***Jane Eyre***

***Vol-2 Chapter 5***

***Chapter 20***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* Jane is woken up by bright moonlight, and then startled by a strange shriek from the third floor. Then she hears thumping and banging upstairs, as though people are fighting, and calls for help. Someone is calling for Mr. Rochester.
* Everyone in the house is woken up by all the noise. The guests stumble around in the corridor in their robes, but nobody seems to know what’s going on.
* Rochester tells them that a servant had a nightmare and assigns the gentlemen to make the ladies go back to bed.
* Jane goes back to her room and gets dressed, then sits by the window waiting. She knows something else is going to happen.
* After about an hour, everyone else has fallen asleep again. Jane keeps waiting, and eventually Mr. Rochester knocks on her door and asks her to come with him.
* When they get to the third floor, Rochester has an idea and sends Jane back to get a sponge and some salts. (These are smelling salts, which have a strong, disgusting smell, and are used to wake up people who have fainted or passed out.)
* Jane comes back, and Rochester unlocks the door to the third floor—the same door Jane has seen Grace Poole go through. They enter, and Jane can hear Grace’s weird laugh. Mr. Rochester goes ahead of her into the next room and gives instructions.
* Rochester comes back, and leads Jane into another part of the first room, where Mr. Mason is sitting in a chair. He’s pale and passed out, and one of his arms is soaked in his own blood.
* While Jane holds the candle, Rochester wakes Mason with the smelling salts. Rochester also checks on Mason’s wound; there’s a bandage around Mason’s arm and shoulder, but the bleeding hasn’t stopped.
* Rochester tells Jane to stay with Mason and to make sure he stays awake, but not to talk to him at all for any reason. He gives her the sponge, which is bloody now, so that she can tend to the wound a little, too.
* Then Mr. Rochester leaves, locking them in the room. Jane’s afraid to be locked in with a dying man when his murderess is just in the next room, but she does what she has to do.
* For a long time, maybe two hours, Jane stays there, wiping blood and gore off Mason’s chest, trying to keep him conscious, and feeling utterly afraid of the woman in the next room.
* Every so often she hears weird, snarling noises, as though it were a dog and not a woman nearby. She wonders what horrible thing lives at Thornfield that Mr. Rochester can’t seem to fight or destroy.
* Finally, Mr. Rochester comes back with a doctor, Mr. Carter. He gives the doctor half an hour to get Mason bandaged correctly before they take Mason away.
* While the doctor works, Mason and Rochester talk about what happened, but they don’t say enough to really explain.
* The doctor notices that Mason wasn’t stabbed—he was bitten.
* Rochester says that he warned Mason, and Mason should have listened. Mason says he thought he could have done something to make things better. Jane wants to know what the heck is going on, and so do we.
* Mason mentions that "she" sucked the blood from the wound after biting him—is Grace Poole a vampire?
* Rochester is worried about getting Mason out of the house before dawn. He sends Jane to fetch various pieces of clothing to get Mason and the doctor ready.
* Rochester gives Mason a few drops of a red cordial that he got in Rome; it seems to help him revive a little, and he’s able to walk downstairs with the doctor holding him up.
* Together, Rochester, and the doctor help Mason get downstairs and into a carriage, while Jane acts as lookout.
* Just before Mason is driven away, he asks Rochester to take care of "her" as gently as possible.
* Rochester and Jane are left alone together outside the house, and he asks her to walk with him in the woods as the sun is rising before they go back to Thornfield Hall. They stroll, and he picks a rose for her.
* Rochester asks Jane about the last few hours, and seems worried that she felt so afraid. He tells Jane that he will be in danger until Mason leaves England.
* Jane’s confused—Mason seems harmless. Rochester explains that Mason could destroy him by accidentally saying the wrong thing, and that he can’t let Mason know how much damage he could cause.
* Rochester muses on Jane’s faithfulness; he can tell that Jane enjoys helping him, but also that she would never follow his orders if she thought they were morally wrong.
* Jane and Rochester sit together on a bench; this is the first time she has taken a place at his side. Rochester asks her to imagine something: she is a spoiled young man in a foreign country, and there she accidentally makes a terrible mistake with long-lasting consequences. Hmm, who do you think he’s really talking about?
* Anyway, this *completely hypothetical* young man tries to get past these consequences, and travels all around the world amusing himself with superficial pleasures. After twenty years, he meets a new friend and feels completely regenerated and changed. Hmm, who might this "friend" be? Rochester’s pretty obvious about things.
* So, anyway, the "hypothetical" man now wants to spend the rest of his life with his "friend," but he needs to break some kind of rule to do so. Rochester’s question to Jane is: is it okay if he does?
* Jane *reeeeeally* wants to say yes, but she can tell Rochester’s trying to get away with something that isn’t right, even though she’s not 100% sure what the problem is.
* She tells him that nobody should let their redemption depend on their relationship with someone else. To put it another way, this hypothetical guy has to sort out his problem first, and then he can be with his, erm, "friend."
* After hearing her response, Rochester gets rude and sarcastic, starts telling Jane how great Blanche Ingram is, and sends her back to the house through the woods while he goes another way to talk to Dent and Lynn, who have come out to the stables.

***Synopsis:***

The same night, Jane is startled by a sudden cry for help. She hurries into the hallway, where Rochester assures everyone that a servant has merely had a nightmare. After everyone returns to bed, Rochester knocks on Jane’s door. He tells her that he can use her help and asks whether she is afraid of blood. He leads her to the third story of the house and shows her Mr. Mason, who has been stabbed in the arm. Rochester asks Jane to stanch the wound and then leaves, ordering Mason and Jane not to speak to one another. In the silence, Jane gazes at the image of the apostles and Christ’s crucifixion that is painted on the cabinet across from her. Rochester returns with a surgeon, and as the men tend to Mason’s wounds, Rochester sends Jane to find a potion downstairs. He gives some of it to Mason, saying that it will give him heart for an hour. Once Mason is gone, Jane and Rochester stroll in the orchard, and Rochester tells Jane a hypothetical story about a young man who commits a “capital error” in a foreign country and proceeds to lead a life of dissipation in an effort to “obtain relief.” The young man then hopes to redeem himself and live morally with a wife, but convention prevents him from doing so. He asks whether the young man would be justified in “overleaping an obstacle of custom.” Jane’s reply is that such a man should look to God for his redemption, not to another person. Rochester—who obviously has been describing his own situation—asks Jane to reassure him that marrying Blanche would bring him salvation. He then hurries away before she has a chance to answer.

***Analysis:***

During the night, Jane hears a shrill cry from the third story, then someone shouting for Mr. Rochester's help. Jane hears the sounds of someone opening a door and running upstairs. Jane leaves her room, as has everyone else. Mr. Rochester descends from the third story and reassures everyone that a servant has merely had a nightmare. Everyone retires to bed, but Jane goes back and dresses. She thinks she is the only one who heard the words after the scream and is certain that Mr. Rochester's story is false.

After Jane waits for an hour in her room for another sound, Mr. Rochester knocks on her door and asks her to come quietly with him upstairs. He has her bring a sponge and some smelling salts, and then shows her the tapestry-room Mrs. Fairfax had once shown her. He opens a door hidden behind the tapestry, from which again emanates the curious laughter Jane sometimes hears, speaks with whomever is inside, and then emerges and closes the door. Rochester then shows Jane what he has brought her up for: a dazed Mason lies on a chair in the tapestry-room, soaked in blood. Mr. Rochester promises him that Jane will care for him while he fetches the surgeon. He then orders Jane to tend to Mason without any conversation between the two.

Jane is frightened by the baffling circumstances, especially by the thought of Grace in the next room. After two hours, Mr. Rochester returns with a surgeon, Carter, and begins a confusing conversation with Mason. Mason says that "she" bit him when "Rochester got the knife from her," while Mr. Rochester blames Mason for going to see "her" without him; had he waited until tomorrow, Mr. Rochester would have accompanied him. After Carter completes his work, Jane and Mr. Rochester help Mason into a carriage waiting outside. Mr. Rochester instructs Carter to take him home; he will visit in a day or two.

After Mason and Carter leave, Mr. Rochester takes Jane on a walk around the garden. He assures her that neither he nor she is in any danger; the only thing that he has to fear is Mason's saying a certain thing. He asks her to consider the following "hypothetical" situation: a young man made an error - not a crime or an illegal act - that has haunted him forever. No measures he took to deal with it alleviated his misery. He traveled copiously, hoping that would help him, but not until he returned home and met someone new did he feel comforted. He wants to marry this woman, but feels that convention is against him. Is this man, who seeks repentance and salvation in this woman, justified in overturning custom, he asks Jane? Mr. Rochester then admits he is the man and says the woman is - after a long pause - Miss Ingram.

At this point in the novel, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Mr. Rochester to maintain the secret of the third-story attic. Mr. Rochester needs Jane’s help after the sudden attack on Mason and, though he is able to take her into his confidence to care for Mason, Mr. Rochester still cannot reveal the truth of what has happened. It is only a matter of time before the truth comes out, but Mr. Rochester exhibits a certain desperation to hide his mystery from Jane for as long as possible.

Significantly, the source of the attack on Mason is female. Although Jane does not know who the woman is (other than possibly Grace Poole), she is both terrified and intrigued by the idea of a female that is uncontrollable by normal social conventions. With her bestial and even carnivorous nature, the mysterious woman in the room seems to have thrown off all of the oppressive ties of the male dominated society.

While Bronte continues to complicate the mystery of Mr. Rochester’s past, she also clarifies some of his feelings toward Jane. During his hypothetical story, he is obviously discussing Jane before he changes his position and reveals that Miss Ingram is the object of his desire. Jane describes Mr. Rochester's face as "losing all its softness and gravity, and becoming harsh and sarcastic" when he names Miss Ingram. There is little doubt now that Rochester prefers Jane to Miss Ingram, but there is still an obstacle to the romantic plot. Whoever is in the third-story room - and how it relates to the "error" Rochester committed in his youth - is preventing Rochester's marrying Jane, much more so than the presence of Miss Ingram.

***Critical Analysis***:

Jane awakes and hears a ghastly cry for help from the third floor. Mr. Rochester tells the guests that a servant was having a nightmare, which Jane disbelieves. Mr. Rochester asks Jane to bring a sponge and volatile salts. Before leading her into a room, he asks if she is sickened by the sight of blood. They enter a third floor room and there is a creature making a snarling, dog-like sound which ends in what Jane recognizes as Grace's laughter. Mr. Mason is there, soaked in blood. Rochester is going for a doctor and asks Jane to sit with Mason and not to talk. Jane wonders how Mason fits into the puzzle. The doctor attends to Mason while Rochester tells Mason he can leave and forget this time. Rochester and Jane walk in the garden the next morning, but she learns nothing more except that Mason knows a secret that could destroy Rochester's happiness. He also asks Jane's opinion of Blanche.

The mystery that defines this Gothic novel deepens as the sleeping guests at Thornfield are awakened by screams and sounds of a struggle. Mr. Rochester calms and sends the guests back to their rooms. Jane, however, he calls into his confidence and asks to help in the emergency. Mr. Mason, it seems, has somehow been bitten and cut by a woman on the third floor. The mystery of the third floor deepens to include Mr. Mason.

Also introduced here is the theme of love, as Mr. Mason breaks into tears as he leaves, asking that the woman who injured him to be treated kindly—it is obvious the person who hurt him is someone he loves. Also, Mr. Rochester again treats Jane in a way that could give mixed messages. He praises her for her help and speaks to her tenderly and kindly. The next moment, however, he changes the topic to speak of his love for Blanche.

***Critical Study:***

Later that evening, Jane lies in bed, gazing at the moonlight coming in her window. Suddenly, she hears a heart-stopping cry for help. Jane hurriedly puts on some clothes, horror shaking her body. All members of the party have gathered in the hallway, wondering if the house is on fire or if robbers have broken in. Rochester assures them that the noise was simply a servant having a bad dream and sends them back to their beds. Jane knows this is a lie, because she heard the strange cry, a struggle, and then a call for help. Before too long, Rochester knocks on her door, asking if she can help him, as long as she isn't afraid of blood. Together they climb to the mysterious third story of the house.

There they discover Richard Mason with a bloody arm. Rochester asks Jane to sop up the blood while he runs for the surgeon, but insists that Mason and Jane not speak with each other; if they do, Rochester will "not answer for the consequences." Jane stares at a cabinet in the room, which bears a grim design: the twelve Christian apostles with a dying Jesus hanging from a cross above them. As dawn approaches, Rochester finally returns with the surgeon. While he dresses Mason's wounds, the men speak obscurely of the woman who bit and stabbed Mason. Rochester has Jane run downstairs to find a special cordial he bought from an Italian charlatan. He measures twelve drops of the liquid into a glass, and has Mason drink the mixture, which Rochester claims will give him the "heart" he lacks for an hour or so.

After Mason has left, Jane and Rochester walk through the gardens. Rochester tells Jane the hypothetical story of a wild boy indulged from children, who commits a "capital error" while in a remote foreign country. He lives in debauchery for a while, then seeks to resume a happy, pure life with a kind stranger, but a "mere conventional impediment stands in his way." What would Jane do in such a situation, Rochester asks? Jane's answer is that a sinner's reformation should never depend on another person; instead, he should look to God for solace. Rochester then asks Jane, without parable, if marrying Blanche would bring him regeneration? He describes Blanche as a "strapper," big and buxom, like the women of Carthage, then rushes off to the stables to speak with Dent and Lynn.

The secret residing on the third floor of Rochester's house is becoming ever more difficult for Rochester to disguise. Rochester's feelings are apparent through his description of his house; while for Jane it is a "splendid mansion," for Rochester it is a "mere dungeon," a Bridewell. While she sees only the glamour of the place, he sees the gilding as slime, the silk draperies as cobwebs, the marble as "sordid slate." Jane is unable to see below the surface to the secret residing within Rochester's domestic space. Under a veneer of domestic tranquility lies a monstrous secret — in the form of the strange woman who lives on the third floor. As Jane notes, this crime or mystery is one that can be neither "expelled nor subdued by the owner," emphasizing Rochester's inability to control this woman. Descriptions of her — she "worried me like a tigress" and "she sucked the blood: she said she'd drain my heart" — suggest her ferocious power and vampiric tendencies. Bertha seems to represent a silent rebellion brewing in women's minds, one Jane will discuss later in the novel.

Jane Eyre combines the techniques of several literary genre, including the bildungsroman (a novel that shows the psychological or moral development of the main character), the romance, and the gothic novel. Elements of gothic predominate in this chapter. Generally, gothic uses remote, gloomy settings, and a sinister, eerie atmosphere to create a feeling of horror and mystery. Jane's language in this chapter — filled with references to the supernatural, mystery, crime, secrets, and excessive emotions — fits this rubric. For example, Jane's description of her experience on the mysterious, remote third story of the house contributes to the reader's sense of horror and impending mystery: She tells of the "mystic cells," of "a pale and bloody spectacle," of a mystery that breaks out "now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night," creating a "web of horror." Her portrait of the grim cabinet depicting the twelve apostles, on which she imagines Judas "gathering life and threatening a revelation of Satan himself," suggests a devilish, supernatural evil. Similarly, Rochester's ability to conjure up a cordial to give Richard almost supernatural strength, hints at his mysterious, possibly unnatural powers.

***Significance:***

As the light of the full moon shines into Jane's room in the middle of the night, awakening her, a frightening shriek rings out from the third floor. Jane hears a struggle in the room above hers and a call for help, followed by a call for Rochester. Rochester calms his frightened guests by telling them that "a servant has had a nightmare." In fact it is another incident that may be related to Grace Poole. Rochester asks Jane to come to the third floor and stay with Mason, who is bleeding, while Rochester fetches a surgeon. Before he goes Jane hears snarling behind a hidden door that she assumes is Grace Poole. Jane tends Mason's knife and bite wounds. After Rochester returns with the surgeon and Mason is patched up, Rochester arranges for him to leave with the surgeon before the guests awaken.

Rochester walks in the garden with Jane and assures her that the danger is past and she doesn't need to be afraid of Grace Poole. He tells Jane a story about a young man who makes a serious mistake in a foreign land that now casts a shadow on his life. After years of trying to find happiness in the pursuit of pleasure, the man goes home. There he meets someone who can help him redeem himself and lead a moral life. Rochester asks Jane if she thinks the man is justified in ignoring a moral "obstacle of custom" and convention in order to be with this person, who can reform him. Jane responds that true reformation should depend on a higher power, not on a mortal person. Then Rochester admits that he himself is in this situation and he believes he has found "the instrument" of his redemption. He asks Jane if she doesn't think Miss Ingram, if he marries her, "would regenerate [him] with a vengeance." Before they return to the house, he asks Jane to sit watch with him the night before his marriage.

There are several unresolved mysteries in this chapter. What connection does Mason have to whoever attacked him in the third-floor room? Is Grace Poole the attacker? Might it be someone else? When Rochester instructs Mason to keep quiet, he refers to an unnamed woman. Who is she? Why is Rochester so desperately determined to keep the occupant of that room out of sight? Why does Rochester insist that Jane and Mason not talk to one another while he gets the surgeon? What mistake did Rochester make in a foreign land? What is the obstacle that is preventing him from moving forward with his life?

Rochester realizes, from Jane's response to his hypothetical story, that the importance with which she regards a higher power will not allow her to ignore the obstacle that is blocking his hope of redemption and regeneration. He stops himself from naming Jane as the person who can help him regenerate his life and revives the idea that he will marry Blanche Ingram.

***Notes:***

This lesson provides an overview of Chapter 20 of ''Jane Eyre.'' In this chapter, Jane awakes in the dead of night to find another horror perpetrated by the mysterious resident of the third floor.

'Good God! What a Cry!'

Jane is awoken at some late hour because she has forgotten to close her window curtain and the bright moon shines in upon her. She reaches out to close the curtain when, suddenly, 'Good God! What a cry!' The peace of the night is 'rent in twain' by 'a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound.' Jane can tell that the sound comes from the third floor. A further struggle seems to be occurring directly over her bedchamber, and another voice calls out 'Help!' and 'Will no one come?' Finally, Jane hears someone run up the stairs and put an end to the struggle above.

The commotion wakes all of the guests, who fill the dark hallway and mill about in fear and confusion. Mr. Rochester is seen coming down from the floor above and tries to cajole his guests out of their panic. The ladies cling to him, even the older, larger ones who 'were bearing down on him like ships in full sail.' The men stand by and ask questions. 'Ladies, keep off; or I shall wax dangerous,' Mr. Rochester demands, and he tells them 'a servant has had the nightmare; that is all.' With this, Mr. Rochester succeeds in packing the frenzied herd off to bed.

Jane, however, who has slipped into the hallway unobserved, knows Mr. Rochester's explanation is just 'an invention framed to pacify his guests.' She doubtless remembers the episode of the fire and the eerie laugh, which we read about in Chapter 15 of this novel. Accordingly, instead of going back to bed, she dresses herself and prepares for further action.

The Third Floor Mystery

After some time, Jane hears a slight tap on her door and Mr. Rochester is there asking her to come with him. He demands she walk quietly and asks her to fetch a sponge and some smelling salts. He then directs her toward the third floor. Before entering, he turns to her and asks, 'You don't turn sick at the sight of blood?' This can't be a good sign...

Upon entering the third floor, Jane sees the tapestry has been pulled back to reveal a long hidden door, which now stands open. Issuing from that open door, Jane hears 'a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarreling,' which dissolves into the eerie laugh Jane has heard before and which she believes to come from the servant, Grace Poole. For this reason, Jane believes Grace to be the one at fault here.

Once the door is shut and locked on these inhuman sounds, Mr. Rochester leads Jane to Mr. Mason, who lies unconscious with half his body soaked in blood. We later learn that Mr. Mason's injuries were inflicted by a knife--and human teeth! 'She bit me,' Mason tells the doctor, 'she sucked the blood: she said she'd drain my heart.' This was no ordinary violence! Mr. Rochester does not seem surprised. 'I warned you, ' Rochester tells Mason, 'I said--be on your guard when you go near her.' Whatever the source of this horrific event, it is not new to Mr. Rochester or to Thornfield. What is lurking in that third floor room? Could it really be Grace Poole who has inflicted these injuries on Mr. Mason and tried before to kill Mr. Rochester by fire?

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

***Summary Part 1:***

That night, a scream rips through the midnight silence at Thornfield. All the guests run into the hallway, but Rochester calms everyone by saying that the noise came from a servant having a nightmare.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Secrets cannot be contained forever. The secrets of Rochester's past break out violently after being repressed for so long.

***Summary Part 2:***

Once everyone has returned to bed, [Rochester](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/edward-fairfax-rochester) taps on [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre)'s bedroom door and asks for her help. They go up to [Grace Poole](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters)'s third floor room, where [Mr. Mason](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) lies bleeding from knife and bite wounds in his arm. They bandage him up and Rochester leaves to fetch a doctor, demanding that Jane and Mr. Mason not speak to each other while he's gone.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Jane is earning Rochester's confidence. But, by demanding silence, Rochester still tries to silence his past secrets. His late-night visit to Jane's bedroom would have been considered risqué in Brontë's time.

***Summary Part 3:***

Jane is left alone in the dark with Mason. From [Grace Poole](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters)'s locked room down the hall emerge "canine" snarling sounds and human groans. Before dawn, [Rochester](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/edward-fairfax-rochester) returns with the surgeon. They sew up [Mason](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) and send him away before any of the guests wake.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Jane is kept in the dark about Rochester's secret, which seems more grave than ever. Since Mason could reveal Rochester's secrets, he must be silenced and removed from Thornfield.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Rochester](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/edward-fairfax-rochester) takes [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) for a walk in the garden. He tells her about an obviously autobiographical story of a young man who got himself into serious trouble as a youth and then, to escape from that error, went on to lead a life of luxury and sinful excess. He asks, What if that man now wants to find redemption by living a good and moral life with a wife but is blocked from marrying her by the rules of society? Should he ignore those rules? Jane responds that the person should look not to any other person for redemption, but to God. Rochester then says that he will marry [Blanche](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters) for his "regeneration," and changes the subject.

***Analysis Part 5:***

To gain redemption ("regeneration") from his secret sin, Rochester wants to ignore particular rules of society. He wants to take a short cut to redemption by marrying Blanche and living virtuously from here on out, without ever revealing his secret past. Jane's answer makes it clear that such shortcuts never work and are themselves immoral, but Rochester is not yet ready to hear it.