



## A dramatic incident

*Jane is attracted to the enigmatic master of Thornfield Hall, Mr Rochester. At night she is often disturbed by mysterious noises coming from the floor above her.*

Charlotte Brontë  
*Jane Eyre*  
(1847)

Chapter 15

And was Mr Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No, reader: gratitude, and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see; his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire. Yet I had not forgotten his faults; indeed, I could not, for he brought them frequently before me. He was proud, sardonic, harsh to inferiority of every description: in my secret soul I knew that his great kindness to me was balanced by unjust severity to many others. He was moody, too; unaccountably<sup>1</sup> so; I more than once, when sent for<sup>2</sup> to read to him, found him sitting in his library alone, with his head bent on his folded arms<sup>3</sup>; and, when he looked up, a morose<sup>4</sup>, almost a malignant, scowl<sup>5</sup> blackened his features. But I believed that his moodiness, his harshness, and his former faults of morality (I say *former*, for now he seemed corrected of them) had their source in some cruel cross of fate<sup>6</sup>. I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged. I thought there were excellent materials in him; though for the present they hung together<sup>7</sup> somewhat spoiled and tangled<sup>8</sup>. I cannot deny that I grieved for his grief<sup>9</sup>, whatever that was, and would have given much to assuage<sup>10</sup> it.

Though I had now extinguished my candle and was laid down in bed, I could not sleep for thinking of his look when he paused in the avenue, and told how his destiny had risen up before him<sup>11</sup>, and dared him<sup>12</sup> to be happy at Thornfield.

‘Why not?’ I asked myself. ‘What alienates him from the house? Will he leave it again soon? Mrs Fairfax<sup>13</sup> said he seldom stayed here longer than a fortnight at a time; and he has now been resident eight weeks. If he does go, the change will be doleful<sup>14</sup>. Suppose he should be absent spring, summer, and autumn: how joyless sunshine and fine days will seem!’

I hardly know whether I had slept or not after this musing<sup>15</sup>; at any rate, I started wide awake<sup>16</sup> on hearing a vague murmur, peculiar and lugubrious, which sounded, I thought, just above me. I wished I had kept my candle burning: the night was drearily<sup>17</sup> dark; my spirits were depressed. I rose and sat up in bed, listening. The sound was hushed<sup>18</sup>.

I tried again to sleep; but my heart beat anxiously: my inward tranquillity was broken. The clock, far down in the hall, struck two. Just then it seemed my chamber-door was touched; as if fingers had swept the panels in groping<sup>19</sup> a way along the dark gallery outside. I said, ‘Who is there?’ Nothing answered. I was chilled<sup>20</sup> with fear.

All at once I remembered that it might be Pilot<sup>21</sup>, who, when the kitchen-door chanced to be left open, not unfrequently found his way up to the threshold<sup>22</sup> of Mr Rochester’s chamber: I had seen him lying there myself in the mornings. The idea calmed me somewhat: I lay down. Silence composes the nerves; and as an unbroken hush now reigned again through the whole house, I began to feel the return of slumber<sup>23</sup>. But it was not fated that I should sleep that night. A dream had scarcely approached my ear, when it fled affrighted<sup>24</sup>, scared by a marrow-freezing<sup>25</sup> incident enough.

This was a demoniac laugh – low, suppressed, and deep – uttered<sup>26</sup>, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin-laughter<sup>27</sup> stood at my bedside – or rather, crouched<sup>28</sup> by my pillow: but I rose, looked round, and could see nothing; while, as I still gazed, the unnatural sound was reiterated: and I knew it came from behind the panels. My first impulse was to rise and fasten the bolt<sup>29</sup>; my next, again to cry out, ‘Who is there?’

Something gurgled and moaned<sup>30</sup>. Ere long<sup>31</sup>, steps retreated up the gallery towards the third-storey staircase: a door had lately been made to shut in that staircase; I heard

- 1 unaccountably. Inesplicabilmente.
- 2 sent for. Mandata a chiamare.
- 3 folded arms. Braccia conserte.
- 4 morose. Tetro, imbronciato.
- 5 scowl. Cipiglio.
- 6 cross of fate. Contrarietà del destino.
- 7 they hung together. Si trovavano uniti.
- 8 spoiled and tangled. Rovinati e ingarbugliati.
- 9 I grieved for his grief. Soffrivo per il suo dolore.
- 10 to assuage. Alleviare.
- 11 had risen up before him. Si era levato contro di lui.
- 12 dared him. Lo aveva sfidato.
- 13 Mrs Fairfax. La governante.
- 14 doleful. Doloroso.
- 15 musing. Meditazione, riflessione.
- 16 I started wide awake. Mi svegliai con un sobbalzo.
- 17 drearily. Cupamente, desolatamente.
- 18 was hushed. Fu zittito, soffocato.
- 19 in groping. Nel cercare a tentoni.
- 20 chilled. Raggelata.
- 21 Pilot. Il cane di Mr Rochester.
- 22 threshold. Soglia.
- 23 slumber. Sonno, assopimento.
- 24 it fled affrighted. Fuggì spaventato.
- 25 marrow-freezing. Da gelare il midollo.
- 26 uttered. Emessa.
- 27 goblin-laughter. La persona che aveva riso come uno spirito maligno.
- 28 crouched. Rannicchiata.
- 29 fasten the bolt. Chiudere il chiavistello.
- 30 gurgled and moaned. Gorgogliò e si lamentò.
- 31 Ere long. Presto.



50 it open and close, and all was still<sup>32</sup>.

'Was that Grace Poole<sup>33</sup>? and is she possessed with a devil?' thought I. Impossible now to remain longer by myself: I must go to Mrs Fairfax. I hurried on my frock and a shawl<sup>34</sup>; I withdrew the bolt and opened the door with a trembling hand. There was a candle burning just outside, and on the matting<sup>35</sup> in the gallery. I was surprised at this  
55 circumstance: but still more was I amazed to perceive the air quite dim<sup>36</sup>, as if filled with smoke; and, while looking to the right hand and left, to find whence<sup>37</sup> these blue wreaths<sup>38</sup> issued, I became further aware of a strong smell of burning.

Something creaked<sup>39</sup>: it was a door ajar<sup>40</sup>; and that door was Mr Rochester's, and the smoke rushed in a cloud from thence<sup>41</sup>. I thought no more of Mrs Fairfax; I thought  
60 no more of Grace Poole, or the laugh: in an instant, I was within the chamber. Tongues of flame darted<sup>42</sup> round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of blaze<sup>43</sup> and vapour, Mr Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep.

32 still. Immobile.

33 Grace Pool. La donna che si occupa di Bertha Mason, la moglie di Rochester.

34 my frock and a shawl. Il mio vestito e uno scialle.

35 matting. Stuoia.

36 dim. Offuscata.

37 whence. Da dove.

38 wreaths. Volute, anelli (di fumo).

39 creaked. Scricchiolò.

40 ajar. Socchiusa.

41 thence. Di là.

42 darted. Guizzavano.

43 In the midst of blaze. In mezzo alle fiamme.

## LITERARY COMPETENCE

### > VOCABULARY

**1 READ** the text and find the words deriving from the following.

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 grateful ..... | 5 mood .....    |
| 2 pleasure ..... | 6 account ..... |
| 3 frequent ..... | 7 malign .....  |
| 4 severe .....   | 8 motion .....  |

### > COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

**2 READ** the text again and describe the setting in time and place.

**3 ANSWER** the following questions.

- 1 What is Jane thinking about?
- 2 What does she wonder about?
- 3 What can she hear suddenly?
- 4 What time is it?
- 5 What deduction does she make?
- 6 What scares her the most?
- 7 How does she react?
- 8 What can she smell and who does she see?

### > COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

**4 IDENTIFY** the narrator and say whose point of view you share as a reader. What effect does the use of the first person create?

**5 FIND** where the narrator addresses the reader directly.

**6 FOCUS** on the method of presentation of the characters. Is it direct or indirect?



**7 LIST** the phrases and expressions referring to Mr Rochester in the following table.

Positive	Negative

**8 EXPLAIN** in what sense Mr Rochester can be regarded as a 'Romantic hero'.

**9 ANALYSE** Jane's character.

- 1 Underline the sentences that denote her attitude to Mr Rochester. How would you define it?
- 2 Trace the sequence of Jane's reactions from when she hears the strange noises to when she rushes into Mr Rochester's room.

First she is depressed and anxious. Then she is chilled with **(1)** ..... but tries to find a rational **(2)** ..... Finally she is **(3)** ..... and step by step becomes **(4)** ..... of what is happening.

- 3 Now choose some adjectives from the list below to describe Jane's personality:

passionate	self-revealing	impetuous	visionary	sensitive
analytical	restless	passive	determined	moody

**10 STUDY** the way the atmosphere of the text has been built up.

- 1 Does the author make use of objective elements or subjective data?
- 2 List sounds and noises mentioned in the extract.
- 3 What is their main connotation?
- 4 What atmosphere do they create?
- 5 Where is the climax? Are the readers led to expect it?

**11 POINT** out the Gothic elements present in the text as regards

- setting;
- characters;
- situation.

## > COMPETENCE: CONTRASTING AUTHORS

**12 DISCUSS.** Point out similarities and differences between the writing of the Brontë sisters and a previous or contemporary novelist.