



## Punishment

*Jane is sent away by Mrs Reed to Lowood Institution, a boarding school for orphaned girls. There she receives a scholastic education, but is very restrained by the strict discipline and lifestyle as well as the harshness of certain prominent figures, such as Miss Scatcherd and Mr Brocklehurst, the institution's main benefactor.*

Charlotte Brontë  
*Jane Eyre*  
(1847)

Chapter 7

'A careless girl!' said Mr Brocklehurst, and immediately after – 'It is the new pupil, I perceive.' And before I could draw breath<sup>1</sup>, 'I must not forget I have a word to say respecting her.' Then aloud: how loud it seemed to me! 'Let the child who broke her slate, come forward!'

Of my own accord I could not have stirred<sup>2</sup>; I was paralysed: but the two great girls who sat on each side of me, set me on my legs and pushed me towards the dread judge, and then Miss Temple<sup>3</sup> gently assisted me to his very feet, and I caught her whispered counsel<sup>4</sup>.

'Don't be afraid, Jane, I saw it was an accident; you shall not be punished.'

The kind whisper went to my heart like a dagger.

'Another minute, and she will despise me<sup>5</sup> for a hypocrite,' thought I; and an impulse of fury against Reed, Brocklehurst, and Co., bounded in my pulses at the conviction. I was no Helen Burns<sup>6</sup>.

'Fetch that stool?', said Mr Brocklehurst, pointing to a very high one from which a monitor had just risen: it was brought.

'Place the child upon it.'

And I was placed there, by whom I don't know: I was in no condition to note particulars; I was only aware that they had hoisted me up<sup>8</sup> to the height of Mr Brocklehurst's nose, that he was within a yard of me, and that a spread of shot orange and purple silk pelisses<sup>9</sup> and a cloud of silvery plumage extended and waved<sup>10</sup> below me.

Mr Brocklehurst hemmed<sup>11</sup>.

'Ladies,' said he, turning to his family; 'Miss Temple, teachers, and children, you all see this girl?'

Of course they did; for I felt their eyes directed like burning-glasses against my scorched skin.

'You see she is yet young; you observe she possesses the ordinary form of childhood; God has graciously given her the shape that He has given to all of us; no signal deformity points her out as a marked character. Who would think that the Evil One had already found a servant and agent in her? Yet such, I grieve<sup>12</sup> to say, is the case.'

A pause - in which I began to steady the palsy<sup>13</sup> of my nerves, and to feel that the Rubicon was passed; and that the trial, no longer to be shirked<sup>14</sup>, must be firmly sustained.

'My dear children,' pursued<sup>15</sup> the black marble clergyman, with pathos, 'this is a sad, a melancholy occasion; for it becomes my duty to warn you, that this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock<sup>16</sup>, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. Teachers, you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul; if, indeed, such salvation be possible, for (my tongue falters<sup>17</sup> while I tell it) this girl, this child, the native of a Christian land, worse than many a little heathen<sup>18</sup> who says its prayers to Brahma and kneels before Juggernaut<sup>19</sup> - this girl is - a liar!'

Now came a pause of ten minutes, during which I, by this time in perfect possession of my wits<sup>20</sup>, observed all the female Brocklehursts produce their pocket-handkerchiefs and apply them to their optics, while the elderly lady swayed herself to and fro<sup>21</sup>, and the two younger ones whispered, 'How shocking!'

- 1 draw breath. Prendere fiato.
- 2 could ... stirred. Non avrei potuto muovermi.
- 3 Miss Temple. Insegnante con cui Jane instaura un legame di stima e affetto.
- 4 whispered counsel. Consiglio sussurrato.
- 5 will despise me. Mi disprezzerà.
- 6 Helen Burns. Una studentessa della scuola.
- 7 Fetch that stool. Andate a prendere quello sgabello.
- 8 had hoisted me up. Mi avevano issato.
- 9 spread ... pelisses. Una distesa di mantelle di seta cangiante arancione e porpora.
- 10 silvery plumage ... waved. Piume argentate si stendevano e ondeggiavano.
- 11 hemmed. Si schiarì la voce.
- 12 I grieve. Mi duole.
- 13 to steady the palsy. A fermare la paralisi.
- 14 the trial ... shirked. La prova non più da evitare.
- 15 pursued. Proseguì.
- 16 flock. Gregge.
- 17 falters. Tartaglia.
- 18 heathen. Ateo.
- 19 Brahma ... Juggernaut. Brahma e Jagannatha sono due divinità indù.
- 20 wits. Facoltà mentali.
- 21 swayed ... fro. Si dondolava avanti e indietro.



Mr Brocklehurst resumed<sup>22</sup>.

50 'This I learned from her benefactress; from the pious and charitable lady who  
adopted her in her orphan state, reared her<sup>23</sup> as her own daughter, and whose kindness,  
whose generosity the unhappy girl repaid by an ingratitude so bad, so dreadful, that  
at last her excellent patroness was obliged to separate her from her own young ones,  
fearful lest<sup>24</sup> her vicious example should contaminate their purity: she has sent her  
here to be **healed**, even as the Jews of old sent their diseased to the troubled pool of  
55 Bethesda; and, teachers, superintendent, I beg of you not to allow the waters to stagnate  
round her.'

With this sublime conclusion, Mr Brocklehurst adjusted the top button of his  
surtout<sup>25</sup>, muttered<sup>26</sup> something to his family, who rose, bowed<sup>27</sup> to Miss Temple, and  
then all the great people sailed in state from the room. Turning at the door, my judge  
60 said: –

'Let her stand half an hour longer on that stool, and let no one speak to her during  
the remainder of the day.'

There was I, then, mounted aloft<sup>28</sup>; I, who had said I could not bear the shame of  
standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general  
65 view on a pedestal of infamy. What my sensations were, no language can describe; but  
just as they all rose, stifling my breath<sup>29</sup> and constricting my throat, a girl came up and  
passed me: in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! What  
an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me  
up<sup>30</sup>! It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength  
70 in the transit. I **mastered** the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand  
on the stool. Helen Burns asked some slight question about her work of Miss Smith,  
was chidden for the triviality of the inquiry<sup>31</sup>, returned to her place, and smiled at me  
as she again went by. What a smile! I remember it now, and I know that it was the  
effluence of fine intellect, of true courage; it lit up her marked lineaments, her thin face,  
75 her sunken<sup>32</sup> grey eye, like a reflection from the aspect of an angel. Yet at that moment  
Helen Burns wore on her arm 'the untidy badge<sup>33</sup>,' scarcely an hour ago I had heard her  
condemned by Miss Scatcherd to a dinner of bread and water on the morrow, because  
she had blotted<sup>34</sup> an exercise in copying it out. Such is the imperfect nature of man!  
such spots<sup>35</sup> are there on the disc of the clearest planet; and eyes like Miss Scatcherd's  
80 can only see those minute defects, and are blind to the full brightness of the orb<sup>36</sup>.

- 22 resumed. Riprese a parlare.
- 23 reared her. La allevò.
- 24 fearful lest. Per paura che.
- 25 surtout. Giacca.
- 26 muttered. Mormorò.
- 27 bowed. Si inchinò.
- 28 aloft. In alto.
- 29 stifling my breath. Trattenendo il respiro.
- 30 bore me up. Mi diede coraggio.
- 31 was chidden ... inquiry. Fu sgridata per la futilità della richiesta.
- 32 sunken. Infossato.
- 33 'the untidy badge'. Il distintivo del disordine.
- 34 blotted. Macchiato d'inchiostro.
- 35 spots. Macchie.
- 36 orb. Sfera.

## READING COMPETENCE

### 1 READ the text and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 burnt .....                                      | 6 short swordlike weapon ..... |
| 2 intruder .....                                   | 7 cured .....                  |
| 3 someone who does not tell the truth .....        | 8 avoid .....                  |
| 4 thin stone board used as a writing surface ..... | 9 terrible .....               |
| 5 controlled .....                                 | 10 rejected person .....       |

### 2 READ the text again and do the activities below.

- 1 Read lines 1-43 and answer the questions.
  - 1 What is Jane accused of?
  - 2 How is she punished?
  - 3 How does she react at first?
  - 4 What are Mr Brocklehurst's warnings to the pupils and the teachers?
  - 5 What does he think of Jane?

**2** Read the text to the end and find out

- the reaction of Mr Brocklehurst's family;
- the reason why Jane was sent to Lowood;
- Jane's sensations;
- who came by her and how she felt;
- the girl's punishment.

**3** The scene is narrated in

- A the first person.  
B the third person.

**4** The reader shares the point of view of

- A Miss Temple.  
B Helen Burns.  
C Jane.

**5** List the phrases and the expressions referring to Mr Brocklehurst. Then answer the question below.

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## He represents

- A the hypocrisy of many Victorian philanthropists.  
B the man who denies himself any luxury.  
C the pious man who really runs the institution in the name of the ideal of Christianity.

**6** Fill in the gaps with the words from the box.

reason	mortification	winner	conventionality	balance
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Mr Brocklehurst identifies morality with **(1)** ..... His philosophy teaches the **(2)** ..... of the body as a way to obtain a **(3)** ..... in which **(4)** ..... may be the ultimate **(5)** .....

**7** Complete the table below with words referring to Jane and those used to describe the other children.

Jane	Other children

**8** Underline the phrases which mark the progression of Jane's feelings.**9** What does she learn through the stool punishment?**10** Choose among the following expressions to describe Jane's character.

*plain, intense, shy, imaginative, passionate, passive, rebellious, impolite, independent, wishing for warmth and affection, defiant, looking for acceptance.*

**11** What is the role of Miss Temple and Helen Burns in the text?

➤ **COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

**3 DISCUSS.** Would a pupil be punished for blotting an exercise or breaking something nowadays? How has the issue of punishment changed since Jane Eyre's times?