

STEPPING STONES™

a chapter book

CLASSIC

Jane Eyre

An illustration of Jane Eyre, a young woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a grey Victorian-style dress with a large orange and red patterned shawl draped over her shoulders. She holds a lit candle in a silver holder, with her left hand raised near the flame. The background features a blue paneled wall and a colorful, patterned curtain on the left.

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Chapter One
My Story Begins

There was no chance of taking a walk that cold and rainy day. I was glad. My three cousins teased me during the walks. They didn't like me any more than I liked them.

My name is Jane Eyre. My parents had died ten years before, when I was just a baby. Since then, I'd lived with my aunt and her three children at Gateshead Hall.

On this day, my cousins, John, Eliza, and Georgiana, were in the warm parlor with their mother. But I was not allowed in.

"Until you can behave like a good girl, you are not to come in here," Aunt Reed told me.

"But what have I done?" I asked.

"Jane, I do not like children who question their elders," she snapped.

I slipped into a cozy sitting room. There, I sat down to read in a window seat. But I was not safe for long.

John flung open the door. He did not see me behind the window curtains. "Lizzy!

Georgy!" he called to his sisters. "Jane is not here! Tell Mama!"

Eliza was smarter than her brother. "Jane is in the window seat," she said.

I came out from the curtains at once, afraid of being dragged out by John.

"What do you want?" I asked him.

"Say 'What do you want, Master Reed?'" was his answer. "I want to know what you are doing."

John was large and fat for a fourteen-year-old boy. He did not like his mother or sisters. But he liked to bully me.

"I was reading." I showed him the book.

"You have no right to take our books," John said.

He snatched the book away. "You have no money. You should go and beg, not live with rich folks like us. I'll teach you not to touch my books. For they are *mine*—everything in this house will belong to me someday."

He angrily threw the heavy book at me. I fell against the door, cutting my head.

"You are a wicked and cruel boy!" I cried. I got up and tried to fight back. I could feel blood trickling down my neck from the cut on my head.

Aunt Reed and the servants came rushing in. "Ungrateful girl!" my aunt said. "Lock her up in the red room!"

My aunt's maid, Bessie, took me upstairs to the cold, dark room.

"You have a duty to Mrs. Reed, Miss," Bessie said to me gently. "If not for her, you would go to the poorhouse."

This was not news to me. I had heard it many times before.

"Try to be useful and pleasant," Bessie went on. "Otherwise, Mrs. Reed will send you away, I'm sure."

She left me there, sad and lonely. It was the same room where my uncle had died, nine years earlier.

Uncle Reed had been my mother's brother. When my parents died, he had taken me in. And when he was dying, he'd made his wife promise to care for me as one of her own children.

I cried in the locked room for hours. I'd tried to behave. I'd tried to be good.

But it didn't matter. My aunt did not love me. She only took care of me because she had to.

Left alone, I cried until I fell asleep.

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Orphaned at an early age, Jane Eyre leads a lonely life until she is hired as a governess at Thornfield Hall, the first place that ever feels like home. Jane is happy at last—but something strange is going on. She hears eerie laughter at night, and a ghostly woman roams the halls. Who *is* this woman? Why does everyone at Thornfield have a secret? And how will these mysteries change Jane's new life?

