***Jane Eyre***

***Vol-3 Chapter 5***

***Chapter 31***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

* Jane moves into her little cottage, which is simple but adequate.
* This was Jane’s first day teaching at the new school; she has twenty students, only three of whom can read, so she’s got her work cut out for her. She knows that she’s doing really useful work, but she still feels like she’s taken a step down on the social scale (which she has).
* Jane reminds herself that her current situation is better than being Rochester’s mistress, but she doesn’t seem to believe her own argument—she starts crying.
* St. John shows up, bringing Jane some drawing materials from his sisters. He asks how everything is going, and she says that it’s wonderful, and she’s grateful things are going so well for her when, a few days ago, she was homeless and friendless.
* St. John counsels Jane to keep trying to master her emotions and overcome her own desire to go back to whatever it is that she left. He tells her about his own experience denying himself—a year ago, he thought that he hated being a priest, but then he felt called by God to become a missionary. There’s only one more desire he needs to overcome before he can go East, he says.
* A young woman comes up and wishes St. John good evening. St. John completely freaks out for a moment, but then calms himself down and turns to talk to her. Jane notices how beautiful the woman is.
* It turns out that this is Miss (Rosamond) Oliver, the daughter of the man who’s paying Jane’s salary. Miss Oliver says she’ll come and help Jane out at the school sometimes.
* Miss Oliver tries to talk to St. John about normal things like a recent dance, but St. John is cold and disapproving.
* Miss Oliver gently teases St. John, saying that the dog, Carlo, would be more friendly to her. St. John blushes and his chest heaves, but he doesn’t really respond.
* Miss Oliver invites St. John to come with her and see her father—she’s on her way home—but St. John refuses. Miss Oliver thinks he’s upset about his sisters leaving for their new jobs.

***Synopsis:***

Jane settles into her new home and job. She does not particularly enjoy her job, but is content to stay. St. John comes by one day with supplies and chats with Jane, telling her of his desire to be a missionary. He is, in fact, preparing to leave for the mission field. Rosamond Oliver, a lovely woman of a wealthy merchant family, comes by and flirts with St. John, who does not respond.

Even in her misery and depression, Jane realizes she made the right choice in leaving Mr. Rochester. Her faith in God and his direction deepens as she begins to see God's hand in the path of her life. In this chapter Jane also meets Rosamond, the daughter of the school's benefactor. Although it appears to Jane that Rosamond has a distinct liking for St. John, he does not return this liking. It is uncertain whether he does not like the girl, or if he simply pretends he does not like her.***Short Study:***

At Morton, the wealthy heiress Rosamond Oliver provides Jane with a cottage in which to live. Jane begins teaching, but to her own regret, she finds the work degrading and disappointing. While on a visit to Jane, St. John reveals that he, too, used to feel that he had made the wrong career choice, until one day he heard God’s call. Now he plans to become a missionary. The beautiful Rosamond Oliver then appears, interrupting St. John and Jane’s conversation. From their interaction, Jane believes that Rosamond and St. John are in love.

***Analysis:***

Jane has moved to her new home: the schoolroom cottage at Morton. Classes begin with twenty students; only three can read and none can write or do arithmetic. Some are docile and want to learn, while others are rough and unruly. Rather than feeling proud of her work, Jane feels degraded. She knows these feelings are wrong and plans to change them. Did she make the right decision, Jane wonders? Is it better to be a "free and honest" village schoolmistress or Rochester's mistress?

St. John interrupts Jane's reverie to offer her a gift from his sisters: a watercolor box, pencils, and paper. Jane assures him that she's happy with her new position. Seeing that Jane's discontent, he tells her his story. He, too, felt he had made a mistake by entering the ministry and longed for an exciting literary or political career, a profession that might bring him glory, fame, and power. Then one day he heard God's call, telling him to become a missionary, work requiring the best skills of the soldier, statesman, and orator. St. John has only to cut one more human tie and he will leave for India to fulfill his dream.

After he says this, their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a beautiful young woman dressed in pure white: Rosamond Oliver. Jane wonders what St. John thinks of this "earthly angel"? Given the sudden fire she sees in his eye, Jane imagines he must be in love with Rosamond.

Although Jane was quick to point out Hannah's class prejudices in Chapter 29, in this chapter Jane shows a lack of feeling for the peasants who are now her students. Jane chose this position, in part, to avoid becoming a governess/servant in the house of a rich family. Having met her uncultured students, Jane wonders if she has taken a step down the social ladder. Interestingly, when weighing her options in this chapter, Jane seems to have forgotten about the possibility of being a governess. Instead, she meditates on the merits of being caught in a "silken snare" as Rochester's mistress in the "fool's paradise at Marseilles," or of being "free and honest" as village schoolmistress in the "healthy heart of England." As before, a trade-off is made between the purity of England and the corruption of Europe; the British must go abroad to live out their illicit loves. Chastising herself for her criticism of her pupils, Jane tries not to forget that their "flesh and blood" is as good as that of the wealthy, and that the "germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best born." Jane's duty will be to develop the "germs," to transform the manners of the lower classes so they conform to upper-class standards of proper behavior. To St. John, Jane claims to be content to have friends, a home, and a job, when only five weeks earlier she was an outcast and beggar. Yet the seeds of her discontent are growing here, as they did at Lowood.

The chapter also develops St. John's personality. As Jane had guessed, he is riddled by restlessness and despair. Rather than becoming a priest, St. John would like to have been a politician, author, orator — any position that brought the possibility of glory, fame, and power. Instead, he is the clergyman for a poor and obscure parish. His solution is to become a missionary. Just as Jane retrains the minds of the lower classes in England, he will reform the values of the pagans in India. Both characters perpetuate a belief in British, Christian superiority. Both also confirm the supposed moral superiority of the upper classes. For instance, despite her documentation of the faults of the upper classes, she still seems to associate "refinement" and "intelligence" with the gentry, and "coarseness" and "ignorance" with the peasants. The iciness of St. John's character becomes more pronounced when he declares his intention to leave Morton after "an entanglement or two of the feelings" has been "broken through or cut asunder." This entanglement arrives in the form of Rosamond Oliver, who has "as sweet features as ever the intemperate clime of Albion moulded." Rosamond is the icon of British beauty and in love with St. John, yet he rejects her. While her appearance incites St. John like a thunderbolt, though he flushes and kindles at the sight of her petting his dog, St. John would rather turn himself into "an automaton," than succumb to her beauty or fortune. His ambition to forge a heroic career cuts St. John off from all deep human emotions. Perhaps, then, his religious zeal is the result of his repressed sexual feelings.

***Critical Study:***

Jane describes her home, using the present tense. After her first day of teaching at the village school, she feels depressed about the task ahead of her. Her students have so much to learn, and some are rough and undisciplined. She resolves to focus on the satisfaction she'll feel when her students make progress. St. John visits and, detecting her sorrowful mood, tells her that there was a time when he was unhappy with his ministry duties and craved a more exciting career. Heaven, he says, sent him a solution—he decided to find action by going to Asia on a godly "errand" as a missionary. While Jane and St. John talk, the beautiful young Rosamond Oliver appears at the gate. She is the benefactress who funds Jane's school. Rosamond invites St. John to come with her to visit her father right away, but he declines, "Not to-night." Jane detects a romantic tension between them. St. John, however, seems to be trying to resist Rosamond.

In this chapter readers see Jane beginning an independent life, the kind of life suitable to her position in society as one who needs to work but above the station of a servant. As the sole schoolteacher, she has autonomy. As someone living alone in her cottage, she has, for the first time in her life, the opportunity to set up her home as she wants it. That this passage is described in the present tense might indicate how alive and empowered Jane felt at this time—and how vivid and real the memory remains for her.

For someone who has known poverty, Jane initially has little empathy for her students, although she then resolves to help them with their manners as well as their education. St. John is revealed to be like Jane in this chapter in his resolve to help and improve those whom he considers beneath him. And, like Jane, he suppresses his passion in order to maintain his sense of morality.

The relationship of St. John and Rosamond provides a parallel to that of Rochester and Blanche Ingram. Rosamund, like Blanche, has her eye set on an eligible bachelor, although in this case Rosamond already has money—she is not a fortune seeker. Her regard for him helps establish him as a worthy character.

***Significance:***

Jane is installed in a cottage at Morton and immediately starts teaching as the headmistress of the school. Her students are largely uneducated, but many are eager learners, and Jane resolves to discard her self-pity over her situation and work hard to help her students achieve academic heights. She maintains that her decision was right: she is better off being free and in somewhat difficult conditions than staying with Mr. Rochester as a beloved slave in luxury.

During a brief visit, St. John finally opens up to Jane and tells her that a year ago he was unhappy as a priest and was looking for a more exciting lifestyle. He was close to picking a new career until he heard a call from God to become a missionary. A beautiful, angelic young lady, [Rosamond Oliver](https://www.gradesaver.com/jane-eyre/study-guide/character-list#rosamond-oliver), interrupts them; her father has told her that St. John's new school has opened, and she wants to know how the first day was. Jane realizes that Miss Oliver is the wealthy benefactress of the school. Miss Oliver invites St. John to visit her father, but he stolidly declines and the two part ways. As she observes St. John’s interactions with Miss Oliver, Jane comes to the conclusion that the two are in love.

Jane has come full circle; she was once a neglected, poor orphan at Lowood and is now headmistress of her own school. Following in the mold of the kindly Miss Temple, she resolves to help her students who, while not orphans, are poor and largely uneducated. In fact, Jane nearly turns to snobbishness when describing the students and must remind herself that "these coarsely clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy." She admits that she is unhappy in her situation, but Jane continues to rationalize her decision to leave Mr. Rochester as fulfillment of her quest for independence.

Miss Oliver serves as the first example in the novel of someone who is rich, beauty, and good-natured (everyone else has only one or two of the qualities). Jane is quick to realize that St. John and Miss Oliver are in love, but she is unable to see how love fits into St. John’s plans to become a missionary.***Notes:***

This lesson provides an overview of Chapter 31 of Jane Eyre, in which Jane has a job and a home but still struggles with the effects of her decision to leave Mr. Rochester.

## Jane's New Home

In this chapter, we find Jane after she has settled into her new home as mistress of the school St. John Rivers has opened. Her cottage is simple, plain, and sparsely furnished, but it is sufficient, and it is her own. As promised, there is a little orphan girl who is paid to serve as Jane's handmaid.

On the first day of school, Jane has 20 girls in her class. Jane knew before she accepted the position that she would be teaching children of a different kind than she had previously. The reality of the situation is a little more shocking than she had anticipated. Only three of the 20 girls can read, and none of them can write or cypher, which means to count or use numbers. Also, Jane's students speak with such thick local accents that she sometimes has trouble understanding them. Jane tries to focus on the good, but she can't help feeling a little discouraged.

## Jane's Struggles

Jane tells us she feels 'degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence, I was weakly dismayed at the ignorance, the poverty, the coarseness of all I heard and saw round me.' Jane strives against these feelings even as she experiences them. She knows she shouldn't feel this way about these girls. She hopes that 'the happiness of seeing progress, and a change for the better in my scholars, may substitute gratification for disgust.'

Another deeper struggle besets Jane in her lonely cottage--her unrelenting love for Mr. Rochester. Ultimately she is glad that she was strong enough to leave. Otherwise, she would have become his mistress and been completely dependent on and subject to his whims. She is glad instead 'to be a village-schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England.' Despite all of these very sensible thoughts, she finds herself weeping and longing for the man she loves and worrying that he will have gone and done something stupid after she left him.

## St. John's Advice

St. John pays a visit to Jane in her cottage in the midst of her weeping. He has brought a package of art supplies which his sisters left for Jane. St. John notices her tear-stained face and asks what troubles her. Is it the school? The students? Her living quarters? Jane answers in the negative to all of these, at which St. John decides to offer some unsolicited advice: 'What you had left before I saw you, of course I do not know; but I counsel you to resist, firmly, every temptation which would incline you to look back: pursue your present career steadily, for some months at least.' Jane answers simply, 'it is what I mean to do,' but the reader can probably imagine Jane's irritation here. No one loves unsolicited advice, especially when it is of such a personal and presumptive nature!

## St. John's Struggles

After telling Jane what to do, St. John goes on to tell a little bit about himself and elaborate on his future plans. The reader will remember he alluded to these in the previous chapter. He tells Jane that in the last year he was 'intensely miserable' because he was regretting his decision to enter the ministry. He was bored to death and felt that his many skills and attributes were going to waste. In the midst of his struggle, it occurred to him that another job in God's service could solve all of his problems. It would provide him with interest and variety and would require from him greater exertion. His solution was to become a missionary.

St. John's father had opposed this career move, but now that his father is dead, there are few obstacles in his way. He needs only to find a replacement for him in his current job, sort through a few other things, and overcome 'a last conflict with human weakness.' What could he mean by this last thing?

## Miss Oliver's Viist

Just after St. John's enigmatic statement, a lovely young woman appears suddenly at his side. It is Rosamond Oliver, daughter of the wealthy owner of the town's needle factory. She speaks to St. John in a familiar way which suggests they have been well acquainted. She also laments the stern aloofness with which he receives her. Rosamond attempts to engage St. John in conversation and even invites him to her home to visit her father, but he remains reserved and brief with his answers. However, in a moment when Rosamond is not looking at St. John, Jane sees 'his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion.'

St. John recomposes himself before Rosamond lifts her head, but Jane and the reader both at this point begin to understand what 'conflict with human weakness' St. John might have been speaking of before--he appears to have romantic feelings for Miss Rosamond Oliver.

## Lesson Summary

In this chapter, we learn that Jane's teaching is off to a challenging start. Her pupils are very rough and Jane has some struggle with her dignity in teaching them. She also pines for Mr. Rochester and worries for his well-being. St. John visits her at her cottage and cautions against some of her struggle. He tells Jane of his own struggles and his plans to become a missionary. At the very end of the chapter, we meet Rosamond Oliver, and we begin to suspect there is something romantic between her and St. John.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) starts work at her school. She has 20 students with little education. While Jane believes that personal potential is not limited to social class, she cannot help feeling a little degraded in becoming a small-town teacher and fears her life is going nowhere. Still, she thanks God for guiding her decision not to become [Rochester](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/edward-fairfax-rochester)'s mistress.

***Analysis Part 1:***

As a teacher, Jane will instill in her students the education that gave her self-respect and strong morals. Since Jane has grown so much, the job now feels small to her, just as being Rochester's mistress would have felt small.

***Summary Part 2:***

In conversation, [St. John](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/st-john-rivers) reassures [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) that he also had doubts about choosing his career in the parish church, but that now he has found his life's purpose—to become a missionary in India. St. John speaks with conviction about choosing the difficult but noble path in life.

***Analysis Part 2:***

St. John and Jane both have strong personalities and convictions, but their values differ. Jane learns from St. John about determination, but will choose a different path.

***Summary Part 3:***

One of the school's benefactors is the rich and classically beautiful [Rosamond Oliver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters). [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/jane-eyre) can see that Rosamond and [St. John](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jane-eyre/characters/st-john-rivers) are in love.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Rosamond's name is French for the "rose of the world." She represents the earthly desire that St. John rejects for his cold spiritual principles.