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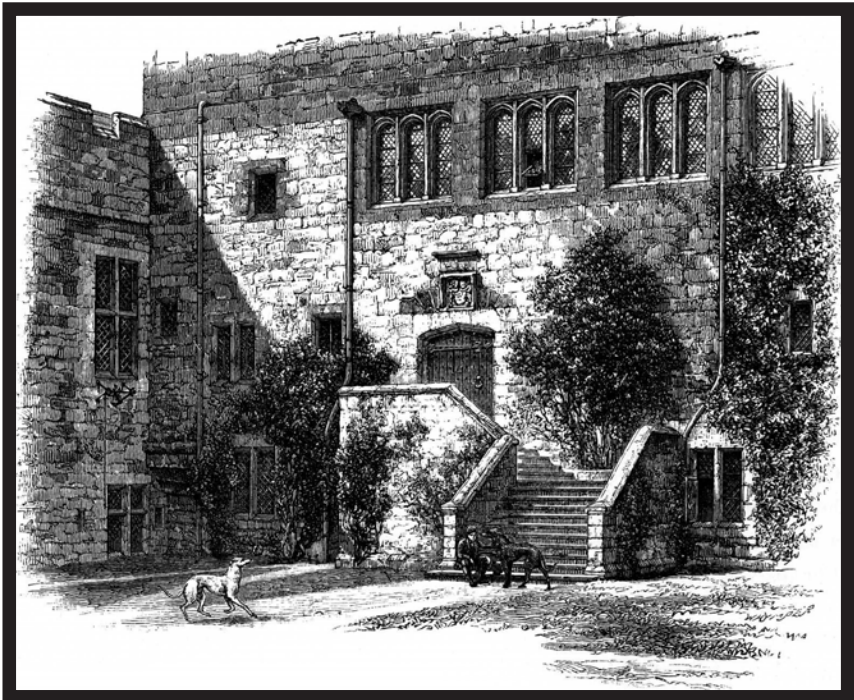
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## **Family Plays**

*Charlotte Brontë's*

# JANE EYRE

*Drama adapted by*  
THOMAS HISCHAK  
(100-minute version)



# JANE EYRE

Thomas Hischak once again affirms his abilities as a playwright in this skillful retelling of Charlotte Brontë's classic story. As with his best-selling adaptation of *Little Women*, Hischak preserves the heart-tugging emotions of the original novel while altering the work to give it an intrinsically dramatic feel. Condensed from the novel of more than 300 pages, this two-act play has a running time of approximately 100 minutes. An 85-minute version with suggestions for further cuttings is also available.

***Drama. Adapted by Thomas Hischak. Based on the story by Charlotte Brontë.*** Cast: 6m., 20w. or 4 m., 14 w. Expandable to 35 roles by adding schoolgirls. Hischak uses three different actresses to handle the part of Jane. We see her as a child as she suffers under the control of a cold-hearted aunt and as she grows into maturity at Lowood School. We see her later as a young woman who experiences both life's difficult trials and the love that makes those trials worth enduring. We see her as a mature woman, 12 years into a happy marriage, looking back on the past and guiding us through her memories. This final Jane remains on stage throughout the course of the entire play and is the audience's insight into thoughts and emotions which could otherwise have been easily lost in the transition from novel to play. An added benefit of the older Jane Eyre is that her narration continues throughout the scene changes, allowing the play to proceed without breaks in the action. Time: 19<sup>th</sup> century. Place: England. Costumes: period. Approximate running time: 100 minutes. Code: J59.

## Family Plays

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Jane Eyre

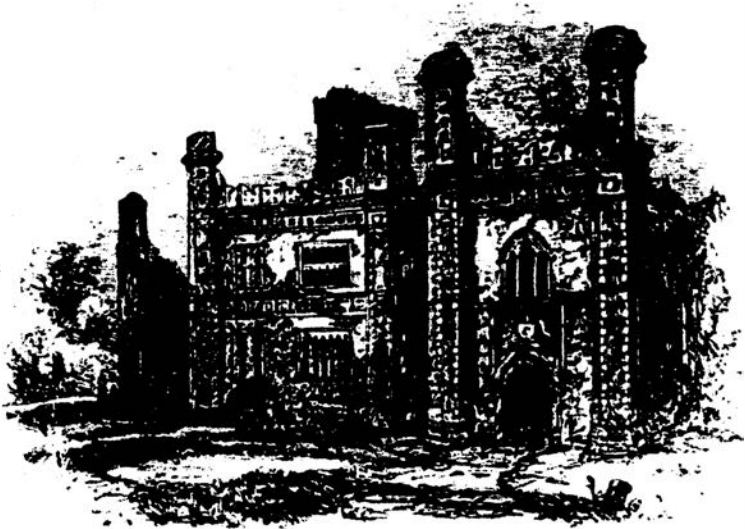
*Charlotte Brontë's*

# JANE EYRE

*Adapted for the stage by*

**THOMAS HISCHAK**

Full-Length Version



**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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## About the Play

Thomas Hischak has condensed the timeless classic *Jane Eyre*, originally a novel of over three hundred pages, into a two-act play with a running time of approximately 100 minutes. A shorter version, with suggestions for further cuttings, is also available from the publisher. Hischak has handled the adaptation in such a way that the plot maintains the emotions, the grandeur, and the majority of the original story line intended by Charlotte Brontë, yet at the same time allows *Jane Eyre* to successfully depart from the realm of the novel and take on a new form that is entirely and powerfully dramatic.

One of Hischak's changes that has made the script such an accomplished work is the fact that he uses three different actresses to handle the part of Jane. There is a young Jane at the age of 10, an older actress to play Jane at ages 18 and 19, and a third Jane looking back at events from 12 years in the future. This final Jane remains on stage throughout the course of the entire play and is the audience's insight into thoughts and emotions which could otherwise have been easily lost in the transition from novel to play. An added benefit of the older Jane Eyre is that her narration continues throughout the scene changes, allowing the play to proceed without breaks in the action.

Without doubling, the cast size would be in the range of 30-35 players, depending upon the number of girls one chooses to use at Lowood school. However, many of these roles are small parts, making double- and even triple-casting a matter of relative ease. This script includes suggested doubling to obtain a cast of 4 men, 14 women, and a variable group of girls for use at both the Lowood and Morton schools.

Thomas Hischak is a professor of theatre at the State University of New York College at Cortland. He is the author of numerous published plays and three books on the American Musical Theatre. With *Jane Eyre*, he has further enhanced a reputation already highly regarded. I. E. Clark Publications has also published his delightful dramatization of *Little Women*.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Jane Eyre, a young woman

### *At Gateshead*

Young Jane, ten years old  
 Mrs. Reed, her aunt  
 Georgiana and Eliza, her cousins  
 Bessie, a housemaid  
 The Ghost of Mr. Reed

### *At Lowood*

Mr. Brocklehurst, president of the school  
 Miss Temple, superintendent of the school  
 Miss Miller, a teacher  
 Helen Burns, a student  
 Girls at Lowood School  
 Jane, eighteen years old

### *At Thornfield*

Mrs. Fairfax, housekeeper at Thornfield  
 Mr. Edward Rochester, owner of Thornfield  
 Adele, his ward  
 Leah, a housemaid  
 Grace Poole, a servant  
 Lady Ingram, a dowager  
 Blanche and Mary Ingram, her daughters  
 Other lady guests  
 Richard Mason, a visitor from Jamaica  
 Rev. Wood, a minister  
 Bertha Rochester, a madwoman

### *At Marsh End*

St. John Rivers, a young clergyman  
 Diana and Marie, his sisters  
 Girls at Morton School

***Time and Place:*** 19<sup>th</sup> Century England

\*Suggestions for doubling available in the Production Notes (p. 70)



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### *Cast Doubling*

*[The following suggested doubling combinations can be used to reduce the size of the cast.]*

#### *Men*

Ghost of Uncle Reed, Mr. Mason  
Mr. Brocklehurst, Reverend Wood

#### *Women*

Diana Rivers, Lady at Party  
Marie Rivers, Lady at Party  
Miss Temple, Lady Ingram  
Miss Miller, Mary Ingram  
Helen Burns, girl at Morton  
Adele, girl at Lowood  
Bessie, Bertha Rochester  
Mrs. Reed, Grace Poole  
Georgiana, girl at Lowood, girl at Morton  
Eliza, girl at Lowood, girl at Morton  
Girls at Lowood, Girls at Morton

#### *Scenery*

The epic sweep of the tale of *Jane Eyre* calls for suggested scenery that does not change very much so that the action is not slowed by scene changes. The play is written so that Jane Eyre's narration should cover the setting up or striking of furniture pieces.

For the original production, the action was played in front of a large panorama of the Yorkshire countryside. Cutout silhouettes of Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End, and Ferndean were placed on the landscape at various points in the show to denote the location of the scenes

being played downstage. This proved to be an atmospheric, economic, and practical way to handle the scenery for the play.

*Furniture*

*Act I*

Prologue (bare stage)

Scenes 1-2

**Gateshead**

Red Room: large bed

Young Jane's Bedroom: small bed

Sitting Room: two chairs, table

Scenes 3-6

**Lowood School**

Schoolroom: long table, stool

Infirmary: small bed

Scenes 7-11

**Thornfield Hall**

Library: settee, long table, armchair, footstool,  
end table, two chairs

Rochester's Bedroom: large bed, bedside table

Grace's Bedroom: bed

*Act II*

Scene 1

**Thornfield Hall**

Garden: bench

**Gateshead**

Red Room: large bed

Scene 2-4

**Thornfield Hall**

Jane's Bedroom: bed, chair

Chapel: bare stage

Scenes 5-6

**Marsh End**

Jane's Bedroom: bed

Sitting Room: rocker, chair

Schoolroom: two long benches, teacher's desk

Scenes 7-8

**Ferndean**

Parlor: armchair, end table, window seat

*Properties*

In addition to the furniture listed previously, these hand props are needed for the play.

3 jump ropes .....	Young Jane, Adele, Girl
travel bag .....	Jane, Young Jane
book .....	Young Jane
hairbrush .....	Bessie
2 large crude wash basins.....	on Lowood School table
large porridge pot with ladle .....	monitors
wooden bowls .....	monitors
book .....	Helen
chalk slate .....	Miss Miller
bread roll .....	Helen
large picture book .....	Temple
sketch pad, pencil .....	Jane
period newspaper .....	Jane
opened letter .....	Jane
3 candlesticks.....	Fairfax, Jane, Rochester
wine glass .....	Rochester
tray with covered plate and mug .....	Grace
3 large skeleton keys .....	Rochester, Grace, Mrs. Fairfax
6 loose sketches .....	library table
elegant washbasin.....	Rochester bedroom
bloodied bandages and dressing .....	Mason
worn letter .....	Mrs. Reed
picture book .....	Adele
long lace veil .....	Bertha
prayer book .....	Wood
small hand bouquet .....	Jane
old, faded marriage certificate .....	Mason
opened letter .....	St. John
small tray with glass of water .....	Mrs. Fairfax
slings .....	Rochester

*Costumes*

Most characters have only one costume. Maids, governesses, housekeepers, teachers, school girls, and others often had one “uniform” outfit that they wore every day so it is not necessary for most characters to have costume changes. Jane, Adele, and Rochester are the only characters to have two completely different costumes. Here is a brief costume plot for the play.

*Women*

- Jane Eyre** ..... late Victorian skirt and jacket, white blouse  
**Young Jane** ..... plain dress and pinafore (add white bonnet and collar for Lowood scenes), black tights, cloak, bonnet  
**Jane** ..... dark skirt, white blouse (add jacket for some scenes), cloak, bonnet; simple white wedding dress with veil; full-length dressing gown  
**Georgiana & Eliza** ..... colorful and frilly frocks, big bows in hair, white stockings  
**Mrs. Reed** ..... fashionable skirt and jacket; nightgown (for Act II)  
**Bessie** ..... black housemaid dress with white apron and mop cap (remove apron and cap for act II)  
**Miss Temple** ..... black skirt, white blouse  
**Miss Miller** ..... black skirt, white blouse and bonnet  
**Helen Burns** ..... plain dress, white bonnet and collar, black tights  
**Mrs. Fairfax** ..... dark dress, quality material but not too fancy  
**Leah** ..... black housemaid dress, white apron and mop cap  
**Adele** ..... pink fashionable dress, bows in hair, white stockings; second dress for party and wedding scenes  
**Grace Poole** ..... black housemaid dress, white apron and mop cap  
**Lady Ingram** ..... fashionable dress; expensive jewelry  
**Blanche** ..... fashionable dress with plenty of frills; jewelry  
**Mary** ..... somewhat less fashionable dress  
**Party guests** ..... fashionable dresses  
**Bertha** ..... dirty white nightgown  
**Diana & Marie Rivers** ..... practical dark skirts, white blouses  
**Girls at Lowood** .... drab dresses, white bonnets and collars, black tights  
**Girls at Morton** ..... add colorful pinafores over the Lowood clothes

*Men*

**Ghost** ..... gray suit  
**Rochester** ..... dark three-piece suit; black tux with tails  
(for party and wedding scenes); coat, hat  
**Mr. Brocklehurst** ..... black tailcoat and trousers, white shirt, top hat  
**Mason** ..... light three-piece suit  
**Rev. Wood** ..... dark clerical suit or black cassock, white surplice over it  
**St. John** ..... gray three-piece suit

# *Jane Eyre*

DRAMATIZED BY THOMAS HISCHAK

## Act I Prologue

*[YOUNG JANE is seen in a pool of light, jumping rope and chanting to herself]*

YOUNG JANE. January, February,  
June and July;  
How many months  
Must pass me by?  
Winter, spring,  
Summer, fall;  
When, oh when  
Will my true love call?

MRS. REED'S VOICE. *[Sharply]* Jane Eyre! *[YOUNG JANE stops jumping]* Do you hear me, Jane Eyre!

*[YOUNG JANE drops her rope, covers her ears with her hands, freezes. JANE enters in traveling clothes and bag, wearily trudging her way as quickly as she can]*

MR. ROCHESTER'S VOICE. *[Pleading]* Jane! *[JANE stops]* Come back, Jane! Please come back—!

*[JANE drops her travel bag and covers her ears as well. The ENTIRE CAST enters (or are already on stage but are now lit) and calls out, a chorus of different shouts that gets more and more chaotic as they get louder]*

ALL. Jane Eyre!... Where are you, Jane?... Come back, Jane!... Look at this, Miss Jane!... You terrible sinner! Come here when I call you!... Miss Eyre! Miss Eyre!... Mademoiselle Jane!... Please come back!... Don't forget me, Jane!... Look at the girl! Look at the liar!... Dearest Jane!

*[YOUNG JANE and JANE run from the noise, end up at Center with JANE EYRE, whom they cling to for safety. The shouting stops. Silence. JANE EYRE addresses the audience]*

JANE EYRE. This is the story of Jane Eyre. It is a story that happened

over one hundred and fifty years ago. The world was very different then. But people do not change all that much. They still long for the same things. Sometimes those things are very simple, sometimes they are difficult to describe. As in the case of Jane Eyre. It is a story that I know well. It is my story.

JANE. And mine.

YOUNG JANE. And mine.

### Scene 1

*[All exit except JANE EYRE, JANE, YOUNG JANE, MRS. REED, BESSIE, GEORGIANA, and ELIZA. A large fourposter bed is brought out and placed center stage]*

JANE EYRE. I was born the daughter of a clergyman but both my parents died when I was very young. So I was sent to live at Gateshead, the home of my Uncle Reed.

JANE. He was my father's brother and a very dear man.

YOUNG JANE. I remember him. He always smelled like oranges and tobacco. And he would read to me.

JANE EYRE. But when I was only six he died too.

JANE. He was my only friend. On his deathbed he made my aunt promise that she would never send me away and would raise me with her own two daughters...

YOUNG JANE. Georgiana and Eliza! I hate them.

JANE. From the day my uncle died, I was always an unwanted relative at Gateshead.

JANE EYRE. I dined with the servants and was never included in family activities.

YOUNG JANE. I don't care. I hate them all.

JANE. Except Bessie.

YOUNG JANE. Except Bessie.

*[BESSIE can be most any age but at least twenty years old. She wears a maid's uniform. BESSIE goes to YOUNG JANE and combs her hair. JANE exits and JANE EYRE stands to the side of the stage.]*

JANE EYRE. *[At the exit]* A servant, but the only one who was not always after me.

BESSIE. *[Finished with the combing]* There you go, Miss Jane. Now

you keep out of mischief today. Mrs. Reed was in a frightful mood at breakfast this morning.

YOUNG JANE. Oh, she never takes notice of me anymore, Bessie. I think she hides in the sitting room if she hears me coming down the stairs.

BESSIE. I was speaking of Miss Georgiana and Miss Eliza. No quarreling with with those two or you'll have the whole house in an uproar. *[Exits]*

YOUNG JANE. It's not me who starts it—! Oh. I'll hide myself in the library with Uncle Reed's books.

*[YOUNG JANE sits on the floor and looks through a picture book. GEORGIANA and ELIZA leave Mrs. Reed and come into the scene. Both can be any age between eight and fifteen years old. They are dressed better than Young Jane]*

GEORGIANA. There she is!

YOUNG JANE. What do you want?

GEORGIANA. Say "What do you want, Miss Georgiana?" Come here when I call for you.

ELIZA. What are you reading now?

YOUNG JANE. Bewick's *History of British Birds*.

GEORGIANA. Show me. *[Puts out her hand]*

ELIZA. It's one of father's books. You know not a one of these books belongs to you.

GEORGIANA. Bring it to me here. *[YOUNG JANE rises, goes cautiously to Georgiana, who takes it from her]* You have no business to take our books. You are a dependent, Mama says. You have no money; your father left you none. You ought to beg and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now I'll teach you to rummage the book shelves. For they are ours. Go stand by the door there, out of the way of the mirror and the windows. *[YOUNG JANE moves a few steps away, then GEORGIANA throws the book at her. YOUNG JANE then attacks GEORGIANA, pulling her hair and wrestling her to the ground. ELIZA screams. BESSIE and MRS. REED come running in and pull YOUNG JANE off Georgiana]*

BESSIE. Dear! Dear! What fury to fly at Miss Georgiana like that!

MRS. REED. Frightful child! Take her away to the red room and lock her in there!

BESSIE. But, Mrs. Reed—

MRS. REED. The red room! Do as I say! *[To her daughters]* Come with me, girls, and tell how this shameful thing happened. *[The three exit]*



BESSIE. Didn't I say—?

YOUNG JANE. She threw that book at me!

BESSIE. Come quickly. What shocking behavior for a young girl!

*[BESSIE brings YOUNG JANE to the area near the fourposter bed and leaves her there. YOUNG JANE collapses to the floor and cries]*

JANE EYRE. The red room was my uncle's bedroom when he was alive. He died in that very bed. It was in this room where he lay in state. No one at Gateshead ever went in there, except for the housemaid to dust every Saturday. Eliza said it was haunted. Even Mrs. Reed would not stay in there.

YOUNG JANE. I'm not afraid!

JANE EYRE. But I was. A little. I cried myself to sleep. Then, in the middle of the night...

*[A strange sound is heard and the LIGHTS turn ghostly. YOUNG JANE sits up as voices are heard coming from all around her. They are the voices of MRS. REED, BESSIE, GEORGIANA, ELIZA, and others.]*

VOICES. Frightful child! Frightful child!... What a fury to fly at Miss Georgiana like that!... You have no business to take our books! You are a dependent!... Not a one of those books belong to you!... Take her to the red room and lock her in there!... Take her to the red room!... The red room!... The red room! The red room! The red room! The red room!

*[YOUNG JANE covers her ears but the voices continue.]*

JANE EYRE. I didn't know whether I was awake or asleep. Was it a nightmare or was it real?

*[The GHOST of MR. REED rises up from the bed, his face all white and wrapped in a death cloth around his jaws. He stands on the bed and stares at Young Jane]*

JANE EYRE. The room was haunted! It was the ghost of my uncle!

YOUNG JANE. Uncle Reed? It's me...! Jane Eyre...!

VOICE OF GHOST. What are you doing in the red room? Why have you come here? Who are you!

YOUNG JANE. Help! Help!... It's just Jane Eyre! They locked me in

here!... Help! Help! Let me out! [*She bangs on the door or on the floor*]  
 VOICE OF GHOST. No one sleeps in the red room but me! [*Howling*]  
 Meeeee!

VOICES. Lock her in the red room! The red room! The red room!  
 YOUNG JANE. No!! [*Collapses on the floor*]

[*Suddenly it is quiet, the LIGHTS go back to shadows, and the GHOST of MR. REED exits*]

JANE EYRE. Then I awoke. Or was I awake the whole time?  
 YOUNG JANE. Mrs. Reed! Mrs. Reed! Let me out! Please, let me out!  
 Bessie! Help me, Bessie!

[*BESSIE and MRS. REED appear out in the hall*]

MRS. REED. What is the horrible child up to now?  
 BESSIE. Miss Jane? Are you all right?  
 YOUNG JANE. Let me out, please, Bessie!  
 BESSIE. Are you hurt? What is the matter?  
 YOUNG JANE. I saw something! I think it was Uncle Reed! Please unlock the door!  
 MRS. REED. Stop this screaming immediately! She is just up to her naughty tricks. I'll not have her wake the girls!  
 BESSIE. Let me take her back to her bed. She'll be quiet then—  
 MRS. REED. No. I will not be taken in by your tricks, Jane Eyre. I shall let you out in the morning.  
 YOUNG JANE. Oh, punish me some other way, Aunt! Just don't make me stay in here! I shall be killed...!

MRS. REED. Silence! Go back to bed, Bessie. [*Starts to exit*]  
 BESSIE. [*Through the door*] Miss Jane, you'll be all right—  
 MRS. REED. Bessie! Back to bed! [*BESSIE and MRS. REED exit*]  
 YOUNG JANE. No...! Please...! [*Falls to the floor; LIGHTS out except on Jane Eyre*]

JANE EYRE. And that is the last thing I remembered. Whether I slept any more that night or I just fainted from fright, I'll never know. But when I awoke it was late the next day and I was in my own bed once again.

[*LIGHTS rise to show YOUNG JANE in a small bed with BESSIE sitting next to her. YOUNG JANE opens her eyes but is weak and confused*]

YOUNG JANE. Where...? Bessie?

BESSIE. It's Bessie, Miss Jane. My, you've been asleep ever so long. It's nearly dinner time.

YOUNG JANE. Am I ill? I feel so ill...

BESSIE. The apothecary has been and gone, Miss. He says it's a fever.

YOUNG JANE. Am I going to die?

BESSIE. Goodness no, child. You'll be up and about in a week or so. You fell sick in the red room with crying, I suppose.

YOUNG JANE. It was not the crying, Bessie. It was the ghost!

BESSIE. Now now, don't upset yourself again. You need to rest.

YOUNG JANE. It was Uncle Reed! And he was all white and—!

BESSIE. Shhhhh. No more talking. Close your eyes. I will stay with you.

YOUNG JANE. I shall never forget it... *[weakly]* I shall... I... *[falls asleep]*

BESSIE. Poor child. *[Covers her and holds her hand]* I do believe you did see something. I believe it well.

*[The LIGHTS fade out on BESSIE and YOUNG JANE]*

## Scene 2

JANE EYRE. I never did forget it. Although I was only ten years old, I believe it changed my life in some way. I always knew I was unwanted and I knew I was very unhappy. But now I realized I must live somewhere else if I was not to die of sadness or grief. Two months after this incident a visitor came to Gateshead.

*[A table and two chairs are set up. MRS. REED sits in one chair and MR. BROCKLEHURST in the other. He is a stern, middle-aged man in a severe black suit. BESSIE and YOUNG JANE enter on the side]*

BESSIE. Come along, Miss Jane. The missus has been asking for you in the parlor.

YOUNG JANE. Whatever for? She never wants to see me.

BESSIE. Hurry! *[They cross to the parlor area]*

BROCKLEHURST. Is this the girl?

MRS. REED. It is, sir. Bessie, you may leave.

BESSIE. Yes, ma'am. *[Exits hesitantly]*

BROCKLEHURST. Her size is small. What is her age?

MRS. REED. Ten years.

BROCKLEHURST. Your name, girl?

YOUNG JANE. Jane Eyre.

BROCKLEHURST. Well, Jane Eyre, are you a good child? [*A pause; she looks to Mrs. Reed*]

MRS. REED. Perhaps the less said on that subject the better, Mr. Brocklehurst.

BROCKLEHURST. Sorry indeed to hear it. Come here. [*YOUNG JANE moves closer to him*] No sight is so sad as that of a naughty child. Especially a naughty little girl. Do you know where the wicked go after death?

YOUNG JANE. They go to hell.

BROCKLEHURST. And what is hell? Can you tell me that?

YOUNG JANE. A pit full of fire.

BROCKLEHURST. Precisely. And should you like to fall into that pit, to be burning forever?

YOUNG JANE. No, sir.

BROCKLEHURST. And what must you do to avoid the everlasting fires of hell?

YOUNG JANE. [*After a pause*] I must keep in good health and not die.

BROCKLEHURST. That answer proves you have a wicked heart. You must pray to God to change it, to give you a new and clean one.

MRS. REED. You see what I referred to in my letter, Mr. Brocklehurst. This little girl has not the character nor disposition I would wish my daughters to be exposed to. Should you admit her into Lowood school, I should be glad if the teachers were requested to keep a strict eye on her. And, above all, to guard against her worst fault: a tendency to deceit! I mention this in your hearing, Jane Eyre, so that you may not try and deceive Mr. Brocklehurst.

BROCKLEHURST. Deceit is, indeed, a sad fault in a child. It is akin to a falsehood and all liars will have their place in the fires of hell. She shall be watched, Mrs. Reed.

MRS. REED. I should wish her to be brought up in a manner suiting her prospects. To keep her humble, she must be kept useful. And as for vacations, she will, with your permission, spend them always at Lowood.

BROCKLEHURST. A perfectly judicious decision, madam. Humility is a Christian grace and one peculiarly appropriate to the pupils of Lowood. Plain and simple frocks, all hair cut short and practical, unsophisticated accommodations, food of the kind needed to work and study but no more.

MRS. REED. I quite approve. Had I sought all over England, I could scarcely have found a system more exactly fitting a child like Jane Eyre.

BROCKLEHURST. And I trust she will show herself grateful for the inestimable privilege you have given her. [*Rises*] Good day, Mrs. Reed. All shall be arranged as we spoke of.

MRS. REED. I will send her then as soon as possible, Mr. Brocklehurst. For I assure you, I feel anxious to be relieved of a responsibility that was becoming too irksome.

BROCKLEHURST. No doubt, madam. No doubt. Goodbye. [*He exits.*  
*An awkward pause*]

MRS. REED. Go out of the room, Jane Eyre. I am done with you.

YOUNG JANE. [*Starts to exit, then comes back*] I am not deceitful. If I were I should say I loved you. But I declare I do not love you. I dislike you the worst of anybody in this world!

MRS. REED. How dare you—!

YOUNG JANE. How dare I, Mrs. Reed? Because it is the truth! I am glad you are no blood relation of mine. I will never call you “aunt” again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up. And if anyone asks me how I liked you and how I was treated, I will tell them how you locked me up in the red room even though I pleaded with you to let me out! Some people may think you are a good woman. But you are not. You are bad and cold-hearted. It is *you* that are deceitful!

MRS. REED. [*Controlling her temper*] My, but you are passionate. There’s a dear... Go to your room and lie down.

YOUNG JANE. I am not your dear. And I will not lie down. You had best send me to school soon, Mrs. Reed, for I hate to live here! [*Exits*]

MRS. REED. I will indeed send her to school soon.

[*MRS. REED exits. BESSIE enters with a small cloak and carpet bag*]

JANE EYRE. Mrs. Reed was as good as her word and made arrangements for me to leave for Lowood within the week. I was to depart at dawn, long before Mrs. Reed or Georgiana or Eliza were awake. I was glad of it but I did feel sad about leaving Bessie.

BESSIE. Come along, Miss Jane. The coach stops at the crossroads in ten minutes. [*YOUNG JANE enters*] Here’s your cloak. And there’s a biscuit and a bit of fruit in your bag.

YOUNG JANE. Thank you, Bessie. [*Puts on cloak*]

BESSIE. You’re such a poor, frightened little thing, for all your bold talk. Come and give me a kiss goodbye. Or will you say you’d rather not?

YOUNG JANE. I’ll kiss you goodbye, Bessie, and welcome it. [*Kisses her*]

BESSIE. So maybe you’re not so glad to leave me?

YOUNG JANE. Not at all, Bessie. Since Uncle Reed died, you are the only kind person I have known—!

BESSIE. Let's not have such talk or you'll get me crying. You do yourself proud at that school, do you hear? And watch that furious tongue of yours. For you are a good girl at heart, you are, Jane Eyre. *[They embrace as LIGHT fades on them]*

### Scene 3

JANE EYRE. Fifty miles I traveled in the coach with strangers, never knowing how much longer I had to go. Then late that night the driver woke me and I was let off at the gates of Lowood Institution, a long stone building with high walls and a little light coming from the many windows.

*[The SOUND of a coach driving away. LIGHTS up on YOUNG JANE and MISS MILLER. She is a middle-aged woman, a bit spinsterish and gloomy]*

MILLER. Jane Eyre?

YOUNG JANE. Yes, ma'am.

MILLER. This way. *[They cross the stage to where MISS TEMPLE is waiting. She is middle-aged and has a warm if reserved personality]*

JANE EYRE. Into the dark stone building I went. All was quiet. I neither saw nor heard any other students.

MISS TEMPLE. The child is very young to be sent alone. She had better be put to bed soon. She looks tired. Are you tired?

YOUNG JANE. A little, ma'am.

TEMPLE. And hungry too, no doubt. Let her have some supper before she goes to bed, Miss Miller. *[To JANE]* Is this the first time you have left your parents to come to school, little one?

YOUNG JANE. My parents are dead.

TEMPLE. I see. Can you read and write?

YOUNG JANE. Yes, ma'am.

TEMPLE. And sew? Do you sew?

YOUNG JANE. A little.

TEMPLE. *[Touches her cheek gently]* I hope you shall be a good girl, Jane Eyre.

YOUNG JANE. Yes, ma'am.

*[MISS MILLER and YOUNG JANE exit. MISS TEMPLE watches them go. A long table (or a few tables) is set up with large wash basins on it. MISS TEMPLE exits]*

JANE EYRE. She took me through a long dark passageway to the kitchen where there were some stale rolls for me to eat. They were cold. The kitchen fire was out and it was cold too. The whole building was cold. And where were the other girls? I did not see any of them until morning.

*[A group of GIRLS enter noisily. There can be any number of girls. They range in age from seven to fourteen and all wear the same brown pinafore and cap. MISS MILLER enters]*

MILLER. Silence! *[The girls quiet down immediately and line up]* To the wash basins! *[The girls gather around the table to wash. But when they get there they hesitate]* What is the matter? Time to wash!

GIRL. Miss Miller...

MILLER. What is it?

GIRL. The water is frozen again.

MILLER. Very well. Monitors, remove the basins.

*[Two or three girls exit with wash basins as MISS TEMPLE enters with YOUNG JANE, who is dressed like the other girls now.]*

MILLER. The new girl. Where shall I put her, Miss Temple?

TEMPLE. Perhaps the third form.

MILLER. But she's so little.

TEMPLE. She can read and write. I think she will do well there.

MILLER. Yes, Miss Temple. *[To HELEN BURNS, one of the girls]* Burns!

HELEN. Yes, Miss Miller?

MILLER. Stop slouching.

HELEN. Yes, Miss Miller.

MILLER. New girl. *[Pointing to Young Jane]* Go to her. *[YOUNG JANE joins HELEN, who gives her a quick smile. Helen is a few years older than Young Jane, but frail and reclusive. The monitors enter with bowls of porridge and place them on the tables]* Formation for morning prayers. *[The GIRLS gather in lines, put their heads down]* Miss Temple...

TEMPLE. "Dearest and forgiving God"... *[Temple continues in silence as JANE EYRE speaks to the audience]*

JANE EYRE. Most of the girls were older than I. Few of them gave me any notice at all. They all appeared weary and were shivering with cold. The porridge seemed hot but it smelled terrible. I looked at the other girls and I could tell they smelled it too. I looked to the girl they called Burns. Her eyes were kind.

TEMPLE. ... “and wait for Your everlasting reward in Heaven. Amen.”

GIRLS. Amen.

MILLER. Monitors, serve the porridge. *[The same few GIRLS go to the large bowls and start to serve it into smaller bowls but soon stop]* Serve the porridge!

GIRL. I think it’s burnt, Miss Miller.

TEMPLE. Let me see. *[Goes to a table, tastes it]* It’s inedible. *[The GIRLS all start whispering at once]*

MILLER. Silence!

TEMPLE. They cannot possibly eat this. Have them take it away, Miss Miller.

MILLER. Monitors, remove the porridge. The rest, form for classes.

*[The porridge is taken away and the GIRLS exit as TEMPLE goes to MILLER]*

TEMPLE. Horrible stuff! It’s shameful.

MILLER. I shall have a word with the cook.

TEMPLE. There is some bread and cheese put aside for the governors’ meeting tomorrow. Give some to the girls after morning lessons.

MILLER. Yes, Miss Temple.

*[MILLER and TEMPLE exit as HELEN enters, sits and reads a book]*

JANE EYRE. I spoke to no one and no one spoke to me all that day. We studied in groups, each lesson set by the clock and very strickly adhered to. The teachers were firm but not cruel. Miss Miller always seemed to pick on the girl they called Burns. Miss Temple was the most gentle. I liked her immediately and sometimes even felt sorry for her because she seemed so concerned for us about the cold and the food. *[YOUNG JANE enters]* It wasn’t until the second day that we had some free time and I sought out the girl named Burns.

YOUNG JANE. Is your book interesting?

HELEN. I like it. *[Hands it to her]* You may look at it.

YOUNG JANE. *[Takes book]* I think it is too difficult for me.

HELEN. You could manage it. You read well for one your age. I’ve noticed.

YOUNG JANE. My name is Jane Eyre. *[Hands book back]* What is your name besides Burns?

HELEN. Helen. Are your mother and father dead?