

Seasons of betrayal

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Seasons of betrayal

by [Ibijau](#)

Summary

Jane Eyre, until recently employed at an infamous institute for disabled children, finds a new start in life when she is hired to act as a private educator for a young girl in a place called Thornfield.

She soon realises that the owner of this old house is hiding secrets. It doesn't prevent her attraction to him though, especially since she has her own mysterious past.

But there's a difference between a sad childhood and a ruthless conspiracy, as Jane will learn

Notes

Welcome to the modern AU of Jane Eyre that nobody asked for but I'm providing anyway.

There's going to be some Jane/Edward here because I'd like to stick to canon as much as I can, but the endgame is Jane/Bertha so please take note of that!

Comment and criticism are super welcome, as I'm writing most of this with less research than I'd like, but the choice is between that and risking to not write at all, so there we are.

Corrections of the french are not required as I happen to be french myself xp

Chapter 1

There once was a girl called Jane whose childhood was such an unhappy business that if she were to tell her story, she would avoid that part entirely. Instead she would start with the first moment she felt truly hopeful for her life, when she reached twenty two years old.

For nearly two years at that point, she had been an assistant educator in a special education facility. It was not a career she had chosen, but she did not dislike it and she was content to help the pupils and teacher there. She might have continued working there many more years, or even the rest of her life, if only the teacher she was closest to had done the same. That lady however announced one day that she was getting married, and that due to the nature of her union, the management of the facility had advised her to find employment elsewhere.

Their charges were considered particularly impressionable, and no matter what new laws said, it would not do to expose them openly to homosexuality. This facility was privately owned and ran with little government intervention, and they boasted themselves of traditional values.

"Of course I expected that," Mrs Temple told Jane privately the evening of her announcement. "I have already found another job, and with a better pay at that. My fiancée told me that I should sue them for discrimination, but after what happened a few years back, I'm scared it might get closed and what would happen of the children?"

Jane agreed that suing was not the best option at the moment, and she was glad that this woman who had been a mother and a friend to her would not be jobless. But the news forced her to consider her own future, which she might not have done for a good while longer otherwise.

She did not mind working with children. They tired her at times, but knowing she was making a difference in their lives felt worth it. Still, she was not terribly fond of the facility that employed her, of their methods, and least of all of their values. She knew that although she had a degree relating to her current field of work, most schools might be hesitant to employ her. The solution, then, was to seek out the family of children who would need help attending school, or could not attend it at all.

For this purpose she put an advertisement in a national newspaper, and asked for letters of recommendation from some of the teachers she worked with. They all kindly accepted to gloss over some of the events of her stay with the school, which was easy to obtain once she hinted that she would rather not have cause to mention a certain scandal that had happened a few years earlier.

When a Mrs Fairfax answered her advertisement, looking for an educator for her ward, Jane sent copies of these letters to prove her worth. Within a month of deciding she needed a change, she had a promise of employment with this family. In the end she left the facility only a week after Mrs Temple, which felt particularly efficient to her.

It was a long travel to Mrs Fairfax's estate, where she would be lodged and fed in addition to her salary. To get there she took the train for the second time of her life. She had been told that a car would come and get her at the station, but all of the waiting vehicles left with other people and she was left alone with her luggage.

Panic started rising in her. There might have been a misunderstanding, or a change of heart, or she might have gotten off at the wrong station after all. She was becoming agitated, clenching her fists repeatedly to calm herself, when at last a new car arrived and stopped in front of the station. Jane was usually rather shy of strangers, but her anxiety had gotten such that she all but run to the man driving.

"Are you sent by Mrs Fairfax, sir?"

"Yes I am," he said with a slight frown. "So you're the educator then?"

There was an inflection in his voice that Jane only understood later to have been doubt. As it was, relief was the only thing on her mind.

"Jane Eyre, sir. That is me. May I get in the car?"

"Well, I suppose. Let's get your stuff in the trunk first, that'll be easier."

He helped her with her luggage, which she appreciated. Her suitcase was not big, but twenty two years of life still had their weight.

The journey to the estate took near an hour, most of it through farmland and forest. They only met one small town on their way, near the end of their travel. The man, at this point, had given up on making conversation, which Jane was glad of, but he still gave her the name of the town and indicated that they would arrive soon.

Indeed before long, the car arrived to a large gate that opened for them. Jane had heard before the expression "in the middle of nowhere", but she had never understood it so well as she did in that instant. The whole estate was surrounded by a high wall that seemed to run for miles, with nothing but a few fields and groves on the other side. Inside were huge gardens big enough to harbour a small village or two and, right in the middle, on a small hill, the house, tall and domineering.

It looked old, more like a place to be visited than to live in, but it clearly was habited. With the night half fallen, there were lights at some of the windows, including one so high it must have been the attic. Jane could only think how it looked like something out of a horror film, and somehow the thought comforted her. She liked those films.

At the door, waiting for them, was a woman. She was older than Jane might have expected, but seemed kind enough, looking very much the part of a gentle grandmother. Her smile wavered somewhat as she watched Jane come out of the car.

"Are you miss Eyre, then?"

"Yes, ma'am. And you must be Mrs Fairfax."

Jane held out her hand, arm perfectly straight, the way she had been taught. The old lady

shook her hand gently, her smile coming back.

"Well, do come in, dear. John will take your suitcase to your room. Did you have dinner?"

"I bought a sandwich in the train, ma'am."

"I will count that as a no, then. Well, I think we should have something lying around to make you a proper sandwich at least, and a cup of tea. I'll sit with you and have a chat, yes? "

Jane thanked her new employer, touched to be welcomed so warmly, and followed her inside.

The interior of the house looked as much like the set of a horror film as its facade, and the contrast with Jane's previous life couldn't have been starker. Lowood institute had nothing but white metal furniture in pale green, corridors brightly lit by harsh white bulbs, the overall effect being very much that of an hospital (and indeed, such was the intent).

This new place, called Thornfield Hall, seemed to have no furniture younger than a hundred years of age, and the elegant lamps could not banish entirely the shadows from every corners. The only somewhat modern place was the kitchen where Jane had her dinner, but even there a preference for past aesthetics was obvious.

"When will I meet my pupil?" Jane asked before even touching her meal.

"Little Adele? Oh, not until tomorrow," Mrs Fairfax said, gesturing an encouragement for her guest to eat. "We keep her under a strict schedule, mostly because she likes it that way. As I warned in the letter, she is a difficult child, and of course the language is an issue. She only speaks with her hands, which no one understands except her nanny, and that nanny herself barely speaks any English."

"I am fluent enough in BSL. It might not be the same sign language as what she uses, but I know from experience it's rather easy for signers to figure out a common ground. I can show you a few signs someday if you'd like."

Mrs Fairfax chuckled. "At my age, I don't know if I can still learn, dear. Still, that's sweet of you. I hope Adele will have more talent than I do, although honestly I don't hope for much. Mr Rochester said that he's not expecting her to ever be normal enough for school, just to become tame enough that she doesn't cause too much havoc in the house. Who knew a child of six could be this scary!"

Jane did not answer that, glad that she had the excuse of her sandwich to ignore the comment.

"Who is Mr Rochester?" She asked once she had swallowed. "Her physician?"

"Oh dear, not at all! He's her father! I don't think he ever intended to have a child, least of all one like her, but he does his best to care for her. He's often gone for business though and since I take care of the house, he's felt that I might as well take care of the child too, with some help. And help has arrived, which I am grateful for."

Knowing it was expected of her, Jane smiled. In truth, she was partly relieved to learn the old lady was not related in any way to the little girl she would be caring for. She hadn't liked

some of the things she had just heard about the child, and she'd found it was often harder to make families change their views than anyone else.

"Now, miss Eyre, I hope you'll forgive me for asking, but where are you from?"

"Before Lowood, I came from Wales, where I have family in Cardiff."

Mrs Fairfax pouted slightly. "I see. But before that dear, where is your family *from*?"

It took Jane an embarrassing few seconds to finally understand, and she blushed.

"I am not quite sure, ma'am. My parents died when I was very young, and my aunt never spoke of them. My mother was Welsh, but my father was from India I believe. I have never been able to know for sure, so it could have been Pakistan too."

"I see... But I thought Lowood was a Catholic institute?"

"It is, ma'am. My aunt had me baptised when I came to live with her."

"Did she? Well, I suppose that was her choice to make, wasn't it? I'm of the mind children shouldn't be forced into anything like that until they are old enough to choose, but of course my family never was much for churchgoing. That said, if you do prefer it, there's a mass every Sunday in town, and I'm sure John would gladly take you."

Jane assured her it would not be necessary since she was not very devout herself. She had the impression the old lady smiled at her more warmly after that statement, but since she did not know what to make of it, she chose to simply ignore that sensation.

When Jane had finished eating and they were both done with their tea, Mrs Fairfax offered to show her to her room. She apologised in advance that it might be too simplistic, but she had felt it would give Jane more of a chance to arrange it to her taste. Indeed, it turned out to be a very simple room with only the bare necessities: a bed, a nightstand, a chest of drawers, a mirror. More could be brought from unused bedrooms if Jane wished, and even what was there could be exchanged for something in another style if she found something in the house that pleased her.

"No, this is perfect, ma'am," she said in earnest. "I think I'll be quite happy in here, thank you."

As if in reaction to her words, a loud, almost hysterical laughter resonated from somewhere above them. Jane jumped in surprise, but Mrs Fairfax barely reacted except to sigh.

"That's only poor Miss Charlotte," she said as if that explained everything. "She can be rather loud sometimes, poor woman. Harmless though, don't worry, and she's got a nurse with her."

Again, the thought of horror films came to Jane's mind, but of a different sort. Now instead of Victorian ghosts she imagined cruel experiments carried by wicked doctors on unwilling patients, and that was far more terrifying. She could only hope that she would never meet this Charlotte and her nurse.

Jane woke up early, as was her habit, and had breakfast with Mrs Fairfax. She was informed that Adele was never up until 8 at best, more often 9 or 10 if she was in a bad mood - which she almost always was. This already told Jane of a few things they would have to work on, and she was so impatient to start that she asked to see the classroom Mrs Fairfax's letter had mentioned.

It was an old bedroom, right next to that of Adele and her nurse. At the moment, it was mostly a play room, with toys discarded all around. A map on one wall gave some indication of the room's new purpose but it had already been scribbled on, and the small bookshelf was almost bare.

"I tried to tell the nurse to tidy," Mrs Fairfax sighed, bending to retrieve a too loved doll. "I'll help you clean if you'd like."

"I'd rather it stayed in this state," Jane said. "It would be a bad start between us if I disrupted her things in her absence. I'll clean when she's here."

"Then it'll be a tantrum for sure. But you must know better than me. Well, if you don't need me, I have work to do. I'll bring Adele to you when she's had breakfast."

Jane thanked her, and turned again to her little classroom, trying to get an idea of the child she would meet. Everything screamed at her that Adele only followed her own rules, but what else to expect if no one managed to communicate with her and her nurse? Some basic BSL would be her priority, and she fully intended for the whole house to learn a few words before long.

It was nearly eleven when, at last, Mrs Fairfax brought her Adele. To Jane's surprise, both the girl and her nurse looked Arabic when she had expected some blonde little child. The nurse was even veiled, which was rather odd after Mrs Fairfax's comments on religion the previous night.

"Adele, this is miss Eyre who will now live us," Mrs Fairfax said, trying to pull the child away from her nurse. "Why don't you say hi? Come on dear, give us a smile?"

More than a smile, Jane could see a scream threatening to escape the girl's lips.

"Please ma'am, let her go," she said calmly. "She doesn't like to be touched, it seems. She can stay with her nurse for now if she feels more comfortable this way."

"As you wish. I'll be with Leah in the kitchen if you need me, and I'll come get you for lunch."

Once she was gone, Jane went to sit on the floor, just far enough from Adele to respect her space. She waved her hand to try to get her attention, then signed a hello, followed by her name. That got her no reaction, but she had not expected one. Patiently she repeated her signs several times, always leaving a moment for Adele to respond if she chose to. The child barely paid her any attention, but the nurse did.

"Allez, dis bonjour à la dame," she said at last while signing to Adele.

The girl refused to obey, only clinging tighter to her nurse, which at least was a reaction.

"Vous parlez français ?" Jane asked, trying to recall her old French lessons.

"La vieille ne vous l'a pas dit ? Pas étonnant. Elle ne m'avait pas prévenu que vous le parliez, mais c'est une bonne chose. Adèle comprend mieux le français, ça va aider."

The flow of words in an unfamiliar language was too much for Jane who felt her heart race in anxiety. She took as deep a breath as she could without drawing attention, then smiled.

"Je parle pas français très bon, pardon. Do you speak any English?"

Instantly the nurse's excitement fell down, and her only answer was to shrug. She was about Jane's age, and appeared to have some understanding of how to best handle Adele, so Jane promised herself to brush up on her French as soon as she had time.

This first school session might have discouraged others. At lunch, Mrs Fairfax even lamented that nothing could be done with the girl, who was unstable and had been too spoiled by her mother. Jane, however, had her own understanding of silent children, and she felt it her duty to learn Adele's personal way of communicating with the world.

"If I may ask, are her parents divorced?" she asked over dessert, when Adele had left for play time. "You barely have mentioned her mother so far."

"My dear, her parents were never even married. Mr Rochester met her mother when he was visiting Algeria for business, and they lived together for a while. It did not work out sadly so he left them with some money. I think Adele still has family there, but because of the lead poisoning that killed her mother, Mr Rochester felt it would be better to bring the child here."

"Lead poisoning?"

This new information changed everything that Jane had been told about Adèle, and she could only feel upset that this had not been mentioned before.

"You only told me she had been born with learning disabilities," Jane complained as softly as she could.

"Mr Rochester gave me a list of what to say to anyone I'd hire, I didn't realise anything else might be relevant. You're not reconsidering the job, are you?"

Mrs Fairfax looked truly worried then, and Jane hastily put on a smile.

"It changes a few things, but not my presence here. I'll have to try and do a few tests with her, that is all. Or maybe she has a medical file I could consult?"

A more experienced person would have known to ask for that file before even considering this employment, but Jane had been too impatient to get out into the world, too trusting that

her new employer would know to tell her everything. Now she could understand a little more why this little girl might be difficult to handle for Mrs Fairfax. What little she knew of lead poisoning was not promising for Adele's future, but for all their sake Jane was determined she would research the subject thoroughly and offer the child as good a care as possible.

"I'll have to ask Grace if she has Adele's file," Mrs Fairfax said. "Everything medical is usually in her keep. At worse, I'll call Mr Rochester tonight, and I'm sure he'll know more than me."

The afternoon went peacefully enough. Jane sat for a time with Adele's nurse, Kakou, and they watched her play while Jane tried her best to speak a few words of French mixed with a few signs. From this conversation, Jane half understood that on top of her disabilities, Adele had hearing problems.

Kakou helped Jane try again to establish a first contact with the child, but Adele continued to pointedly ignore her. It did not bother her. Jane had already decided that she would not force anything.

Then, when Kakou and Adele left for the child's bath, Jane decided to go meet Grace Pool. As she climbed the long stairs to the third floor, Jane's heart was beating hard against her chest. More than once she had to stop on a step, paralysed with childish fear, only pushing through it for the sake of little Adele.

At last she reached the final floor, and found there a woman on a comfortable chair near a door, intently looking at her phone. That woman had no evil look about her, she was middle aged with hair dyed red, but still Jane couldn't shake her old terror. She stood there a long moment, wondering what to say and how to say it, until the woman raised her head and frowned as she saw her.

"And who are you?" she asked, dropping her phone and standing up. "You're not allowed to be in here!"

"My name is Jane Eyre, and I am the new educator for Adele. I'm sorry to bother you, but I was told to check with you for her medical files?"

Grace Poole, for it was her, only frowned more deeply. Before she could speak though, there was a loud clash coming from behind the door, followed by a inhuman scream that startled Jane. The noise had little effect on Grace, but when she grabbed again her phone something on it turned her white as a ghost.

"I'll see if I find those files and I'll bring them to you," she grunted, glancing worriedly at the door. "If I don't bring anything it'll mean I didn't have them, so no need to come here again. I'll have a word with Mrs Fairfax about that!"

Jane was only too happy to leave her, especially as the noises coming from behind the door became more violent. She quickly thanked the nurse and all but ran down the stairs and back to the security of her own bedroom.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Jane gets used to her new student, but unexpected changes and a surprise meeting change things

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The next few weeks were a quiet affair during which Jane fell into a somewhat comfortable routine. Adele, at first ignoring her, slowly started first to acknowledge her, and then to accept her. With Kakou's precious help, educator and child managed to learn to communicate through some spoken words and a good quantity of signs.

It was a clear source of distress for Adele to understand that she was expected to learn from scratch a whole new signing system, but Jane had to be firm on that point since the child was likely to live the rest of her life in England. There were many tantrums at first, of the sort that must have so impressed Mrs Fairfax, but Jane held on. French sign language was never punished, but only British sign language was rewarded.

This was Jane's great plan for teaching Adele. Her time at Lowood had left her with an intense dislike for punishments, as well as a belief that they rarely worked. The only teacher she had ever seen to have success was Mrs Temple who used kindness and positive reinforcement whenever possible, and Jane had taken her as a model to follow.

It did not always work, of course. Adele was not a mean spirited child, but she was used to having things her way. To her, the very fact of not getting a reward often felt like a punishment, even when she had entirely refused to do what was asked of her. This led to more tantrums, to dolls and toys thrown at adults, piercing shrieks and uncontrollable tears. More than once Jane and Kakou had to leave Adele alone until she had calmed down for fear she would hurt them. She truly had a sweet nature though, and once the worst of her anger had passed, Adele would hug them and sign apologies.

As fall began turning into winter, Jane felt the joy of some small successes with her student. Adele had finally started to accept her, even going so far as to hug her sometimes on particularly good days.

She was learning also to accept following rules given to her, and in return Jane had worked out a series of ways for Adele to signal when she was uncomfortable or needed time off. Better yet, she had managed to teach those to almost everyone in the house, and to convince them to respect Adele's demands.

"Isn't it spoiling her to let her give up everything any time she feels like it?" Mrs Fairfax often asked.

"It's better than pushing her into a tantrum. Besides, it's teaching her that we pay attention to what she needs, and that's important."

"In my days, children didn't leave the table without permission. My father would never have allowed that sort of disrespect, he'd have given me a good slap for that. "

"And when I was a child, my aunt once locked me into a cupboard for taking candies from her children. I do not really believe in repeating mistakes of our elders."

Mrs Fairfax had looked at her with wide eyes, and dropped the subject. Jane had been grateful for that. She never liked talking of her days before Thornfield, nor even to think of them.

This house was her home now, for as long as Adele might need her, for as long as Mrs Fairfax would allow it. And while the old lady often confronted her with her doubts and questions, Jane had once heard her on the phone saying how different things were these days at Thornfield, how much quieter.

Jane, finally, had found her place.

Still, as much as she enjoyed Thornfield and the life there, she sometimes found herself longing for more. Fall brought with it a particular ache as she settled into a routine. Her days were ordered and full, but her mind would not rest. Something was missing from her life that she could not name. She had everything she had ever wanted in life, freedom, security, and a chance to help another child, what more could there be for her?

Then, Mid-november, Kakou announced that she was intending to go home.

As much affection as she had for Adele, it had never been her intention to stay with her permanently, least of all in England where everything was cold and expensive. Every penny she'd earned she had saved for the day she'd go home and now that Adele had someone competent to care for her, that day had come.

The week after her announcement was a hard one for the house, but not so much as the day after she had left. Adele had been warned of course but she did not fully understand it until she saw Kakou leave with her luggage one morning. She cried and screamed and begged in every way she could, to no avail. Kakou climbed into a taxi and never returned. It was a hellish day at Thornfield. Adele would not calm down and, as if alerted there was some drama going on, old Charlotte in her locked room took to shrieking too every time her medication wore off.

Night came and Adele, exhausted from her crying, at least went to sleep quickly. Not long after Kakou called to say she had arrived at her parents' home and that everything was well. Then, to Jane's surprise, she asked to talk to her.

"Good evening Kakou," she said, holding the phone hesitantly. It never was a pleasant task to take a call, and having to do it in broken English and French made it worse still. "Did you want something?"

"I wanted to give you a warning," came the static ridden answer. "There is something bad in the house. Something... Maléfique. Very bad. There is... La folle, la dame qu'ils ont enfermée... Ils vont finir par la tuer un jour. You understand? Up the house. There is death up the house"

"Kakou, are you okay? I don't hear you very well... Who will die?"

Next to her, Mrs Fairfax stared at her with as much confusion on her face as Jane felt.

"The woman up the house," Kakou insisted on the phone. "Adele know. Adele see. Protect her. I have fear. Ils vont la tuer cette pauvre femme, et moi j'ai peur de Rochester. Je suis juste la nounou, personne ne va me croire, mais vous on vous écouterà. You understand ? Il faut faire attention Jane, c'est un homme mauvais qui cache des secrets et Grace est une sale vipère !"

"You're speaking too fast, I can't... "

"I go now. Kiss Adele, I love her. Goodbye, please protect her. Remember the death! "

There was a click then, followed by silence. Jane stood unmoving for a moment, the phone still against tight against her ear as if she might hear Kakou's voice again to explain what she meant. Instead she felt a hand on her shoulder that startled her and got a small cry out of her.

"Calm down dear, it's only me," Mrs Fairfax said, frowning. "What did she tell you then? Why did you speak about someone dying?"

Her heart beating hard in her chest and her hand painfully clenched on the phone, Jane wished she could have time to relax before she had to process what little she had understood. She wished also that Mrs Fairfax who move away her hand, that contact almost sickening with her nerves in such a state, but she couldn't find the words to explain all that.

"I'm not sure," Jane said at last, forcing the words out as if they were splinters under her skin. "I could not hear well. Someone in her family is sick, I think."

Her face burned with that lie, and Jane thought the old lady would have to see she wasn't telling the truth. It made her heart beat faster still, and she might have become sick if Mrs Fairfax hadn't finally moved her hand.

"Poor girl, I suppose she's been gone from home quite a while, hasn't she? I hope things will go well for her. I didn't understand a word she said, but it was clear she loves Adele dearly."

Jane nodded distractedly, still trying so ground herself. The sound had been terrible, and the language barrier had been there, but the sense of dread and impending disaster had been

impossible to miss. Something had scared Kakou, something in the house, and Adele was involved.

Up in the house, Kakou had said, and Jane could only think of Charlotte, that mad woman locked in the attic and under the constant guard of Grave Poole. Even after a few months in the house, Jane had never seen that woman, but she had heard her hysterical laughter almost daily, the loud noises of heavy objects thrown against the door whenever Grace was late with her medication. Even Mrs Fairfax was often startled by those sounds and never went near the attic if she could help it.

Perhaps the tense atmosphere created by this unwanted and unseen guest had become too much for Kakou who had grown to fear for her life and that of everyone in the house. Jane herself wondered at times why the old lady was not moved to a facility better equipped to deal with such violent dementia. Then, always, her mind went to Lowood, and perhaps it was a mercy that woman would never know anything of the sort.

Jane did not last long before she had to go sleep that evening. It was just as well because Adele woke up early and made sure the whole house knew it as she started crying for her nurse again. The child refused to eat or drink any breakfast, screaming and shouting and pushing Jane away with surprising strength any time she tried to calm her. Her nerves sorely attacked by the whole thing, Jane felt rather close to crying and screaming too but knew she could not allow it. After some hours, she had to get out. She mumbled some excuse to Mrs Fairfax, went to grab a coat, and ran outside.

Immediately the freezing air brought her new life. After the warmth of the house, it was as if her hands and face were being pricked by needles or pinched, and the sensation grounded her somewhat. She was human again. Too soon though, her body acclimated to the cold, and she realised she could still faintly hear Adele's screams. She should have gone back inside, should have tried harder to calm the child, but the very idea of it made her stomach twist. If she went back right then, she knew she might lose control of herself, and that would serve no one. Mrs Temple, had she been here, would have told her to do first what was necessary for herself before she could think of helping others, and with that she made up her mind.

Rather than to go back inside Jane started following the path to Thornfield's gates, then kept walking beyond them. She knew from experience she was unlikely to ever meet anyone on the roads around the house which was her only wish at the moment.

Each step brought her back to herself even as the world seemed to fade all around. The fields were covered in a thin layer of ice and surrounded with light fog that hid the sky too, the air smelled only of sharp cold and dusty wind, while no birds or animals could be heard. Jane might have been the only living thing left in the world. Time passed around her without her notice until the wintery whiteness of her surroundings turned to darker shades. It was time for her to go home at last and take care of a heartbroken little girl.

Just as she turned back toward the house, a distant hum broke the cold silence, definitely bringing her back to reality. After a minute, a motorbike passed by her at perhaps greater speed than advisable, something not uncommon on that deserted road.

She would have quickly forgotten it if not for what happened next. A few metres ahead of her, the bike hit an ice layer on the road and slipped. Rider and bike fell on their side, the rider stopping before their vehicle that ended up in the ditch.

It all happened so fast that for a second Jane felt as if in a dream. She blinked, but that body remained in the middle of the road, unmoving. Instinct took over, almost a habit to her. Cautiously she walked to the person and careful not to touch them, she sat by them.

"Sir or madam, can you hear me? If you're conscious, can you say something or move?"

"It's sir," came the gruff answer from under the helmet. "How's my bike?"

"I wouldn't know sir," Jane replied, glad that the man was well enough to worry about such a thing. "It went to the ditch, and I don't think it should be too damaged though. Can you move? Are you in pain?"

"Damn right I'm in pain. That thing fell on me. Can you call for help?"

"I don't think anyone will hear me from here, sir. Can you try to sit up maybe?"

"I meant on your phone, you funny girl," the man grumbled as he carefully raised himself on his elbows.

"I don't have a phone."

He raised a hand to unbuckle and remove his helmet that had some heavy scratches on the right side. The first thing Jane noticed about him were two dark eyes staring at her in disbelief.

"You can't be older than seventeen, and you want me to believe you don't have a phone? You certainly are a bit of a comedian, aren't you?"

Jane frowned, unsure what was so funny about that. She did not like the way he was looking at her, half mocking and half angry, as if she were to blame for his accident. It did not help that her life before Thornfield had taught her to be wary of older men, and this one had a rough, uneven face that might have been that of a gangster in some old film noir.

"I'm twenty two sir," she said, "and rest assured that if I had known you would need my assistance, I would have borrowed a phone."

The man laughed.

"You are never that old, miss comedian! And if you don't have a phone, I suppose we'll have to use mine." He rummaged through the pocket of his leather jacket, and took out of it a flat phone with a shattered, concave screen. "Well, that option is out too. Doesn't matter, I think nothing's properly broken. Can you try to get my bike back on the road while I do my best to stand up?"

"I don't think that's advisable, sir. You should sit on the side of the road and let me run home. There is a phone there, and a car to move you somewhere warmer."

The man shrugged. "I'll be frozen to death by the time you get home, so that doesn't sound so advisable either."

"It will take me only ten minutes to get there, and only a few more to be back here for you." Interrupting his attempts to stand, the man threw Jane a curious look.

"Then you must leave in that old shack down the road? Funny, I didn't know they had a teenage daughter. Also thought the folks there were a good deal paler than you. "

"I'm twenty two sir," Jane insisted. "And Thornfield is not a shack. But I live and work there, and it's not so far, if you think you can wait a little."

"I don't like waiting, and I don't fancy spending the night anywhere but at home. Get my bike to me, or get me to my bike. That would be more helpful than calling an ambulance."

In spite of his rudeness, Jane could not leave that stranger to fend for himself on such an evening. Perhaps if he was forced to walk even a few steps, he would realise how unwise his plan was and agree to let her run home to get help, so she offered to let him use her as a crutch to go to his bike.

"It looks too heavy for me to move," she argued. "If it is to go back on the road, you will have to do it."

"Let's have it your way then, since you're too stubborn to really want to help!"

Jane almost protested that she was helping plenty, but saw the man was smiling and though it was clear his right leg pained him, he now seemed rather amused by the whole situation.

Even with his limp, they had no trouble getting to the bike, and Jane did help getting it out of the ditch. She once more protested he should not ride it again so soon, but he laughed it off.

"I'll be fine, little miss comedian. Now you go home quickly, it's too late for a girl your age to be outside in company of some old man. Your parents won't like it."

Jane was about to protest once more when the man winked at her, clearly entertained by his joke.

He left soon after, not much slower than before his accident. Jane waited until she could no longer hear his bike then started walking home again, musing on those very strange twenty four hours in her usually quiet life.

She eventually returned to an oddly lively Thornfield, all the lights on and everyone running this way or that. They did not even notice Jane at first, but when the Leah, the maid, saw her, she forced her into a tight hug.

"Well, there you are! We all kinda thought you'd had enough and left for good maybe! And then Mr Rochester who arrived without warning and told us he'd had an accident, and that damn child till crying... Well, I'm glad you're back!"

"Mr Rochester is here?"

"Yes, he does that sometimes, just come without telling anyone and then complain we're not ready for him. He's in his room with Alice now, if you want to go and meet him."

"I'm sure he's in good hands with Mrs Fairfax," Jane protested, unwilling to risk her newly regained balance by meeting another stranger. "I'll go see Adele, that should be more useful."

Leah did not insist, and Jane went to the nursery. Adele was still, there still crying, but all that could come of her now were dry sobs. She jumped on Jane's arms when she saw her and after some reassurance that Jane did not intend to leave her, the child finally started calming down. Jane sat with her in a chair and pet her hair the way she had often seen Kakou do it, until Adele fell asleep on her lap.

Around them, the world kept moving. A car came to stop in front of the house, people talked and walked by the door of the nursery without a glance inside. Just as had happened outside, Jane felt herself slip outside of time. Her breath started falling into the same rhythm as Adele's, slow and steady. She knew she was dozing off and did not care, glad of this peaceful moment, of the child's trust.

Jane might have fallen asleep somewhat, because she was startled when she heard Mrs Fairfax call her name from the door.

"I'm glad to see you could calm her," the old lady said in a low voice. "Mr Rochester has arrived, and he's sprained his ankle in a bike accident. He's lucky that's all he had, but he'll still need rest, and I was worried it might upset him to hear Adele."

"I'm sorry for leaving this way, I was..."

"Don't worry dear, you've been dealing with her since Kakou left, anyone would have needed a break. Now, how about I have Leah fix you a bit of dinner? I just need to put away that helmet first, and then I'll be taking care of you for a bit."

Fully awake now, Jane finally noticed the round helmet in Mrs Fairfax's hands, the exact sort a biker might use. It had scratches on the right side, and they were in an oddly familiar pattern.

"Is that Mr Rochester's then?"

"He's lucky he had it, or the whole thing might have been more serious. Can you imagine though? He had his accident not even a mile from here, some ice on the road I think... I don't know why he even rides that thing, it's too dangerous for anyone with senses."

Jane did not reply, instead resuming her petting of Adele's hair.

Life at Thornfield was going to change far more than she might have imagined when Kakou left.

I'm trying to follow the rhythm of the original novel (thanks Sparknotes, after saving me in University you save me in writing)

Again, if I'm talking shit on any subject or if you think some tags should be added, please tell me, I aim to improve!

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Jane learns some more about her employer

The day after Mr Rochester's arrival started normally enough. Jane woke up early, took time for her personal studies (Kakou's departure made French less necessary but it was nice to have something to do, and Jane never missed a chance to doodle or read a bit) then she went to get Adele for breakfast.

The girl was still upset to have lost her nurse, but her mood brightened when Jane told her that her father was home. She cheerfully clapped her hands and begged to go see him immediately.

"We'll ask Mrs Fairfax if he isn't too busy," Jane promised. "But you must eat something first, and get dressed. Do you think you can do that?"

Adele could do it, and more. She was careful to eat her full breakfast, even though she usually left it half untouched, then made a point to clean herself and brush her hair by herself. Jane had to help a bit with that because Adele had more enthusiasm than skill, but it touched her to see her little student so excited. However rude Mr Rochester had been to Jane the previous evening, his daughter seemed to adore him.

For her outfit, Adele settled on a sparkly yellow tutu and a white embroidered shirt, both of which she explained were gifts from her parents. Jane had to insist on some tights too, and then negotiated for shoes so the outfit was complete.

Adele had never been so cheerful, she kept clapping to herself, twirling and signing excitedly about her father, hands too fast and shaky for Jane to properly follow. But this excitement died down abruptly when Mrs Fairfax told them that Mr Rochester was not at liberty to see them at that time.

"He's a very busy man, and a sprained ankle or a country holiday won't change that," she explained. "He said no one was to disturb him today because he has important phone calls to make, but to wait him for dinner. He'll be wanting to eat with us, and then Adele can see him."

Adele was heartbroken at the news, and by the time they returned to the nursery, she was quietly crying. Taking pity on her after those last few rough days, Jane gave her the day off from any sort of schooling. The little girl did not even have the energy for playing though, still exhausted from her anger the previous day. In the end Adele sat on her teacher lap, huddled there like a lost kitten while Jane read and took notes from her book. It was a rather slow and joyless day, but they had both needed the calm.

Evening came, and their meal was served in the dinning room rather than the kitchen as usual. Leah was doing the service that night, when usually she and her husband ate with them, which felt odd to Jane. Odder though was the sight of Mr Rochester.

When Jane entered the room with Adele, her eyes immediately went to the man already

sitting there. As she had suspected, he was the rather rude stranger she had met the previous afternoon. Now though, she could properly see him. He truly wasn't handsome, shoulders too square, mouth too large. His only handsome feature was big black eyes, but they were under unkept eyebrows that half hid them. Just like the previous night, Jane was struck by the thought he would have been perfect in the role of a cinematic mobster.

At her side, Adele was entertaining very different thoughts. She froze at the sight of her father, then ran to him. The man looked up from his phone and with a strained smile pulled his daughter on his lap.

"I see you've grown again. Did you start speaking at last?"

Adele shook her head and started signing excitedly at her father, but it was clear he was not paying her attention. He was instead staring right at Jane, his expression one of mild displeasure. A creeping feeling of discomfort, of fear even slowly tried to overtake her, and for a brief moment she was tempted to run away again. Thankfully Mrs Fairfax saved her from having to do any such thing. She sat down on the seat nearest their employer, smiling kindly.

"That is miss Eyre or course," she explained. "She is doing wonders with Adele, you'll see how improved she is!"

"Not so improved she can speak," Mr Rochester grunted. "Tell me miss Eyre, did you let that girl dress herself that she's looking like such a little clown?"

Adele's face fell at the accusation, and Jane felt fiercely protective of the poor child, being attacked so when she had longed all day for her father.

"She insisted so, and I saw no reason to deny her. She is covered enough for the weather and decency's sake, and she told me these clothes very dear to her. I believe you gifted her the skirt, sir?"

"Well aren't you rude, throwing my own bad taste to my face this way! Although I can't say I remember buying this, so you might have invented this just to get the upper hand on me. No, no, don't look so offended, I'm only joking. Have you no sense of humour?"

"Perhaps not the same as you, sir," Jane retorted as she sat down on the seat furthest from her employer. "Come here Adele, it's time to eat."

But the child made no move to leave her father, who laughed and pat her head.

"I don't think you'll get her back tonight," Mr Rochester said, suddenly looking fondly at the child. "She can be quite stubborn, and I think she's my burden for the night. Come on Adele, don't you know how to tie a napkin on your neck? There's a good girl. Now be careful not to stain my shirt or I'll have to be angry."

Adele did not make any stains on her father's clothes, nor her own. She ate slowly but carefully, and even forced herself to finish the portion her father had served her. In fairness to him, Mr Rochester seemed to know his daughter's appetite and barely gave her more than what Jane herself would have done. He did complain once or twice that she made too much noise when chewing, but overall he seemed quite happy to have his daughter on his knees while he talked with Mrs Fairfax.

Still exhausted from the last few days, Jane could not follow conversation. Lucky for her, Mrs Fairfax had plenty to say for both of them, chattering about everything new in the house and in the neighbourhood. Mr Rochester looked quite bored by it all, but he still asked questions here and there, so he must not have minded too much.

Once the main course was over and cheese had been eaten, Mr Rochester decided they would have dessert in the library, since the seats there were more comfortable and there was a large chimney. Leah must have been informed of those plans already, because she had already put two armchairs and a sofa near the fire, with a glass table in the middle on which she put some

warm apple pie.

"Looking delicious as always," Rochester commented as she served them. "Now miss Eyre, if you don't mind, I'm somewhat curious about you. I feel I should learn more about my daughter's teacher, and even more so after your frightful attempt on my life yesterday."

"What do you mean?" Mrs Fairfax cried. "I can't believe Jane would do anything..."

"But she did," he insisted with a smirk. "She summoned the patch of ice on which my bike slipped. Alice, you've hired me a witch or maybe some alien. Or perhaps you are some fairy trying to kidnap me?"

"I don't think there have been any fairies in the last hundred years, sir," Jane retorted in perfect seriousness. "And if I were some dark creature come to kill you, I should have done a better job of it."

That answer made her employer smile some more, though Mrs Fairfax seemed rather confused by it.

"Incompetence happens to everyone and everything," Mr Rochester said. "But fine, I'll pretend to believe you. So, how do you like life at Thornfield? Not too lonely and gloomy for your tastes I hope?"

"It is a very fine place, and I like it very much," Jane answered. "I am glad I had a chance to come here."

"You worked at Lowood Institute before coming here, didn't you? I imagine after that anything is an improvement. Some acquaintances of mine had recommended it for Adele, but after I did research on the place, I was surprised it has not been closed off a few years ago."

"Any institution of that sort has a dark history, sir. Lowood is still far from perfect, but the new management is making real efforts to offer the children better living conditions and a brighter future."

"You sound just like a brochure. Weren't there over a hundred deaths?"

Jane paled and nodded.

"The epidemic was a dreadful thing," she said, forcing the words out of her throat as memories tried to resurface. "Things are better now. The staff responsible for that tragedy is almost entirely gone. Some of the patients can finish high school these days, and those willing are even allowed to pursue a degree. Things are better now."

"Still an odd place to work at for a girl as young," Mr Rochester insisted, and though she said nothing, Mrs Fairfax looked just as curious.

"Everyone deserves help and caring love, even those most abandoned by their families. I don't believe anyone could see the pain and loneliness some of these children feel and not want to help."

Mr Rochester grimaced at the thought.

"Don't be so quick to believe that everyone feels what you feel. There are plenty of people out there who would not feel an ounce of pity for anyone abnormal, not even children. Still, all the more power to you for your great heart, and I'm glad you're putting it to work on Adele now. And what do you do in your free time then? Rescue birds fallen from their nests? Look for a cure to all diseases? You seem to have the mind of a missionary, I'll bet you never stop the sacrifices to help others."

Irony never was Jane's strong suit, but when it was as thick and obvious, even she could not miss it. It somehow made things easier for her; whatever her employer said, it might be easier to assume it was not in earnest. Finally, she was starting to feel a little more at ease.

"I lack the background in biology for curing the ills of the world, and birds usually do well enough without me," she retorted. "I like to study in my free time, or to draw if the right mood strikes."

"Drawing is the disease of your generation," Mr Rochester proclaimed as if the notion were a personal insult to him. "And I suppose you are like every introverted teenager out there, scribbling super heroes and big eyed anime?"

"Not at all, sir," Jane protested, who in her life had never been allowed to open a comic book of any origin. "I paint things of my own imagination."

"Quick to defend yourself! Now I must see some of your work or I won't be convinced."

"I'm sure that is not necessary."

"Then I must insist. Go get me some of your work, and in the meanwhile I'll question Adele a little and test your worth as a teacher."

Jane agreed at last, knowing this was a fight she would not win. This man before her was one unaccustomed to be refused anything, and she had already crossed him enough. She went back to her room to grab her portfolio, then quickly brought it back to the library.

"These are not cartoons," Mr Rochester admitted. "And I suppose they are quite good, too."

"They are amazing!" Mrs Fairfax exclaimed. "You should try to sell them, dear. A friend of mine has a daughter who sells postcards she makes, and it works well for her."

Jane looked down, feeling the compliments had to be polite rather than sincere. She knew well enough the value of her own work, which she had compared to that of far more skilled artists. There was more passion and ambition than anything in those watercolours, and she felt keenly how much she had failed to capture her original ideas.

"They are not too bad," Mr Rochester admitted, his eyes still on the sheets of paper. "Rather more romantic and emotional than I would have expected though. There's something of Rackham in those. I'm starting to think you are full of surprises, miss Eyre, although I doubt you'd have much success in the postcard business. I fear you'll have to keep teaching a little longer."

The notion was so ridiculous Jane could only smile.

"I would not like to quit teaching anyway. I am of more use as a teacher than as an artist."

"And yet you let your student stay up so late," Rochester retorted abruptly, handing her back her paintings in an almost violent gesture. "It is almost nine, I certainly hope that Adele is usually in bed at that hour. Look at her, she can barely keep her eyes open!"

It was true enough that the little girl, in spite of her excitement, was starting to look sleepy. It was equally likely that her father too was tired, but too proud to admit it, and would have used any excuse to get rid of his company.

Jane, exhausted too, was only too happy to take Adele to bed, and Mrs Fairfax politely followed them.

"I think he is happy of your work with Adele," Mrs Fairfax said as they walked together. "At least, it seemed that way to me."

"He is a peculiar man."

Mrs Fairfax smiled. "He is rich enough to be allowed some oddities. He used to be pretty cheerful when he was younger, but life wasn't so kind to him. My husband knew more about it than me, so I'll just say his father and brother weren't very kind to him."

Jane did not ask for details, to which Mrs Fairfax was so disappointed she was compelled to give them anyway.

"His father founded the company that Mrs Rochester now owns," she explained. "He left it all to his oldest son, because he liked money a bit too much, then pushed Edward into some bad business, something in Africa I think. He had a lot of problems there, and he cut off ties with his family. He didn't even come back for his father's funeral, but when his elder brother died too... Well, he had to come back then, since the company became his. And he's doing a nice job of it, as I understand it."

Jane had been at Lowood long enough to have seen the disastrous effects family could have on people. This sad story could also explain why Mr Rochester appeared to try and keep a distance between his daughter and himself, if this was how he had been treated in his youth. She did not pity him though, as he did not seem to be a man who would tolerate it.

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