Besides signaling Jane's lack of interest in the self-righteous religion Brocklehurst professes, their interaction also reminds readers of Jane's general lack of respect for tyrannous authority figures. Her inability to quietly accept unfair treatment becomes pronounced in her interaction with Mrs. Reed. When her aunt tells Brocklehurst that Jane's worst trait is her "deceitful nature," Jane immediately recognizes her lack of power: How can a poor child defend herself from unfair accusations? When Brocklehurst leaves, Jane is filled with a "passion of resentment," contrasting clearly with Mrs. Reed's "eye of ice" that dwells "freezingly" on Jane. Indeed, Mrs. Reed's iciness incites Jane's passions, causing her entire body to shake, "thrilled with ungovernable excitement" and her mind has become a "ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring." Following an outburst against her aunt, Jane feels a sensation of freedom and triumph. In fact, she declares herself the "winner of the field" and revels in her "conqueror's solitude." Has she simply stepped into her cousin John's role, becoming for a moment the "Roman emperor" she had earlier critiqued him for being?

Struck by the fate of Jane's enemies, many critics have viewed this novel as Jane's revenge fantasy. As the story progresses, notice what happens to Jane's attackers; all seem to meet with misfortune and unhappiness. Jane's fiery, passionate nature transforms as the novel progresses, and she learns to balance passion and reason. In this scene, Jane's passion quickly drains away, and she's left with its aftertaste, "metallic and corroding," showing her that excessive emotions will not lead to happiness. Yet releasing her inner fire has a positive result: Because of it she befriends Bessie at the end of the chapter. This conversation reveals Bessie's sympathy — even affection — for Jane.

Jane's comment that the Psalms are uninteresting reveals that she forms her own opinions about things without regard to popular opinion. This very combination of intelligence and independence might contribute to Mrs. Reed's dislike of the girl. In Mrs. Reed's world, a penniless orphan belongs in the lower class, illiterate and begging on the streets; only wealthy upper-class women should display intelligence and accomplishments. To keep Jane in her place, Mrs. Reed asks Mr. Brocklehurst to prepare her "in a manner suiting her prospects" so that she is "made useful" and "kept humble." This directive refers to Jane's unfortunate position in society as a woman without fortune, which makes her unsuitable for a husband of high social rank, unlike her female Reed cousins. Jane is relegated to working for a living.

Jane's impending departure from Gateshead gives her the courage to confront Mrs. Reed about how she has been treated. Initially Jane sees her passionate outburst as a victory; yet in the end it leaves her feeling somehow disappointed with herself. The "ridge of lighted heath" to which Jane compares her act of retaliation invokes the symbol of fire that recurs throughout the novel and often signifies uncontrolled passion, one of the book's themes. The blackened heath to which she compares her state of mind after that retaliatory remark represents the ruin that can result when passions are allowed to run out of control. While Jane still acts impulsively, she is beginning to learn that such behavior is not desirable.

The chapter ends on a hopeful note, as Bessie tells Jane some of her "most enchanting" stories and sings "some of her sweetest songs." Bessie—who is herself a young woman—provides Jane with something of a surrogate mother, and the maid serves as a foil, or counterpoint, to Jane's stern aunt.

Religion makes its first formal appearance in the novel in the form of Mr. Brocklehurst. Already, we can see the religious hypocrisies that Bronte exposes; Mr. Brocklehurst believes the deceitful Mrs. Reed’s accusations about Jane and relishes the seemingly heartless reformations that take place at school. He also displays an abhorrence for any form of creative thinking; although Jane enjoys Revelations, the book of Daniel, Genesis, and other parts of the Bible, she is accused of being “wicked” because she does not approve of the Psalms. The extent of Mr. Brocklehurst’s hypocrisy in his beliefs about Christianity will become more apparent in later chapters of the novel.

After the night in the red-room, Jane’s position in the Reed family seems to have fallen even further. Instead of being tormented by Georgiana, Eliza, and John, as she was before, Jane is now simply ignored; she no longer even exists in the context of the family. However, Jane does find comfort in Bessie, who begins to act as a surrogate mother figure and is Jane’s only source of consolation and affection. Although Bessie seemed to be harsh at earlier points in the novel, her sole support of Jane during this time (and acknowledgement that she prefers Jane over the other children), make Mrs. Reed’s antipathy toward Jane seem increasingly callous. Bessie’s behavior toward Jane and Jane’s love for her doll both constitute one of the major themes of the novel, the idea that “human beings must love something.”

In this chapter, Bronte also introduces the motif of fire and ice, a theme that will appear frequently throughout the novel. Fire is associated with Jane and with positive creation, while ice is associated with Jane’s antagonists and with negative destruction. Bronte is often subtle with these symbolic attachments; for example, Mrs. Reed’s eyes are twice compared to ice in this chapter: “her cold, composed grey eyes” and “her eye of ice continued to dwell freezingly on mine.”

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

***Summary Part 1:***

For two months, [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) anxiously waits for her schooling to start. She is finally interviewed by [Mr. Brocklehurst](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters)—the aloof and stern headmaster of the Lowood school. He lectures Jane about religion, especially about the virtue of consistency. [Mrs. Reed](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) warns him that Jane is a liar, and Mr. Brocklehurst promises to inform her future teachers.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Another painfully ironic moment—as will become clear, Brocklehurst is hardly pious or consistent, while it is Mrs. Reed who is the liar. Once again, Mrs. Reed does harm to her niece, whom she should protect.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) is so hurt by [Mrs. Reed](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters)'s false accusation that she can't stop herself from angrily exclaiming that her aunt makes her sick and is herself a cruel and deceitful person. Mrs. Reed is dumbstruck and subdued by Jane's bold criticism. Afterwards, Jane feels a thrilling mix of victory and fear at her uncontrolled passions.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Jane's passionate nature arises. By asserting herself, she stops others from misrepresenting and taking advantage of her. But she also knows that because of her social position, her outburst is out of line. She must learn to control her passions.

***Summary Part 3:***

The Reeds continue to shun [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) during her remaining time at Gateshead. Yet Jane makes friends with [Bessie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) and speaks to her with a new "frank and fearless" attitude. Bessie treats her to stories and [cakes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/symbols/food) and tells Jane she likes her better than the Reed kids.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Jane is beginning to mature because she sees through—and speaks out against—the hypocritical and cruel conventions that silence and repress her.