



# Thornfield Hall

*Jane Stubbs*

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## Thornfield Hall Jane Stubbs

The Rochesters are very good at keeping secrets...

Thornfield Hall, 1821. Alice Fairfax takes up her role as housekeeper of the estate. But when Mr Rochester presents her with a woman who is to be hidden on the third floor, she finds herself responsible for much more than the house.

This is the story Jane Eyre never knew - a narrative played out on the third floor and beneath the stairs, as the servants kept their master's secret safe and sound.

## Thornfield Hall Details

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Author : Jane Stubbs

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## From Reader Review Thornfield Hall for online ebook

### Charlene says

This was such a disappointing read for me. While initially I was enjoying it - the account of the elder Mr. Rochester (the present Mr. Rochester's father) was interesting and Mrs. Fairfax - a poor widow, forced into service from her previous status as gentry - felt true to the vision of the original book *Jane Eyre*. When Bertha was introduced, I also felt like it was a sensitive portrait of a woman who has had a lot of hardships, but who is quite definitely dangerous at times (she seemed so initially) and that made me feel like this would be an intelligent reworking of *Jane Eyre* from the servant's point of view. Sadly as the story developed, the believability of this novel as a retelling of *Jane Eyre* became lost. Jane herself, was painted in such an unappealing way - as a pert, uptight thing - so naive in her innocence as to be almost stupid. Mrs. Fairfax seemed unable to truly respect her, yet she had the utmost respect for Bertha and Grace Poole. Jane's life and her story seemed trivialized in the extreme, especially with how this novel twists the events to make pretty much everything Jane believed to be inaccurate.

It was incomprehensible to me as well to see Bertha in this new light - someone who is a little simple, but not really dangerous - actually quite gentle, and yet there had to be a culprit behind the fires and the attacks at Thornfield, so a new female servant was created to serve that purpose. I didn't understand what was wrong with the original, that the story couldn't have kept Bertha as the perpetrator yet in the more ambiguous light of an unfortunate woman with dangerous tendencies. Basically the story made anyone, who was seen in a negative light in the original story, out to be more sympathetic and unfortunate in this book. And the only way I could find that believable is if I completely disregard all my knowledge of the original book.

While the writing and the detail of this book was good, I really could not get into this revision of *Jane Eyre* because of how thoroughly it alters every positive outcome of the novel. Even Mrs. Fairfax, who is a decent, God-fearing woman in the beginning of this book and in the original *Jane Eyre*, becomes a reluctant manipulative liar, who is not above selling out someone completely innocent - namely *Jane Eyre* - just for security. There were many times I wanted to stop reading because it made me very sad to be forced to see these characters twisted so. Even though Mrs. Fairfax does bear a conscience about the things that she does, it is just too unbelievable to me that she could be so careless of others, while carrying her bible with her at all times. And yet she looks down at the clergyman Mr. Wood for catering to the gentry, when she does so much worse.

Obviously my main problem with this book reflects how much I love the original novel and how much I disagree with this vision of *Jane Eyre*. So this is a very personal dislike of a novel that does keep your interest and is paced well and has some (unbelievable) twists. While the story is focused on Thornfield Hall, there is really very little secondary accounting of Rochester and Jane's romance - the focus is more on the plight of one unfortunate madwoman and of servants (especially female servants) in this time period. If this sounds like an interesting story to you and you are intrigued by seeing Bertha Mason redeemed or by a lightweight reworking of *Jane Eyre* in the vein of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then this might be a good read for you.

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### Veronika Szabó says

I wanted to love this book, really. Unfortunately, I felt nothing, but a disappointment: the story was simply boring, the characters were annoying (please, let me forget, what happened to Rochester and Mrs. Fairfax...), the whole thing had nothing to do with the Bronte's world - it is an example for why some books should not be continued or re-written and Jane Eyre is definitely that kind of story.

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### **Katy Noyes says**

I've really taken to this genre of book in the last year - the behind-the-scenes-of-the-classic book. Longbourn took us behind the frills of the Bennetts, the wonderful YA novel *A Little in Love* fleshed out the waif-like Eponine of *Les Mis*. And now *Thornfield Hall* imagines the backstory around Jane Eyre's love affair with Rochester and examines just how mad (and why) Bertha Mason, the mad wife in the attic, really was.

I was sucked in from the start, with Mrs Fairfax's recounting of her own life story and how it fit into the beloved Bronte novel. It's been a while since I read *Jane Eyre*, but this book dovetailed nicely with my recollection of the plot and characters, and added the author's own stamp on just what might have happened behind the scenes to bring Bertha Mason to *Thornfield*, what happened to her there, and how she came to jump from the roof.

I'm assuming almost anyone reading this has read the classic, though as a piece of social history fiction it could also work well, as a servants' story of a rich and mysterious household and its occupants. I would imagine this will be seen my most as a companion piece to Bronte's work however, and the author has worked hard to fit in details from scenes, backstories and her own conjecture and direction to make this a thrilling novel that makes you see many familiar characters in completely different ways.

I loved Stubbs' choices, I loved what she decided to make of Bronte's famous characters, and the spin some of them are given. Minor characters are given a voice, a mind and a heart - and a few schemes as well. Jane and Rochester come off well, but are very much background to the actually very interesting under-stairs (or third floor) crew of Mrs Fairfax, Grace Poole, Bertha and the other servants.

The writing style complements Bronte's, though is probably a little easier on the eye of the contemporary reader. There are a few nods to particular phrases of Bronte's (a famous one near the end stood out), and it gave a very vivid account of life in the oft-empty but always secretive *Thornfield*.

Really enjoyed this, and love having a new take on the story to mull over in my mind. Recommended for fans of the classic, it shouldn't spoil it for you, only give you more to savour.

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### **Tripfiction says**

Novel set in Yorkshire ("a tide of disaster")

(Read our review with caution if you are unfamiliar with the original story of *Jane Eyre*)

This book is a re-imagining of the story of Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester seen through the eyes of the servants, essentially Alice Fairfax, the housekeeper at *Thornfield Hall*. Such an interesting take on the original book by Charlotte Brontë and (both) well worth the read.

The book starts off at a gentle pace as the reader gets to know the ways of life in the grand houses of very early Victorian England. The relationships between master and servants are established and explored as the characters are introduced. Etiquette and manners of the era are well researched and highlighted, and it is a pleasure to hear about the lives of people well over 150 years ago.

Mr Rochester, the owner of Thornfield Hall is often away on his travels and the staff members are left to get on with their lives; occasionally he returns on a whim. But one of his visits heralds the arrival of a deranged woman, who is to be housed secretly on the third floor of the house, only a couple of people are to know about her existence. There are few surprises in store as the plot has been mapped out in the original work, but it is nevertheless delightful to observe the storyline unfold with ease and precision.

A care programme for the mad woman in the attic is devised and gradually her histrionics subside – only to be inflamed when Mr Rochester happens upon her. Clearly there is some connection between the two people, which of course manifests as the book unfolds.

The house is a haven for waifs and strays and Alice Fairfax also soon arrives at Thornfield Hall, but again a question mark hangs over her head. What is her connection with Mr Rochester? Soon, Jane Eyre – “a woman with a ‘central core of tempered steel’” – is employed as her tutor and any encounters with her employer are well supervised, and yet....

Nuptials are soon announced, but all hell breaks loose and the story turns from a pleasing amble into a frantic gallop towards the end. The end can feel a little crowded and frantic, when suddenly, to crown everything, a fire changes the lives of many. Overall this is a good and engrossing read.

And finally to the cover of the book.... it certainly alludes to all the comings and goings on the third floor of Thornfield Hall but it feels like quite a dull cover. Technically, green and red are complementary colours, far apart on the colour wheel and should work well in harmony. However, here we have two colours that are a dull mix, making the cover feel lacklustre. Subdued colours are, of course Victorian, they loved earthy, tonal colours, but for the 21st century I think the audience might be looking for something brighter and more eye-catching.

Originally reviewed on the TripFiction Blog: <http://www.tripfiction.com/novel-set-...>

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## **Emma says**

'Longbourn' this ain't.

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## **Celina Grace says**

Interesting take on the classic novel by Charlotte Bronte. Very readable, with well-drawn sympathetic characters and a different perspective on the 'mad woman in the attic' (clearly mad here for very good reasons). I'd like to see Jane Stubbs take on Rebecca!

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## **Bron says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, I wasn't tempted to skip even one paragraph. It's the Jane Eyre story but seen through the eyes of Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper at Thornfield. The author has cleverly picked up a few hints in the original novel to create a believable back story for Mrs Fairfax. Jane doesn't enter the plot until quite late on, and then only as a quite shadowy figure, someone Mrs Fairfax doesn't get to know too well. The characters that really do come to life are Bertha Mason, Grace Poole and the bevy of servants needed to run a big house in the 1830s. Bertha is no longer the raving mad woman but a damaged soul with a kind nature and limited understanding. Grace isn't a sinister minder but a compassionate nurse who dedicates herself to drawing Bertha out of a black depression. The events follow the original novel closely but with slightly different interpretations. And there's quite a big twist at the end.

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## **Cora Tea Party Princess says**

DNF at page 67.

Just not my thing right now, but I will definitely be giving it another go.

*I received a copy of this for free via Goodreads First Reads.*

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## **Samantha says**

Thornfield Hall magically transported me back not only to the period of 1821 and all the quintessentially Englishness of this Victorian period but back to my school days when I was forced to read that wonderful classic Jane Eyre. I am so glad that I was made to read this incredibly beautiful book at school and even more pleased that I was asked to review this novel of Jane Stubbs telling the story behind Jane Eyre from the servants below stairs.

I never thought that Jane Eyre could be enhanced or indeed needed enhancing but having read Thornfield Hall I realised how much more rounded the original book became for me because of this novel. Jane Stubbs managed to retain all the magic and mystery of the original book as if she were Charlotte Bronte herself. She understood the characters so well and seemed able to really capture the essence of the book, it was beautifully written with great imagery connecting the reader to the familiar language and landscape of the rugged Yorkshire countryside and the hardships of living below stairs during this Victorian era.

Those of you who have read Jane Eyre will know the story so there are no 'spoilers' here, those of you who have not read the original will certainly want to read it I am sure after reading Thornfield Hall.

Jane Stubbs managed to preserve the integrity of the original book and yet create an outstandingly convincing take of the same novel from the perspective of the servants who were the hidden heart of the household, keeping the estates and grand houses running and sharing hardships and secrets below stairs. I loved the way Stubbs moulded the characters and developed their personalities, introducing new characters who were just as convincing as the originals and the twist she gave to the end of the story, believable and completely in keeping with the original novel.

If you, like me, loved Jane Eyre then you have to read this book, its' enchanting, beautifully written and well worth the 5 stars I have given it. If you haven't read Jane Eyre then you need to if only to appreciate the mastery of Jane Stubbs Thornfield Hall.

Loved it, absolutely loved it. I would like to thank the publisher for sending this, in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Jenny Mackinlay says**

I would have liked it better if I didn't know and love JANE EYRE. This one is, or would be, interesting in its own right, as the (contemporary) story of a gentlewoman fallen on hard times taking a job as housekeeper, a misunderstood and misused wife of a gentleman, and an under-stairs working woman who is a good friend to them, but Jane and Rochester are such unappealing, messed-around-with versions of themselves it spoils the other story for me.

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### **Chapterhouse Publishing says**

If you're a fan of Jane Eyre, you'll either love or loathe this book. It's the story of Thornfield Hall viewed from the perspective of Mrs Fairfax, the discreet housekeeper who is mentioned in Jane Eyre, but who here takes centre stage. The familiar story of Mr Rochester and his "mad wife" are told from an entirely new direction, and this time it's a completely different take on his first wife from that given either in Charlotte Bronte's novel or from that in the more modern classic Wide Sargasso Sea, by Jean Rhys.

Mrs Fairfax as portrayed by Jane Stubbs has a strong and credible voice – she's a parson's widow and a gentlewoman who has fallen upon hard times and has had to seek employment for the first time as a paid housekeeper to a distant relative – Mr Rochester senior. On the death of her "first Mr Rochester" (soon after the death of his own elder son Rowland), young Edward Rochester has to return from Jamaica to take up his responsibilities at Thornfield Hall – bringing with him "an unfortunate invalid who suffers from great weakness of mind" as he describes Bertha in a letter to Mrs Fairfax. (That's not the description we're accustomed to hearing of the wife locked in the attic rooms of the Hall!)

Mrs Fairfax's words lead us through the familiar story but explain key events such as the fire in Mr Rochester's room in an entirely different way. The novel shows us how "mad" Bertha Rochester lived for many years quietly in the seclusion of the isolated house on the moors, forming relationships with the servants who were her regular companions, taking care of her and of the house and grounds, frequently in the absence of their master. Jane Eyre herself is a relatively minor character in this version of the story, entering into it well into the second third of the novel. The main interest is in Mrs Fairfax herself and in the Hall, the destruction of which is now reinterpreted, so that poor Bertha is no longer seen as to blame for the devastating fire which sweeps through it. As for the famous "Reader, I married him..." ending of Jane Eyre, this novel stops short of showing us that moment or indeed Jane and Edward's future, instead revealing a very different view of what might have happened after the fire.

Jane Stubbs' clever book shook up my ideas of both the story line and the characters, and gave me a whole new but connected world of people and events. I loved it and would be fascinated to see Jane Stubbs' or other writers' takes on other well-known classics. Anyone want to have a go at the story of another famous

fictional Fairfax – Jane Fairfax in Emma?

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## Sebaloo says

DNF

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## Anne says

Approached with trepidation but with no need. Jane Stubbs does not contradict the story of Jane Eyre but provides background and an alternative credible explanation for some of the events. The author obviously respects and pays close attention to the original novel, and I even though I knew the outcome for Jane and Rochester the outcome for lesser characters was unknown. Got up early to finish the last few chapters - which are perhaps the weakest of the whole book - being a little too far fetched but on the whole a well written book that could stand alone, and a worthwhile and enjoyable read.

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## Amy Mckee says

*I got this book through goodreads first-reads*

First of all I haven't actually read the original Jane Eyre and I don't know much about the story.

This book is perfect for a fan of classic drama, it's fast-paced, interesting and had me finishing it much quicker than I would for any other book of the same length. *Thornfield hall* had a very English feel to it and I found myself feeling all of a sudden much classier whenever I picked it up.

I am glad that this book didn't include as much romance as it could have, it did contain some, enough to move the story on, but not enough to take away from the fact that the book is inherently about social conventions and mental health. These are both dealt with in a very mature way, in contrast to other books I've read that just pass the mad off as the mad and conventions as law. It shows that mental issues can be overcome with patience and care and conventions can be overlooked for love and devotion.

The only reason this book didn't get five stars was because of the almost cliché feeling, not that it's like something I've read before, and not that it's predictable, just in the sense that all of the events taking place had the same sort of scandal feel to them. There was one mildly-major twist but the rest of the book seemed to just run its course.

Overall this was an enjoyable read and I would recommend it to anyone who is a fan of British or period drama.

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## Amy Pitman says

I was incredibly disappointed with the book. Perhaps I am a sceptic when other authors take on previous



novels and rework them but none of this sat well with me.

I remember reading Jane Eyre when I was younger and imagining this cold, isolated part of Yorkshire, Thornfield Hall almost becoming an abandoned place. I admit I don't remember the original as much as I would like but the feeling from the original was completely lost on this novel.

It felt false to have Bertha not as a mad woman (who I remember flinging herself from the house) but a simple creature who got caught up in the mess of an English gentleman. I also don't remember such details as Bertha being from Jamaica which felt very strange to me.

Although I didn't like the story, the writing was mostly engaging, however still felt out of context to the original. I wouldn't recommend it particularly to those who have a very clear representation of Jane Eyre in mind.

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