***Jane Eyre***

***Vol-2 Chapter 8***

***Chapter 23***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* Summer at Thornfield is incredibly beautiful this year, with bright sunlight and incredible colors in the wood and fields. Adèle gathers wild strawberries, Jane strolls in the garden, and everything seems perfect… a little too perfect.
* While strolling in the woods, Jane smells Rochester’s cigar. She tries to sneak away from him, but he notices her at the moment that their shadows cross. Creepy.
* Rochester asks Jane to walk with him, and she can’t think up an excuse not to. As they walk, he asks if she’s become attached to Thornfield and its residents, and she admits that she has. He tells her that she’ll have to leave soon and that he’s marrying Blanche Ingram. He reminds Jane that it was her idea that, if he married Blanche, Adèle should go to school and Jane should get a new job.
* However, Mr. Rochester tells Jane not to advertise for a new position as a governess; he says he’ll find a position for her himself. He has one in mind, he says, in Ireland.
* Jane is so upset at the idea of being in Ireland, far away from Thornfield and Mr. Rochester, that she starts crying. Rochester soothes her a little and says that, since they’ve been such good friends, they should spend a little time together before she has to leave in a few weeks.
* Jane and Rochester sit on the bench under the chestnut tree. Rochester describes his attachment to Jane; he feels, he says, as if there is a cord tied to each of their hearts that connects them, and he’s worried that if she goes too far away it will snap. Jane can’t say very much to this, because she’s sobbing.
* Notice that there’s a nightingale singing in the background; nightingales are usually Significant with a capital S. (See our breakdown of Keats' [**"Ode to a Nightingale."**](https://www.shmoop.com/ode-nightingale/))
* Jane finally stops crying long enough to explain what she loves about Thornfield—mostly, her intellectual and spiritual connection with Mr. Rochester. Needing to leave him, she says, feels like death.
* The conversation gets confused; Rochester asks Jane why she has to leave, and she says that it’s because of his bride, Blanche Ingram. Rochester says he doesn’t have a bride; Jane says he will. Rochester says, yes, he will, and Jane is going to stay.
* Jane can’t take this; she’s hurt and angry, and she lectures Rochester on how cruel it would be to make her stay in the house and watch his marriage to someone else. Even though he’s a gentleman of property and she’s a governess, she still feels like he does—that they’re equal in that way.
* Rochester says they are indeed equal—and kisses her. Whoa!
* Jane struggles and insists that she’s going to leave him and go to Ireland.
* Rochester asks her to marry him.
* Jane thinks he’s making fun of her.
* Rochester asks her to sit back down. They listen to that Significant nightingale and try to calm down.
* After a bit of wrangling, Rochester convinces Jane that she’s the only woman he wants to marry, and that he never cared about Blanche Ingram. Jane scrutinizes his face before deciding she believes him—remember how important faces were in [**Volume 1, Chapter 14**](https://www.shmoop.com/jane-eyre/volume-1-chapter-14-summary.html) and [**Volume 2, Chapter 4**](https://www.shmoop.com/jane-eyre/volume-2-chapter-4-summary.html)? Yep, they’re still important here.
* Jane and Rochester embrace… and Rochester asks God to pardon him. For what, we wonder?
* They sit on the bench together for a long time, but the night is dark and a thunderstorm begins. They hurry back into the house before they get too wet in the rain; once they’re inside, Rochester kisses Jane good night… a few times. They don’t notice at first that Mrs. Fairfax is watching them.
* Everyone goes to bed, separately, of course. Mr. Rochester knocks on Jane’s bedroom door several times in the night to ask if she’s okay—the storm is raging crazily outside. Jane is fine, but, bad omen alert, the chestnut tree gets splintered in half by lightning.

***Synopsis:***

After a blissful two weeks, Jane encounters Rochester in the gardens. He invites her to walk with him, and Jane, caught off guard, accepts. Rochester confides that he has finally decided to marry Blanche Ingram and tells Jane that he knows of an available governess position in Ireland that she could take. Jane expresses her distress at the great distance that separates Ireland from Thornfield. The two seat themselves on a bench at the foot of the chestnut tree, and Rochester says: “we will sit there in peace to-night, though we should never more be destined to sit there together.” He tells Jane that he feels as though they are connected by a “cord of communion.” Jane sobs—“for I could repress what I endured no longer,” she tells us, “I was obliged to yield.” Jane confesses her love for Rochester, and to her surprise, he asks her to be his wife. She suspects that he is teasing her, but he convinces her otherwise by admitting that he only brought up marrying Blanche in order to arouse Jane’s jealousy. Convinced and elated, Jane accepts his proposal. A storm breaks, and the newly engaged couple hurries indoors through the rain. Rochester helps Jane out of her wet coat, and he seizes the opportunity to kiss her. Jane looks up to see Mrs. Fairfax watching, astonished. That night, a bolt of lightning splits the same chestnut tree under which Rochester and Jane had been sitting that evening.

***Analysis:***

It is a beautiful midsummer's night. As the sun sets, Jane walks around the gardens of Thornfield, enjoying the solemn purple that colors the sky. Smelling Rochester's cigar from a window, Jane moves into the more secluded space of the orchard. But Rochester is now in the garden. Jane tries to escape unseen, but he speaks to her, asking her to look at an interesting moth. Although uncomfortable being alone with Rochester at night, Jane is unable to find a reasonable excuse for leaving him.

During their ensuing conversation, Rochester tells Jane she'll soon need to leave Thornfield forever because he's finally marrying Miss Ingram, whom he humorously calls "an extensive armful." Rochester teasingly tells her of a governess position, undertaking the education of the five daughters of Mrs. Dionysius O'Gall of Bitternutt Lodge in Ireland. Together they sit on a bench under a chestnut-tree to discuss Jane's trip. Now Rochester admits his strong feelings for Jane, and she reveals her love for him. He proposes marriage. At first Jane doesn't believe he's serious, but she reads the truth in his face and accepts his proposal. He savagely declares that God has sanctioned their union, so he doesn't care what society thinks of the relationship.

A flash of lightning sends them rushing home through the rain. They are soaked, and when Rochester helps her out of her coat, he kisses her repeatedly. Jane looks up to see Mrs. Fairfax watching, pale and amazed. During the night, lightning splits the great chestnut tree in two.

Throughout this chapter, nature symbolically mimics Jane's feelings. Blissfully spending time with Rochester, Jane notices that "a band of Italian days had come from the South, like a flock of glorious passenger birds, and lighted to rest them on the cliffs of Albion." Everything is in its "dark prime," as the apex of Jane and Rochester's relationship is reached. On this splendid midsummer's evening, Jane notes the sky is "burning with the light of red jewel and furnace flame at one point"; the sky, like their love is passionate, flaming. Not a delicate white jewel, the heavens now glow with a fervent red. Ripe and blooming, the world offers various sensual pleasures; the gooseberry-tree is laden with fruit large as plums; the sweet-briar, jasmine, and rose have yielded a "sacrifice of incense"; Rochester tastes the ripe cherries as he walks through the garden; and the nightingale sings. This moment combines material pleasures with the spiritual pleasures of a "sacrifice of incense" and Jane's feeling that she could "haunt" the orchard forever.

But the world has changed by the end of the chapter: The chestnut tree under which Rochester proposed now ails, "writhing and groaning" in the roaring wind. Thunder and lightning crack and clash, so Jane and Rochester are forced to race back to the house in the pouring rain. The relationship has reached the zenith of ripeness, and a fallow, tragic time is on the way, symbolized by this raging storm. During the night, lightning splits the great chestnut tree, foreshadowing the separation that will soon befall Jane and Rochester.

The chapter also continues themes discussed earlier, such as the problems of class difference and the spiritual nature of their relationship. Early in their conversation, Rochester treats Jane like a good servant: Because she's been a "dependent" who has done "her duty," he, as her employer, wants to offer her assistance in finding a new job. Jane confirms her secondary status, referring to Rochester as "master," and believing "wealth, caste, custom" separate her from her beloved, even though she "naturally and inevitably" loves him. In this quote, Jane creates her love for Rochester as essential and uncontrollable, and, therefore, beyond the bounds of class. Similarly, Rochester argues that an almost magical cord connects him to Jane. Yet she also believes Rochester may be playing with her feelings, that he may see her as an automaton, "a machine without feelings"; because she is "poor, obscure, plain, and little," he may mistakenly think she is also "soulless and heartless." At this point, she speaks to him beyond the "medium of custom, conventionalities," even flesh, and her spirit addresses his spirit in a relationship of equality. Again, Jane creates equality by moving the relationship outside of the material world, and into the spiritual: At "God's feet," they can stand side-by-side, rather than with Rochester leading, Jane following.

***Short study:***

On Midsummer Eve Jane wanders in the orchard under the rising moon, describing the scene in the present tense. Rochester joins her and tells her he will soon marry (he implies, and Jane thinks he means, to Miss Ingram); Adèle will be leaving Thornfield; and he has found a new situation for Jane in Ireland. They sit under the huge chestnut tree, and Jane is overwhelmed by sadness. Through sobs she speaks of her love for Thornfield. Then she passionately admits her feelings for Rochester. He suddenly asks her to be his wife, but, sure that he intends to marry Miss Ingram, Jane thinks he is mocking her. Rochester finally convinces her that he has no interest in the other woman, emphasizing his and Jane's equality: "my equal is here, and my likeness." Jane accepts his proposal. They sit under the chestnut tree until a storm begins to blow in. A heavy rain falls and thunder and lightning boom and crackle through the sky. During the storm the chestnut tree is struck by lightning, splitting it in half.

Rochester uses the fiction that he will marry Miss Ingram to arouse Jane's emotions. He needs to know the depth of her feeling for him before he can propose to her. After Jane accepts, Rochester says, really to himself, "I know my Maker sanctions what I do." With these words he washes his hands of the world's judgment and defies man's opinion. Jane may think he is speaking this way because, in marrying someone who is not of his class or social standing, he will be defying convention. But Rochester's reference to "God's tribunal" suggests a more serious moral transgression.

In determining his sincerity, Jane views Rochester's face in the light of the moon. Once again, as had happened, for instance, on the night that [Helen Burns](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Jane-Eyre/character-analysis/#Helen_Burns) died, moonlight signals her way.

The lightning strike on the chestnut tree, so soon after the marriage proposal that takes place below its branches, is a bad omen for the couple's future. The tree, a symbol of growth and harmony, is split apart by fire's destructive force.

***Critical Analysis***:

The summer is glorious at Thornfield, and Jane is happy to be back at her home. One evening Jane runs into Mr. Rochester in the gardens. He reveals that he will marry Miss Ingram in a month and Jane must leave Thornfield; he already has another governess position lined up for her in Ireland. Jane is devastated at the prospect of being so far away from Mr. Rochester, but admits that Miss Ingram's presence will make such a separation necessary.

Mr. Rochester and Jane sit on a bench under a chestnut tree, and Mr. Rochester suddenly changes emotional positions. He tells her that he feels as if they are connected by a cord attached at the heart and asks her to stay at Thornfield. Jane refuses, bringing up the topic of his bride. She also argues that she must mean little to him if he is willing to marry someone so inferior to him as Miss Ingram. Admonishing him for his thoughtless cruelty to her, Jane confesses that she loves him. To her surprise, Mr. Rochester asks her to marry him. At first she believes that he is only mocking her, but he convinces her that he does not love Miss Ingram and could never marry someone who was only interested in his money. After Jane is convinced of his earnestness, she accepts his proposal. Rain forces the overjoyed lovers inside, where they kiss briefly before retiring to their separate quarters. [Mrs. Fairfax](https://www.gradesaver.com/jane-eyre/study-guide/character-list#mrs-fairfax) observes their kiss, but Jane ignores her shocked expression and decides to provide her with an explanation later. That night, a bolt of lightning strikes the tree under which Jane and Mr. Rochester were sitting and splits it in half.

The long build-up to Jane and Rochester's romance culminates in Rochester's marriage proposal, but a greater change comes about within Jane. Oppressed much of her life because of her poverty, she asserts her validity as a person to Rochester, regardless of her material wealth: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? - You think wrong! - I have as much soul as you, - and full as much heart!" The extent of Jane’s insecurity is revealed by her inability to believe that Mr. Rochester actually wants to marry her. Although the proposal makes her extremely happy, even Jane wonders about Mr. Rochester’s decision to marry someone so beneath his social station.

Jane is also anxious about the prospect of subverting her desires for those of someone else. While her search for love is a driving force in her life, Jane understands that attachment to others comes at a price, and she is not willing to sacrifice her autonomy. A marriage to Mr. Rochester would be one of love and passion, but it might also automatically force her into yet another position of inferiority. Moreover, Bronte will not allow the readers to think that Mr. Rochester’s marriage to Jane will proceed without obstacles; when the lightning strikes the chestnut tree, it is hint that the love that Mr. Rochester and Jane share will soon be torn apart.

***Critical Study:***

Jane and Mr. Rochester inadvertently meet in the garden and sit and talk. He tells her he will be marrying Blanche and Adèle will go to school and Jane will need to find a new position. Indeed Rochester has already found her one in Ireland. Rochester says Jane will forget him and she sobs, confessing her feelings for him and her belief that Blanche is beneath him. He tries to embrace her, but she does not allow it. He asks Jane to marry him, explaining that he has found out that Blanche is just after his money. Jane says yes to the proposal. They part, but not before Mrs. Fairfax sees them kissing. The next morning, Adèle tells Jane the horse-chestnut tree in the orchard was hit by lightning the night before, splitting it in half.

This chapter is the turning point in Jane and Mr. Rochester's relationship. It is here they profess their love for each other. Jane finally understands Mr. Rochester has the same feelings for her that she has for him. Mr. Rochester explains that he tricked Blanche into showing her true nature by starting a rumor that he was not worth nearly as much money as originally thought. Blanche took the bait and treated him coldly, causing the relationship to be broken off. Despite the joyous tone of this chapter, there is trouble lurking. This trouble is foreshadowed by the splitting of the horse-chestnut under which Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane.

The politics of love is discussed in this chapter. Jane tells Mr. Rochester that she is a better person than he because she would not allow herself to be trapped in a loveless, companion-less marriage. She feels this is what Mr. Rochester will be doing if he continues with his plans to marry Blanche. Although Blanche is beautiful and rich, Jane knows the two are not equals and the match is not a good one. After becoming acquainted with Mr. Rochester and learning to converse with him as an equal and almost as one person, Jane truly knows what love is.

***Notes:***

Chapter 23 is pivotal in the plot of Jane Eyre. It contains both a dramatic climax, in Rochester's marriage proposal to Jane, and foreshadows what is to come. Equally important is Jane's firm declaration of her sense of self.

Chapter 23 of Jane Eyre

Language and Imagery

|  |
| --- |
| frontispiece |
| Jane Eyre as autobiography |

Chapter 23 of Jane Eyre is not only one of its most important, but one of its most lyrical. Jane basks in the peace she's found at Thornfield. Much of the chapter is occupied with rich depictions of nature. Typically for gothic romances, these sections function dramatically as well as descriptively. This is particularly the case for the destruction of the tree under which Rochester proposes marriage to Jane.

Somewhat ominously, the beauties of the weather are often compared to those of foreign climates. Jane alludes to Italy and Turkey; Mr. Rochester speaks of the West Indies. This sense of things being out of place foreshadows things to come in this important chapter.

Jane's happiness at Thornfield is mirrored in the rare gorgeousness of the summer weather. Her delight in the long succession of sunny, blissfully hot days is palpable. Her love for Thornfield is made clear through her descriptions of its properties and gardens, as well as her conversation with Mr. Rochester. When a summer storm comes, Jane's own happiness is not disturbed. The reader, though, should take it as a warning.

A Walk in the Orchard

Having put her pupil Adele to bed, Jane is enjoying the evening of Midsummer outdoors. She starts on Thornfield's terrace but leaves when she smells Mr. Rochester's cigar smoke coming from an open window. She goes to the orchard, one of her favorite spots, but her description of its beauties is halted by her noticing the cigar smoke again. She describes it as 'a warning fragrance,' hinting at trouble to come.

Not only is Jane hyper-aware of Mr. Rochester, he's hyper-aware of her. When he stops her as she tries to sneak out of the orchard, Jane asks herself if he has eyes in the back of his head! He asks her to walk with him, and she is upset she is unable to think of an excuse not to. He seems oblivious to the possible implications of taking a walk alone in a shadowy, fragrant garden on a day traditionally dedicated to celebrating fertility.

A Fateful Conversation

Rochester breaks the silence by commenting on what a shame it is that Jane will have to leave Thornfield, to which she's become attached. Jane's resilience shows in her calmly telling Rochester that she'll be ready when necessary. She can't resist adding 'Then you ARE going to be married, sir?' He confirms that he is. Jane becomes increasingly distressed during their subsequent conversation. Rochester hints that he's to be married to the society beauty Blanche Ingram and says that he's found Jane a new job in Ireland.

Jane is deeply upset, not only because of the distance across the Irish Sea, but also what she describes as 'the wider ocean' of social custom and class separating her from Mr. Rochester. Rochester, too, expresses anxiety at separation. He suggests that they are spiritually connected, as if by a strong cord between their hearts, and if she were to leave him, he'd 'take to bleeding inwardly.'

Jane Shares Her Heart

It's at this point that Jane bursts into tears. She passionately explains herself. She loves Thornfield, she says, because she's lived 'a full and delightful life' there, treated kindly and allowed intellectual freedom. Most importantly, she's had her friendship with Mr. Rochester. Knowing she has to leave 'is like looking on the necessity of death.'

Rochester feigns obliviousness (again). Why should she have to leave him? Jane famously retorts that he shouldn't tease her this way. 'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?' She declares herself to be not only in love with Mr. Rochester, but his equal before God! Whereupon he kisses her.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Two weeks after Jane returns to Thornfield, Rochester finds her in the garden and tells her that his plans to marry Blanche are decided. He tells Jane that he has found a governess job for her in Ireland. Jane, upset, says that Ireland is too far away. Jane explains how much she loves Thornfield. Rochester requests that she stay. But Jane fiercely declares her independence and equality, and rebukes him for choosing a loveless marriage.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Jane stands up to Rochester for prioritizing social concerns ahead of his feelings. Jane's passionate response comes in part from her thwarted feelings for Rochester, but also because he seems to think he can send her away, or keep her near, as he wishes.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Rochester](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/edward-fairfax-rochester) confesses that he has no plans to marry [Blanche](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters). He was only trying to make [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) jealous. He passionately asks Jane to marry him. Jane at first thinks Rochester is teasing her, but he convinces her. Jane, overwhelmed with emotion, agrees to marry him.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Rochester loves Jane, but even in proposing to her he distorted the truth to make it seem like he was marrying Blanche. He still has not fully revealed himself or his secrets to Jane.

***Summary Part 3:***

The weather suddenly changes into a downpour, and the couple rushes inside, where Rochester kisses Jane. Later that night, lightning splits the chestnut tree where they had sat when Rochester proposed.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The storm represents divine disapproval of the marriage. Rochester's secrets will split up their marriage, just as lightning split the tree.