***Jane Eyre***

***Chapter 11***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Short Summary:***

After a sixteen hour journey, Jane arrives in Millcote. She finds no one to meet her and waits at an Inn until a person is located who drives her to Thornfield, where her governess position is. Mrs. Fairfax greets her as a guest, rather than employee. Jane settles into a comfortable room and learns of her charge, Adèle Varnes, a dependent of Edward Rochester, the owner of Thornfield. Mrs. Fairfax is the housekeeper. Jane meets Adèle, who only speaks French and who tells her of her mother's death. She shows off her ability to sing and dance.

Jane finds her pupil eager to please but not accustomed to regular study. Mrs. Fairfax gives Jane a tour of the house and Jane questions Mrs. Fairfax about their employer. Mrs. Fairfax's answers vaguely and Jane gives up trying to learn of Mr. Rochester. After touring the home, the two climb on the flat roof and view the entire grounds of Thornfield. As they return inside, Jane hears an eerie laugh coming from one of the rooms. Jane asks about the sound and Mrs. Fairfax explains the noise comes from Grace Poole, one of the servants who often becomes too noisy in her talking and laughing.

***Short Analysis:***

Note that the overall atmosphere of the house is cold and church-like with few of the rooms being used or inhabited. The oddity associated with the servant Grace is a theme which will recur. While the tone of the chapter is generally pleasant, the eerie nature of the attic, the hint of a ghost, and the odd laughter are signs there is a sinister secret at Thornfield. Also Jane is not given any substantial information about her current employer, a figure in whom she shows an interest.

***Summary in detail:***

Jane’s driver is late picking her up from the station at Millcote. When she finally arrives at Thornfield it is nighttime. Although she cannot distinguish much of the house’s facade from among the shadows, she finds the interior “cosy and agreeable.” Mrs. Fairfax, a prim, elderly woman, is waiting for Jane. It turns out that Mrs. Fairfax is not, as Jane had assumed from their correspondence, the owner of Thornfield, but rather the housekeeper. Thornfield’s owner, Mr. Rochester, travels regularly and leaves much of the manor’s management to Mrs. Fairfax. Jane learns that she will be tutoring Adèle, an eight-year-old French girl whose mother was a singer and dancer. Mrs. Fairfax also tells Jane about Rochester, saying that he is an eccentric man whose family has a history of extreme and violent behavior. Suddenly, Jane hears a peal of strange, eerie laughter echoing through the house, and Mrs. Fairfax summons someone named Grace, whom she orders to make less noise and to “remember directions.” When Grace leaves, Mrs. Fairfax explains that she is a rather unbalanced and unpredictable seamstress who works in the house.

* Jane stages the beginning of the next chapter almost like a play, describing the scene as she sits by the fire at an inn, waiting nervously to get to Thornfield and meet this mysterious Mrs. Fairfax and her daughter. (She’s assuming the little girl is Mrs. Fairfax’s daughter.)
* Notice that Jane (or perhaps Charlotte Brontë) addresses the reader directly here, something that happens only a few times in the novel, but always at key points (see, for example, the beginning of [**Volume 1, Chapter 10**](https://www.shmoop.com/jane-eyre/volume-1-chapter-10-full-text.html) and the beginning of [**Volume 3, Chapter 12**](https://www.shmoop.com/jane-eyre/volume-3-chapter-12-full-text.html)).
* A servant meets Jane and drives her in a coach to Thornfield. Jane guesses that his plain clothes mean that Mrs. Fairfax isn’t too wealthy. It’s amazing, in fact, how little Jane knows about the job that she’s heading into. We hope you would never take some random job based on one letter from someone you didn’t know and then travel across the country alone to live who-knows-where.
* Jane arrives at Thornfield and is brought in to see Mrs. Fairfax, who looks almost exactly as she had expected; she’s an old woman dressed in black clothes and a widow’s cap, which probably means she’s mourning her husband.
* Jane is surprised that Mrs. Fairfax welcomes her kindly, chatting with her and offering her tea; she’s never been treated so politely by anyone, especially an employer. She’s really relieved that this situation is better than her previous ones.
* Suddenly, a surprise: Jane finds out that her new student isn’t Mrs. Fairfax’s daughter; her name is Miss Varens, and Mrs. Fairfax doesn’t have any kids. Unfortunately, Jane is too shy to ask more about Miss Varens at this point.
* Mrs. Fairfax tells Jane more about the household; it’s been somewhat lonely for her, because she can’t socialize with the maid, Leah, or the other servants, who are a married couple. Jane, however, will be closer to Mrs. Fairfax’s "level," whatever that is.
* Jane goes to bed; her room is small but nice, and she feels very secure in it… although the long, dark corridors of the house are, she admits, a little bit creepy.
* Jane wakes up on her first day at Thornfield, soothed by the luxurious surroundings, and dresses in her plain Lowood-style clothes and heads downstairs. She meets Mrs. Fairfax again and learns that the owner of Thornfield is a Mr. Rochester—Mrs. Fairfax is just the housekeeper, although she is a distant cousin of Rochester’s. Adèle, Mrs. Fairfax explains, is Mr. Rochester’s ward.
* Jane meets Adèle, a French girl about seven or eight years old who only speaks a little English. It’s lucky that Jane learned French from a native speaker; she’s able to understand Adèle easily, even when Adèle talks really fast.
* Adèle tells Jane (and Jane relays to Mrs. Fairfax) how she came to England about six months ago. Long before that, the first thing Adèle remembers is living with her mother, who taught her to sing and dance and had a lot of, erm, let’s call them "gentlemen admirers." There were ladies who liked to hear Madame Varens sing, too, but there seem to have been quite a few gentlemen, as well, if you take our meaning.
* Adèle offers to sing for Jane, and sings a song from an opera that’s really far too mature for her. The contrast between Adèle’s childishness and the extremes of jealousy and passion in the song seems crass to Jane. Then Adèle recites a poem with similar strange adult motifs and techniques. Jane’s pretty weirded out by her and stops her before she can dance.
* Jane questions Adèle further about her history; Adèle explains that, after her mother died, Mr. Rochester offered to take her with him to live in England, and (as she explained earlier) she and her nurse Sophie came with him on a steamship across the (English) Channel. Unfortunately, Mr. Rochester took her to Thornfield, left her there, and went traveling, so Adèle doesn’t actually get to live with him.
* Jane teaches Adèle her first lesson that morning; Adèle is obedient, but not very studious. She’s never really been asked to apply herself. Jane decides to take it slow and lets her have the afternoon free.
* In the afternoon, Jane talks to Mrs. Fairfax about Thornfield and Mr. Rochester while Mrs. Fairfax does some light housework. Jane is amazed at how beautiful and fancy the house is.
* Jane practically cross-examines Mrs. Fairfax about the absent Mr. Rochester. She really wants to know what kind of a person he is, but it’s hard for the housekeeper to describe him. Most people like him, she tells Jane, but he is "rather peculiar," whatever that means (1.11.99).
* Jane follows Mrs. Fairfax through the house, admiring everything she sees, but feeling a little creeped out by all the empty rooms full of strange furnishings and decorations. She asks Mrs. Fairfax if there are any ghost stories about Thornfield, but there aren’t. However, Mrs. Fairfax does admit that the members of the Rochester family have been "rather a violent than a quiet race in their time" (1.11.109). So there may not be any ghosts… but there are some metaphorical skeletons in the closet.
* Jane and Mrs. Fairfax make their way to the attic and then to the roof, and Jane is able to look out across all of the land surrounding Thornfield. It's an incredible view.
* After a good, long look, they head back; Mrs. Fairfax is fastening the trap door and Jane is a bit further away in the attic when she hears an eerie, unearthly laugh. Mrs. Fairfax says that it must be one of the servants, perhaps a woman named Grace Poole who does the sewing.
* Jane’s convinced there is no Grace and that the laugh is a ghost, but at Mrs. Fairfax’s call Grace comes out of a room nearby. She’s a squat, heavyset, middle-aged redhead—not a ghost. Mrs. Fairfax tells her there should be less noise, sends her off, and changes the subject. Oh, that's not suspicious at all.

***Critical Analysis:***

Jane sits waiting at the George Inn at Millcote, because no one has arrived from Thornfield to pick her up. Just as Jane is becoming anxious, a servant arrives for her. Despite its imposing architecture, Thornfield is inviting. Mrs. Fairfax proves to be a neat, mild-looking elderly lady, who greets Jane kindly. Surprised, Jane finds herself to be the object of more attention than she has ever before received.

For the first time, Jane learns of the existence of Mr. Rochester, the owner of Thornfield. Jane also discovers that her new pupil, Adèle Varens, is Rochester's ward. Meeting eight-year-old Adèle, Jane is surprised to find she and her nurse, Sophie, are French and speak little English. Adèle's mother was a dancer and singer, and Adèle is also an adept performer, who sings an opera song for Jane. After her mother was taken to the "Holy Virgin," Adèle lived with a Madame Frédéric and her husband for a while, but the Frédérics were too poor to look after her, so Rochester kindly brought her to England.

Mrs. Fairfax gives Jane some information about Rochester and his family: He is somewhat "peculiar," but a good master, and in general, the Rochesters have been a "violent" rather than a "quiet" family. As she tours the house with Mrs. Fairfax, Jane suddenly hears a strange, disquieting laugh. Mrs. Fairfax tells her that the laugh belongs to Grace Poole, an eccentric servant.

A new stage of Jane's life has begun, and she feels it will be a good one. From the simplicity and peacefulness of Lowood, Jane has entered the stately, upper-class realm of Thornfield. The chapter begins with a direct address from the narrator, who tells readers that each new chapter in a novel is like a new scene in a play; when she draws the curtain, readers must imagine themselves in a new place. Thus, she draws the reader into her performance; not a passive reader, but one actively involved in imagining the people and places the novel describes. In addressing the reader directly, the narrator identifies her reader as companion and friend, someone who is expected to peer into Jane's life and vicariously share her experiences.

Class issues are addressed once again. As an upper-servant, Mrs. Fairfax feels a great difference between herself and the other servants in the house. For example, she likes Leah and John, "but then you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality; one must keep them at due distance for fear of losing one's authority." The strict hierarchical system in England requires that everyone maintain their proper place, yet, as the novel shows, the differences between classes are constantly blurred. As a governess, Jane will be in the same category as Mrs. Fairfax: neither a member of the family nor a member of the serving class.

The British tried to maintain hierarchies not only between different social classes, but also between themselves and foreigners. As a French citizen, Adèle is, therefore, an exotic. While Jane emphasizes that her own clothes are extremely simple, and her entire appearance "Quaker-like," Adèle's style is more extravagant. Her excess is apparent in the operatic song she chooses, the tale of a woman whose lover has forsaken her. The song's subject, which Jane feels is in very bad taste for a child, hints at Adèle's mother's sexuality, but also shows that Adèle herself will need to be tamed to meet proper British moral standards. This will be Jane's goal, along with geography, history, and English lessons.

***Critical Study:***

Jane starts the chapter by speaking to the reader and calling out the setting, first saying, "A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader," she asks the reader to picture her room at the inn. The passage is also briefly in the present tense. Then Jane describes the final segment of her journey to Thornfield.

Jane arrives at Thornfield on a cold October evening, and Mrs. Fairfax gives her a warm welcome. The next day Jane discovers that Mr. Rochester, who is away, is the owner of Thornfield, not Mrs. Fairfax. Jane's pupil is his ward, a young French girl named [Adèle Varens](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Jane-Eyre/character-analysis/#Ad%C3%A8le_Varens) (Adèle has a nurse, Sophie). Following lessons Mrs. Fairfax gives Jane a tour of the manor house, from the richly decorated first-floor rooms to the "dark and low," old-fashioned third-floor rooms. When Jane hears strange laughter coming from one of the third-floor rooms, Mrs. Fairfax explains that it must be Grace Poole, a servant.

Jane's arrival at Thornfield is quite a contrast to her first day at Lowood. Here the house and grounds are very pleasant, and everyone treats her kindly and with respect. Before Jane sleeps in her pleasant room, she prays her thanks for her new situation and also asks for "the power of meriting the kindness which seemed so frankly offered me before it was earned." Her gratitude and humility reinforce the idea that she has gained maturity. The third floor of the manor, however, introduces an element of gothic mystery to the setting. It feels dark and heavy, and Jane finds it difficult to connect the unearthly laughter to the person of Grace Poole. "I really did not expect any Grace to answer; for the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard," she comments. Like the red-room of Jane's childhood, the third floor of Thornfield seems to lend itself to superstitious fancies.

In talking with Jane on her arrival, Mrs. Fairfax comments that she looks forward to having someone to talk to. Referring to servants of the house, she says, "Leah is a nice girl to be sure, and John and his wife are very decent people; but then you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality: one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one's authority." Even within the serving class, there are ranks and levels, and all must be aware of the social differences between a housekeeper and kitchen help.

Jane's direct address to the reader in this chapter is echoed in the final chapter of the book, which begins with the famous "Reader, I married him." Jane rarely engages in the self-conscious lifting of the authorial curtain; her doing so here underscores the significance of this chapter, a passage to a new phase of Jane's life.

***Significance:***

As Jane arrives in Millcote, she is overcome with anxiety; there is no one at the station to meet her, and she fears that this [Mrs. Fairfax](https://www.gradesaver.com/jane-eyre/study-guide/character-list#mrs-fairfax) will prove to be a second [Mrs. Reed](https://www.gradesaver.com/jane-eyre/study-guide/character-list#mrs-reed). By the time the servant arrives to take her to Thornfield, night has fallen, and Jane can see nothing of the exterior of the house or its grounds. Jane’s feels are allayed, however, when she is shown into a cozy room where the elderly Mrs. Fairfax is waiting for her. At first, Jane assumes that Mrs. Fairfax is the owner of the manor, but she soon learns that Mrs. Fairfax is only the housekeeper. Because Mr. Rochester, the manor’s owner, is a “peculiar” man who frequently travels on business, Mrs. Fairfax manages the household and estate and thus, responded to Jane’s advertisement in the newspaper herself. Mr. Rochester’s ward, [Adèle Varens](https://www.gradesaver.com/jane-eyre/study-guide/character-list#ad%C3%A8le-varens), will be Jane’s sole pupil at Thornfield. After the initial introduction, Mrs. Fairfax shows Jane to her room, and Jane sleeps peacefully, content to have embarked on a new adventure. The next day, Jane explores the grounds of Thornfield and meets the young Adèle, a garrulous but sweet French girl who chatters in a mixture of French and English. While exploring the house with Mrs. Fairfax, Jane hears a loud, odd laugh. Mrs. Fairfax brushes off the laugh and explains that it was probably one of the servants. She then chastises [Grace Poole](https://www.gradesaver.com/jane-eyre/study-guide/character-list#grace-poole), a seamstress employed in the house, for "'Too much noise,'" and bids her to "'Remember directions!'"

Analysis:

The introductory chapter to Thornfield plants a few narrative seeds. First, there is an obvious correspondence between Jane and Adèle, both orphans, although Adèle’s living conditions are far better. Rochester's background is mysterious, made more so by Adèle’s belief that he "'has not kept his word'" to her by constantly abandoning her on his business trips and Mrs. Fairfax's opaque label that he is "'peculiar.'" The ghostly laugh at the end of the chapter, emanating near the attic of the manor, heightens the Gothic suspense of the novel, as do Mrs. Fairfax's curious commands to Grace Poole. Still, despite some strange aspects of Thornfield Manor, Jane feels a certain calm contentment. Not only is she no longer an inferior relative in Gateshead, she is also not a poor student at Lowood. Thornfield provides Jane with the first real opportunity to start her life anew, exploring her independence, maturity, and important position at Thornfield Manor.

***Deep Study:***

## A Bit of a Rough Start

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| Horse and Carriage |

After 16 hours of travel by coach, Jane arrives in Millcote expecting to find someone sent from Thornfield Hall to escort her the rest of the way to her destination. Instead, she finds no one. As the chapter opens, she sits alone in a room at the George Inn, worrying and wondering what she should do next. Fortunately, she is not left to fret for long.

An unassuming servant eventually arrives to carry Jane the rest of the way to Thornfield in a very plain carriage. Jane is relieved of her first set of worries but soon settles into another. She wonders what her employer will be like, if she will be able to execute her duties satisfactorily, what her pupil will be like, etc. Her mind goes round and round as any of ours would upon embarking on a new adventure.

## Thornfield

Around midnight, Jane finally arrives at Thornfield Hall and is grateful for a warm reception. She is met by a picturesque scene of a tidy little old lady dressed in black knitting by a fire with a large cat resting at her feet. Jane calls it a 'beau-ideal of domestic comfort.' The woman, we learn, is Mrs. Fairfax. After corresponding with Mrs. Fairfax regarding the position of governess, Jane assumes her to be the owner of Thornfield and the guardian of the young girl she is to teach.

Jane is duly surprised at the very cordial welcome Mrs. Fairfax offers her. She unties Jane's bonnet for her and helps her out of her traveling cloak. Jane watches with awe and a little confusion as Mrs. Fairfax cleans off the table 'with her own hands' and proceeds to personally hand Jane her refreshments. Despite her perplexity at being treated as an equal by the head of the household, Jane welcomes and enjoys her reception at Thornfield. Mrs. Fairfax sees that Jane is weary and soon shows her to her room. Jane is delighted with her bedchamber. Her gratefulness inspires her to offer a prayer of thanks before retiring to bed.

## Mr. Rochester and His Ward

After an excellent night of sleep, Jane carefully dresses herself for the day and descends the stairs. In the course of their morning conversation, Mrs. Fairfax mentions a Mr. Rochester for the first time. Jane is totally confused: 'Mr. Rochester!...Who is he?' Mrs. Fairfax explains that he is the owner of Thornfield Hall. When Jane reveals how she took Mrs. Fairfax to be the owner, this good lady replies, 'me? Bless you, child; what an idea!...I am only the housekeeper--the manager.' Suddenly, things make a lot more sense to Jane. She is actually delighted by this revelation, thinking, 'The equality between her and me was real; not the mere result of condescension on her part.'

Once Jane has a better idea of who is who at Thornfield, she meets her pupil, Adele Varens. The child is Mr. Rochester's ward, not Mrs. Fairfax's as Jane originally presumed. Adele's mother died, and Mr. Rochester personally escorted her from France to England to reside at Thornfield Hall.

Adele, who speaks French, begs to show off her skills in singing and recitation to her new governess. Jane consents, and the child sits on her knee, proceeding to sing and recite poetry. Adele's voice is sweet, and her delivery is polished, but the subject matter of the pieces she chooses is not exactly appropriate for children. This inspires Jane to ask a few more questions about Adele's family and her upbringing. It seems there may be more to uncover there--possibly of a questionable nature--but we are not provided with much information just yet.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) arrives at Thornfield Hall at night, and therefore can't make out much more than the house's exterior splendor in the dark. She meets the kind old [Mrs. Fairfax](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), who leads her through the cavernous house to a cozy and snug bedroom. To Jane's surprise, Mrs. Fairfax is not the owner of Thornfield but the head housekeeper. She learns from Mrs. Fairfax that [Mr. Rochester](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/edward-fairfax-rochester) owns the place but only shows up intermittently. Mrs. Fairfax describes Rochester as peculiar, well-traveled, and a good master.

***Analysis Part 1:***

With its dark splendor, mysterious and absent master, and suggestive name, Thornfield Hall has a Gothic feel to it. Jane, like Mrs. Fairfax, is a servant and dependent to the "master" of the house. These servants and dependents, it seems, will be her new "family."

***Summary Part 2:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) meets her new pupil, the hyperactive French girl [Adèle Varens](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), whose mother was a French singer and dancer and who is [Rochester](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/edward-fairfax-rochester)'s ward. Later, [Mrs. Fairfax](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) leads [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) on a tour of the luxuriously furnished house. The third floor is packed with old furniture, odds and ends of the past. Jane considers it strange enough for a ghost to live in.

***Analysis Part 2:***

How and why Rochester has a ward deepens the mystery surrounding him. Did he have an affair, breaking social and religious ethics? The strange third floor adds Gothic flavor to Thornfield Hall.

***Summary Part 3:***

After they leave the third floor, strange laughter echoes above them, spooking [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre). [Mrs. Fairfax](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) blames the noise on [Grace Poole](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters), a servant and seamstress whom Mrs. Fairfax scolds and reminds to "remember directions."

***Analysis Part 3:***

Thornfield's supernatural qualities grow even more pronounced.