**OE\_ch27-part2\_final-2\_10.22.2021.mp3**

[Fluttery intro music starts and stops]

**Vanessa:** [00:00:00] We are doing Chapter 27 again this week. Last week, we focused on Bertha. This week, we'll be getting more into the plot of the chapter. What happens between Jane and Rochester?

[Acoustic music begins]

Chapter 27 starts with Jane saying to herself, “You shall tear yourself away from both Thornfield and Mr. Rochester.” The chapter ends with her doing just that, disappearing in the middle of the night with all of her money, which is nearly none, in her pocket. In between that initial thought and the final action though, she goes through arduous, emotional anguish, contemplating whether or not her conclusion to leave is correct. Jane finally leaves her room after sitting and stewing and thinking and strategizing for hours and hours. When she gets up and opens the door, Rochester is right there waiting for her, which is good because she faints so he catches her. He, quote, ‘revives her’ a bit. He feeds her, he gives her some wine and makes a fire, and he wants to talk. First, he apologizes. “I never meant to hurt you,” he says. “Will you ever forgive me?” “Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot,” she tells us. He asks her to yell at him. She tells us that she wishes she could die in not-too-painful a way rather than break up with this man who she loves so much. But then he tries to kiss her and she turns away from him. She tells him that there is no place for her at his side, and he seems confused. “Ah,” he remembers. “You think I'm married, but I haven't explained to you. I am not married.”

As you might remember from last week, Rochester tells her that he isn't really married. Bertha is mad and he doesn't love her. He tells Jane that if she ever went crazy, that his arms would be the only thing that held her. Not ever a straightjacket – implying, of course, that sometimes Bertha is in a straightjacket. Jane keeps her heels dug in, as Rochester explains to her why it is that they can be together. He then threatens her. “Will you hear reason?” He then leans down and whispers in her ear, “Because if you won’t, I'll try violence.”

Jane then does something that women have done time immemorial. She tries to manipulate him into not raping her. She has been on the verge of tears this whole time, and she finally lets the tears spill. She tells Rochester she will listen to everything he has to say. She succeeds. He doesn't rape her – for now. He then tells her his tale of woe, which we talked about last week. He was tricked into marrying Bertha. It turns out she was mad, so he brought her back to England and locked her up 10 years ago. In those 10 years, he had three mistresses: the French woman, Celine, Adele's mother; the Italian, Jacinta; and the German, Clara. He then tells Jane that he ended up despising all of his mistresses and that it is the title and power dynamic of mistresses itself that make it impossible to love these women.

Jane then says to herself, “I felt the truth of these words and I drew from them a certain inference that if I were to forget myself under any pretext with any justification to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling.” Then he tells Jane a love story. He tells her that he met an elf who put, quote, ‘sap incense into him’ and that he fell in love with the elf: Jane. He tells her what he thought about as he played all of those games with her. He goes on and on about their shared past until she can't take it anymore and makes him stop, but he can't stop trying to convince her. He says, “You are my sympathy, my better self.” He's making the claim that their love is a true love, but she tells him again, moved beyond belief by him as she is, “Mr. Rochester, I will not be yours.”

Rather than a threat, he tries seduction this time. He begins to touch her and asks, “Do you mean it now? Do you mean it now?” But she does. She is tempted, but not seduced. She has to leave, and that's when he makes his most compelling point yet. “Oh, Jane, this is bitter. This…this is wicked. It would not be wicked to love me.” This is the part of the scene that gets me every time. He is so compelling. He makes such good points and Jane wants to comply, to, quote, ‘soothe him, save him, love him.’ But she can't. She must make the moral decision. Here's Elsie Mitchie from Louisiana State University once again.

[Music stops]

**Elsie:** [00:05:35] So Adam Smith has a famous passage in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* where he says, “We all are on paths where we’re offered a choice between wealth and virtue.” Right? And so the question is: how do you get people to choose virtue? And in many ways, I think that is what the 19th century novel is about, and we're still struggling with that, right? I mean, and that's why they're so enduring. So – so when Darcy learns to choose Elizabeth, he's learning to choose virtue. Right? Well, Rochester's learning to choose Jane, she’s learning to – *he’s* learning to choose virtue, right? And so the narrative is like educating its readers. And Jane is so different from Elizabeth. They both embody some set of values, often that are associated with a middle class, right, some set of values that we go, “Yeah, that would be good.” I mean, and you know, it's complicated in terms of gender [laughs] because the guy gets to be rich and makes that choice.

[Gentle music begins again]

**Vanessa:** [00:06:28] Jane is teaching us how to make a moral decision. And she's telling us it hurts to make it. But as she says, “laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigor.” One last time, Rochester considers that he could rape Jane. He says, “A mere reed she feels in my hand. I could bend her with my finger and my thumb. [Music stops] And what good would it do if I bent? Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it.”

[Synth music begins]

**Vanessa:** She again tells him she is leaving. He thinks she means eventually, that he'll still have a chance to convince her, but she leaves in the middle of the night. I'm Vanessa Zoltan

**Lauren:** [00:07:23] And I'm Lauren Sandler.

**Vanessa:** [00:07:25] And this is ‘On Eyre’ from *Hot and Bothered*.

[Synth music intensifies with added percussion before fading out again]

**Vanessa:** So, Lauren, we're back at Chapter 27. What would you like to teach us to keep in mind as we dive into this chapter?

**Lauren:** [00:07:47] The thing I really want to talk about is something that I'm teaching myself as much as anything because this is the place in the book where I really feel my heart get ripped out [laugh], meaning not just my heart for Jane or for Rochester, but for the book. Every time I read this book, I'm, like, screaming at her to leave with him. And listening to you position the reality of who mistresses were and his relationship with them definitely gets me thinking a little bit more systemically than I have allowed myself to in past readings.

And that's what I think is most helpful to talk about here, which is that to run off to the south of France with Rochester would essentially make Jane no different than Celine or any of the other mistresses that he lists in the chapter. And if he were ever to leave her, or she would have reason to flee him, that she would be in no better social position than she is now. In fact, she'd be in a far worse social position than the one that she is now.

I mean, there's this big part of me that I want the book to question what sex work meant, what the institution means, to question the incredible bias that existed against what were called prostitutes or harlots or whores, which all, of course, feel like historic terms right now that might make one's skin crawl.

But I think that there's this sort of double bind where there is both the social reality of Jane's world that she doesn't feel like she has the power to upend, which is that bias against sex work, and then there's also the fact that Rochester isn't trustworthy enough to be the one who she gets to test that with. You know, I wonder if Rochester was not someone with his track record, if this book could have actually had a different dimension, one that maybe really speaks out for women who don't have the legal confines of marriage, which Brontë clearly sees as really not all that different than sex work, right? I mean, she sees marriage as an economic institution that isn't necessarily based on love in which women are financially dependent and sexually available. It's pretty hard to see a difference here, and yet one of them is accepted and indeed desirable, and the other one is anathema to anyone in society.

And in this chapter, like, we learn a lot about what Jane and Rochester think about mistresses, think about, you know, as he puts it, hired mistresses. He says that they are worse than slaves and to associate with them sullies the self in some way, which of course, is more problematic slave language and now we get to add total disrespect for sex work and anyone who is forced to do it to that category. But it really does show us how much Jane fears being marked like that. But I don't want her to. This argument, the argument that she is protecting herself from what it would mean to be seen as a mistress in society is one that I want the book to reject. And even more than that, I really want the book to reject the notion that there is a moralism attached to this. But Vanessa, tell me how all of this ranting of mine is sitting with you.

**Vanessa:** [00:11:17] I mean, I love this question about what if Rochester had said, “Look, I've had mistresses in the past and I have loved and respected them, and then we went our own ways and I gave them five thousand pounds and I still cherish and respect them a great deal. But with you, it's different. I can just tell, like, I want us to last forever. But worst case scenario, I will take care of you the way I took care of all these other mistresses,” right? Like, “I have nothing but respect for them.” I do wonder if that would have changed Jane’s eventual moralism, that if it's strategy first with moral justification after. And the strategy, I really – I just think of this as such a strategic decision, right? She said it before, before she knew about Bertha, that “in six months you'll tire of me. But hopefully after that you'll come back around just because you're going to be legally stuck with me and like me again.” And so if there wasn't a legal contract between the two of them, maybe he would just leave her in six months and then who's going to hire her as a governess? Who would marry her? Like, all of her ability to support herself would be gone. She would die in the slums. To go with him – if they last, it's great. She's the mistress in the south of France. She is saying ‘screw convention.’ She is saying ‘I find marriage oppressive’ and, like, her uncle's money would find her. She'd be independently wealthy. Like, if this goes well, it could go great. But he has given her no reason to believe that it will go well and the risks are just so huge.

**Lauren:** [00:12:58] I do buy this strategy argument, and it's the first time that I've read this book, as I've said, in which I am internalizing the strategy argument, but I don't think it's the whole story. And I think that this is where Jane loses me and the book loses me a bit is… she's had all of these opportunities to give over to desire. She's had all of these opportunities to lose herself, and she hasn't. I think that she's a little bit of a prude. And I think that this is a book where I get seduced by Jane's passion as a kid. And then she gets older and Lowood knocks it out of her in some way and maturity knocks it out of her in some way. And then she ends up in this situation where she's ostensibly madly in love with someone who is madly in love with her and desperately wants someone who's madly in love with her. But I don't ever get the feeling that she wants him as much as I want her to want him. The desire there isn't overpowering enough. And maybe, maybe that's because she knows as a young woman with no power and no money, no recourse, like very few rights in the world that she can't afford that kind of desire, that she can't let herself go in that way. That to be able to be that unencumbered is literally a mark of privilege. And so I think that in many ways there is a lesson here which I'm very glad that Brontë is teaching us, and in other ways, you know, I'm writing in the margins, ‘do it, Jane go!’ because I want her to have what I want and what I want is the man I want in a whitewashed villa in France and his piles of money and the need to never have to worry about anything except what delicious thing I'm going to eat for dinner and whether we're going to drink champagne before or after we go to bed.

**Vanessa:** [00:15:04] – and whether tonight's going to be the night that he loses interest and so you get kicked to the curb. I also want her to go. And I'm so impressed with her that she doesn't because we know that he can push her to her breaking point, to her passion point, to the point where she is going to throw caution to the wind and be like, “Look, you're my boss and you're going to find me another job. I don't care. I love you!” Right? We know that that's still in her, and he gives her every angle he can. He literally starts to seduce her physically. He threatens her physically. He guilts her right. He's like, “I will be desperate and alone in the world” And he – he tries logic, right? He's like, “Who would you offend?” Cruel logic. “No one cares about you. Like, you're not going to offend anybody by running away with me.” And none of it works. And I just can't imagine that that is just prudishness. I have to believe…that that is a deep commitment to self-preservation. Because the arguments are so good. Who wouldn't fall for that? But it could literally kill her. She could get pregnant with a baby that he says isn’t his..

**Lauren:** [00:16:29] And she probably would get pregnant. So then what would happen?

**Vanessa:** [00:16:33] And yet what I do agree with you about is that she does not hold our hand through, “Oh my God, I wanted to go with him. But then a flash came to my head about me holding my baby in my arms and realizing that it had no social standing in the world.” Right? She's really giving us Rochester's point of view and not her – why she's making this decision again and again, which I think is really strange.

**Lauren:** [00:16:59] I do really puzzle over how much we get Rochester to speak his own desire and his own story in this chapter…and then furthermore, why it is that so much of Jane's grief is about hurting Rochester. Why, continuously, all the way through the very end of this chapter, what she keeps going back to is how unconscionable it is for her to hurt this man in this way, and not a question of what it is that she's losing herself. And I truly puzzle over that, although perhaps it could be argued that that's making the case for the fact that this is true love, that true love, when it's moral – and this is not how I see it, but perhaps Brontë is telling us this – is something that is selfless. True love, as all the greeting cards will tell you and probably the Psalms before them, is something where you are less interested in your own desire and pain than you are in another person's.

**Vanessa:** [00:18:04] I mean, Lauren, this might be a moment for us to look at our close reading texts because I – I think that it might help us circle this square. Do you want to – do you want to tell us what it is that you brought?

**Lauren:** [00:18:18] The passage is one that you, Vanessa, already mentioned in your introduction…or at least you mentioned a brief part of it and I just want to go whole hog and read a massive chunk here and pack it apart if you can all put up with me. “The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane and not mad as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there's no temptation. They’re for such moments as this: when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigor, stringent are they and violate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth, so I have always believed, and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane. Quite insane with my veins running fire and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs.” So…[sigh] shall we break it down? Can we just start with this first sentence?

**Vanessa:** Yeah.

**Lauren:** – which is, “The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself.” I mean, I just – this element of martyrdom and of self-denial is the part of Jane that I struggle with the most and what makes me want to just take this book by the lapels and shake it sometimes.

**Vanessa:** [00:19:55] I agree. I hate this line. [Laughs] People quote it to me, like young women will quote it to me, and I'm like…no! No, why? *Why?* The more friends you have, the more you *should* respect yourself, because the more people who you're taking care of and who are taking care of you – not in a popularity way, in a quality way, but like – we need each other! We *need* each other. My defense of this sentence in the context of the book is that she's trying to pump herself up, like, “I have to leave the man I love. This hurts me so much. I want to die. But no, no, no, it's OK. The more friendless I am, the more I’ll respect myself.” But I agree, this is, like, a really disordered way of thinking. I just also understand why there are moments in which you have to have disordered thinking in order to…get yourself to do something that you don't want to do. Like sometimes, you have to tell yourself a bad reason to get yourself to do the right thing. That's the best defense I have of this because it's horrible. And then the next sentence is, “I will keep the law given by God sanctioned by man,” which is in direct conversation with what Rochester says in the proposal scene. Remember, Rochester is holding Jane, and she's so happy that she doesn't really pay attention to this weird thing that he says, but he says, “It will expiate at God's tribunal. I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment – I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion – I defy it.” He's saying, “God approves of what I do, and I don't care what man thinks,” whereas Jane is saying the law given by God and what men have done with it is one in the same. And I think that that is a really interesting theological difference that's been drawn out by the young, innocent Jane and the more world-weary Rochester.

**Lauren:** [00:21:52] Well, I also think that Rochester is giving us the argument that he has been using ever since he decided he wanted to not be married to Bertha Mason anymore, that this unconscionable thing that he's doing – locking his wife in the attic while he gallivants around Europe and falls in love with his governess – it's the old ‘the heart wants what the heart wants’ as some sort of overarching coda by which to live, which…a really strong part of me doesn't disagree with. I think that when the heart wants what the heart wants and no one gets hurt, that is how to live and how to love. My issue is, you know, when Rochester applied that logic to Bertha, that was a cruel act that deeply hurt someone. It's like, when the temptation is to lock your wife on the third story for 10 years, maybe laws and principles telling you not to do that, that the temptation to have your own freedom by any means necessary at the expense of another human – we should have some laws and principles letting us know maybe not the best idea, Rochester. But that said, she's saying that they are for moments like this one, when her body and soul rise in mutiny, I want what her body and soul wants here. And so it's not so much about codes of conduct that are existing to protect other people from our own desires. This is a code of conduct that is existing to protect herself from her own desires. I – I just really feel like there's this tension through this whole chapter, and indeed the whole book, about this – this question between morality and love and desire and power that is just, it's just frothing up in this way in this paragraph – that that attempts to resolve itself in a way that I find incredibly dissatisfying.

**Vanessa:** [00:23:52] I mean, I’m very compelled by that, right, as we talked about a couple of weeks ago: when a woman wants these things, she's insane and when a man wants them, he's Rochester. Like, he's just a man. He is fine. I just really feel Jane on both sides that at least when you feel like, “Oh my god, I can't make this decision, I can't make this decision. So I'm going to rely on my former self.” Seems like a good option, right? She can take back leaving him. She can't take back running away with him. In English society, in the 19th century, that will immediately ruin her. And so she's like, “That would make me insane if I behaved so irrationally that I ruined my life on a moment of impulse…after years of thinking that I will protect myself, that I can only rely on myself, that you know, I am my best keeper, then that is insane,” which again tucks her into this corner of…”and therefore, if I run away with him, I've become the thing he hates. He hates insane women.” I just think she feels trapped by what an asshole it is that she's in love with.

**Lauren:** [00:25:04] And this is what's driving me crazy is she is not telling us that. She's not calling him an asshole, she's not telling us privately that she thinks that he's an asshole, she is not saying for a second, and he's even begging her to do it, “How the hell could you do this to me? How could you lie to me? How could you gaslight me? How could you put me in the same situation that you've put all of these other women in? How could you seduce me and give me hope and make me love you to put me in this position?” And it just drives me crazy that she's so unwilling to push back at him about it.

**Vanessa:** [00:25:39] I think that this actually vindicates you in a previous episode, Lauren. I don't think Jane thinks he's an asshole. I think that she thinks he's been put in a terrible situation. I think she hates the hideous hyena stares and is like, “Oh my God, I cannot believe that you have to be married to that,” right? And she says in this chapter, “I pity you, sir,” and I think she means it, I think she feels so bad for him. So I think she's like, “He's not an asshole. He did everything he could in this horrible situation that he was manipulated into and, unfortunately, that means that I can't be with him.” But I just don't think he thinks he's an asshole. I think that…she thinks that the things she loves about him also make it impossible for her to be with him unless they're married. His changeable mood, his passion, his wit, his excitement about the world…she loves all of those things about him. All of those things are what make him impossible for her to be with and under these circumstances. And so she buys his story, whole hog. She's not listening to this critically. She's not like, “Is there a racial element to this?” Right? Like, “Is Bertha really crazy? Or did she only go crazy after being locked up in the attic for 10 years?” She hates Bertha.

**Lauren:** [00:26:58] But it is fascinating to me that Charlotte Brontë did not give us a sentence in which she says anything like, “You may be able to hop from mistress to mistress. You may be able to, you know, lock your mad wife in the attic. You may be able to do all of these things and continue to have all of this money, all of this freedom, all of this social standing. I have nothing. I am nothing, and you will make me less than that. How can you not see that?” You know, there are all of these other moments, the ones that Virginia Woolf hates in the book right, where it's Jane pontificating about her circumstances as – as a young woman in England, and I could definitely use one deftly deployed evisceration here. And it's so frustrating to me that we don't get one and that furthermore, what we get is her concern about his emotions, her concern about hurting him, which carries us all the way to the end of this chapter.

**Vanessa:** [00:28:02] I mean, the other thing that's just so interesting to me, Lauren, is that this is a move that Brontë’s made at least once in the past as well, is that you get the impression that she's had all of these thoughts off the page. Right? The chapter starts with, like, “I spent all day in my room thinking,” but she doesn't bring us along on what she thought. And I feel like what she's been thinking about is, “Can I stay, can I stay, can I stay? No, I have no option. I have no option to stay.” And it is only once she is completely convinced of that, that she allows herself to see Rochester because she doesn't trust herself around him until she knows what she wants. And so part of the reason that she doesn't articulate that in the scene is because she's done all of that thinking off the page. And it's similar to the moment when she's like, “Eight years elapsed at Lowood and not much changed.” And you're like, “What?! Ahh!” [Lauren laughs.] And so I feel like, again, there's this weird thing where Jane's transformation or something just, like, happens off the page and she's like, “Well, I came to the conclusion that I can't possibly stay. You get why, right? Now, let's hear what he has to say.”

**Lauren:** [00:29:11] And then she makes it all about God and moralism, though. I know that's what's so frustrating is…listen, maybe for a Victorian reader who imagines Jane's situation in which this is what she's been offered, perhaps anyone in that era would read it and say, “[gasps] She would just be a mistress! How horrifying! She can't do that!” And of course, I'm like, “Go get them, girl!” But…it feels to me like Brontë is so frustratingly inconsistent about when she gives us a social critique and when she gives us a moral critique. And in this situation, I want all the social critique and I want her to just, like, totally lay off the moralism. That's the book I dream this book can be.

[music interlude plays, then fades out.]

**Vanessa:** [00:30:16] So, Lauren – Lauren, we have to talk about this moment that, again, is just a horror element of this chapter to me, which is when Rochester gets really close to her ear and whispers in her ear, “I could try violence,” and then has his hands on her, on her neck, and is like, “I could bend you with my finger and my thumb. I could strangle you.” These are *so* scary. And if – if a film version of this took those two moments really seriously, which I've never seen a film version do, it would be a horror movie, right? Like this is terrifying. And I'm wondering what you make of those two abject threats of violence.

**Lauren:** [00:31:03] I'm going to say something potentially very unpopular. I will preface it saying…I am going to say this as someone who has been on the receiving end of my share of sexual violence as most female-bodied people I know. I think that there is an erotic nature to this that I don't see neatly as a rape threat. I think that this is a man who is absolutely crazed with desire, and he's crazed with desire for someone who also desires him and that he is not on the precipice of pushing it beyond what she desires. I think that this is a situation where…the chapter could have gone in a different direction. She could have given herself over to what she wanted physically, and then it would not be rape. She doesn't, and so he doesn't do it. Listen, I can't stand him in this chapter. I'm sure it's going to shock you to hear that. The moments in which I find him the most offensive, though, are not when he wants her like this, which never gets past that knife edge of control. It's when he says things like, “I didn't think that there could possibly be a woman in the world who wasn't, like, dumb and reprehensible. And then I met you.” [Laugh] Those are the moments where I'm like, “Oh, that's that's kind of the violence against women there.” He's just – he's mad with desire and love for her, but not in a way where I think he's actually going to cross that line. I think that he knows that if he crosses that line, that's the surest way to lose Jane Eyre, that, you know, her degree of self-respect, her degree of self-control and her degree of intolerance for anything that she thinks really crosses a line with him, even though she indulges so much about him, it is still…there's – there's a very clear boundary there, and I think that this would clearly cross that boundary. And I think that he knows that if he were to break her like a reed, that would be the easiest way to lose her forever.

**Vanessa:** [00:33:15] Except that she's not in on that because she's scared. Right? Like, she lets herself cry in order to calm him down and like she sees herself as having to manipulate him out of this. And so I'm more compelled by that, with the, “I could bend her with my finger and thumb,” like, I think that that is – could be read as like a moment of meditation of, like, “I could break her. But I – but I wouldn't have her,” right? Like, “I could have her body. But like, I don't want just her body. I want all of her and I want – and part of what I am seduced by in her is the fact that she wants me too,” right? Like, “I only want consensual sex with her.” But when he threatens her at first, whether or not he means it – and I do think that there is text-based evidence that he didn't actually mean it as a real threat, right? – but she experiences it as a deeply scary moment.

**Lauren:** [00:34:13] Entirely, and it's a moment that feels really familiar to me. I mean, there are – there are so many instances in my life, perhaps in yours, perhaps in many people who are listening right now where, you know, I read on the page this scene where he – he wants this thing and she isn't going to go there, whether she wants it or not. And she can't defuse the situation by doing anything except indulging his words and his emotions, right? That whole moment of, “Let's just sit and talk and we'll talk all night. Well, tell me how you're feeling. Well, I'll listen to it for hours.” It feels so familiar. It feels, you know, it felt like such a modern concept to me until I read it in this book. And it was like, “Oh no, we've been doing that shit forever, because what else have we had? We haven't had much to fight back with, except for that performance of just, like, listening and listening and listening.” And it's really interesting how much listening we readers have to do in Jane's perspective here. But that is also why the fact that she finds what she listens to so compelling is something that I struggle with. Okay, so she leaves him. She says farewell forever. We'll see about that and –

**Vanessa:** [00:35:36] [Laughs]

**Lauren:** [00:35:38] – and then she goes to bed and she has this dream that she's in the Red Room and then she wakes up and sees the moon and I think the language around it is pretty powerful. What do you make of this?

**Vanessa:** [00:35:54] Yeah. So it says that the – the moon bursts from a cloud and then it's not the moon. It's a white human form that shines inclining a glorious brow earthward. And then it – it looks at her and speaks to her spirit. And it's as – distant was the tone and yet, so near. And it whispered to my heart: “My daughter, flee temptation.” And she answers, “Mother, I will,” and I don't know. I love that, like, religion got her into this situation and some, like, pagan idea of her mother gets her out of it. Mother Moon saves her…whether or not it saves her, right, because she is actually about to get into one of the most dangerous situations of her life, she's about to walk into the threat of homelessness. But I just love that it's this, like, really deeply pagan thing that gets her to flee.

**Lauren:** [00:36:52] I also, you know, reading this from – from an awareness of her orphanhood, of her never being called daughter by anyone and her never being able to call anyone mother, I think these words have so much power, and I have to admit I didn't automatically read it as Mother Moon. I very much read it as an apparition of a maternal figure for her. Like, I didn't think it was necessarily actually her mom, but still the experience of this, it's the only time that her own mother is invoked, except for when she hears the story about her parents from Bessie and how remarkable they were and how they died and then once that information is there, we never reflect on it again. Her mother's not a presence through any of this, which is – it's remarkable to me that she's been exposed to Blanche Ingram's mother, that she, you know, is exposed to Aunt Reed as a mother, that she's struggling with her own motherlessness through all of these different periods. And yet that doesn't come up ever. The word ‘mother’ in terms of her own experience as a daughter is never, ever invoked. And then here it is in the moment when perhaps she needs it most. And it's interesting because it's such a brief moment. It's not like we really stay with this. It just gives her that glimmer of what she needs. I think it's fascinating.

**Vanessa:** [00:38:26] Well, what are you looking forward to next week? We're reading chapters 28, 29 and 30. I know we want to keep talking about chapter 27, but we have to leave it eventually. The Mother Moon is telling us to go.

**Lauren:** [00:38:41] I mean, there's a whole part of me that's excited to be back in the sort of social problem novel mode where we will spend the beginning at least of our next chapters. I think I'll probably be a little – a little less on fire because we're losing the fire of their romance, but I'm going to get my nerd brain back, so I'm looking forward to that. How about you?

**Vanessa:** [00:39:06] I mean, I love that it goes dark, like it confronts despair. It's like there are repercussions to this situation, and it does not shy away from them. And I think that that is like a really bold thing to do, so.

**Lauren:** [00:39:22] I'm looking forward to it, though. I mean, honestly, I think I could do another episode on 27.

**Vanessa:** [00:39:28] It's so fucking weird. I love it. [Lauren laughs.]

[Music with bells and soft percussion.]

**Lauren:** [00:39:48] All this talk about the economic models of marriage versus mistresshood has really got me thinking that the person I most want to talk to about it other than Vanessa, of course, is historian Stephanie Coontz, who's the author of five books on gender, family, and history, including the seminal book *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, which I've written about a gazillion times but far more importantly, was cited in the U.S. Supreme Court decision on marriage equality. And in addition to writing all this incredible work about the oppression of marriage, she also happened to give remarks at our dear friend Chloe Angel's wedding recently. This was the first time in her 77 years she's ever been asked to give remarks at a wedding in the ceremony, which I guess made sense because what she did was she got up and she talked about the oppressive history of marriage, which of course elated all of us and was exactly why she was there. I really want to talk to her about some of the stuff that's come up in this episode, so let's get her on the line.

[Skype dialing sound]

**Lauren:** Hi, Stephanie.

**Stephanie:** Hi.

**Lauren:** Thank you so much for joining us.

**Stephanie:** [00:41:09] My pleasure.

**Lauren:** [00:41:10] So one of the things that I've really been parsing in this episode with Vanessa is, you know, why it is that we are given this critique of marriage from Brontë about how marriage is – is such a purely economic, loveless force for so many women in Victorian England. And yet the idea of Jane running off with Rochester for love, to be someone who isn't legally married to him, is anathema to her. And she cites all of his past mistresses, how they've ended in ruin. But I wonder, just from really pulling back, how you can help us understand the differences and similarities between these two institutions?

**Stephanie:** [00:41:55] Well, you put your finger on what was considered the central contradiction in the early 19th century of the triumph of the love match. For thousands of years, women and men too often were not allowed to – to choose their own partner. Marriages were arranged for political and economic benefits on both sides, not just for women. And in fact, through most of history, aside from aristocrats, they were co-provider marriages. If you were in the lower classes, you married a woman who could work right alongside you and you – and she was often called a yoke fellow. No man referred to himself as a – as a primary provider, as a mark of pride. It was usually a call for pity because his wife wasn't able to help him. [Laughs] So when – as you got the rise of the love match, people were very worried about what would happen to those women who could make this – this choice, this new choice, this risky choice, because they were making this decision to attach themselves to a man and they might do it for very bad reasons. The man might not really love them. The man might treat them wrong. So women agonized over and their parents agonized over how you could accommodate the love match to the realities, the continued realities, and in fact, in some cases, the increased realities of women's economic dependance on men. So of course, she's looking at these kinds of trade-offs here. In this new idea, the basis of marriage was not economic collaboration, political needs, any of that, but it was love and love was supposed to be between two people who were opposites, so women were simultaneously empowered by this. There was a tremendous dyadic power in having someone who loved you, and we look at courtship in the 19th century – and women really enjoyed courtship because that's when they could ask men to prove their love to them – but on the other hand, once they married, they were dependent and so they had to have some guarantee. And I think that Jane Eyre is recognizing that, yes, I want to marry for love, but love is not enough. I have to have some protection against being left alone, penniless and totally disgraced in the ideas of Victorian society.

**Lauren:** [00:44:27] What do you think it would have cost her, though, to run off to the south of France with the man that she loved, who she believed loved her, who she believed would provide for her? I mean, obviously she's skeptical that that will last, but what would it really cost her?

**Stephanie:** [00:44:48] Well, there are dozens of novels of the time, like *Clarissa* and others that actually talk about the fears that women have, that they'll be left pregnant and have to support a child on their own. This is a period, incidentally, when there was no real possibility that you could actually claim child support from someone who was the father if you were not married. One of the very interesting things about this period is that the sexual condemnation of women who stepped out of the virgin role was much stronger than had been a couple of hundred years ago. In Germany, for example, a man could actually legitimately, socially-acceptably break an engagement off if he discovered his fiancée was not a virgin. So this is a tremendous pressure for women that she would be – she could be left a single mother without any finances, and she could be totally socially ostracized. Certainly, no one would employ her as a governess ever again. [Laughs]

**Lauren:** [00:45:49] I do wonder, just thinking about this one element of Victorian law and that wives were not allowed to own their own property, how their property would automatically go to their husband, if there actually was an element of freedom and self-protection, even if you were anathema in society, that a mistress would at least have the ability to own her own property, to make and keep her own money? Is there an argument to be made for the notion that a mistress is actually a far more empowered and possibly even safe place to reside than a wife?

**Stephanie:** [00:46:31] Well, some women obviously made that choice, and some mistresses were very successful. Um, we think particularly of the ones who were mistresses of kings and princes that were not allowed to marry someone they loved and even were sexually attracted to, and those women had quite a bit of power in those relationships and independence. But whether you're talking prostitution or mistresses versus marriage, one thing they have in common is that they illustrate how difficult it was for a woman in that time period to make a living without extending sexual or personal or emotional services to a man. And the trade-off is that if you extend those services to somebody of whom you are a mistress, you do not have any legal rights to its continuation. And you might in fact be treated badly, and you might in fact have certain social people turn their nose up at you socially but you do have real independence on a day-to-day basis. By contrast, in marriage, your property is taken over. If you don't get a man who is loving and stays loving, you are in a situation that is very difficult to get out of. But on the other hand, you do have a guarantee of economic protection, and if the man loves you, you get a lot of satisfaction, particularly compared to the patriarchal marriages that most of these women have seen their mothers and grandmothers in.

**Lauren:** [00:48:01] Stephanie, I can't help but ask: how are we still stuck with some of the residual bullshit [laughs] of this Victorian era?

**Stephanie:** [00:48:11] Well, you know, I actually I'm writing about this right now. One of the ways in which we are still stuck in this is that as people began to really romanticize the process of falling in love, men began to confuse love with providing for a woman, with protecting for a woman, and a woman's love with her admiration for that and her gratitude for that. Women, meanwhile, began to confuse erotic attraction with the sort of things that made her anxious about whether she'd be able to win and keep the love of this dangerous man with lots of resources. From *Jane Eyre* to *Fifty Shades of Gray*, we have been haunted by the idea that we need to fall in love with this man who is an opposite, who can give us wonderful things, but who could also hurt us. And it is our femininity that brings him to love us. That has been a theme in romance novels ever since *Jane Eyre*. And I think that it deforms men's and women's understanding of love.

**Lauren:** [00:49:25] Hear, hear. Well, thank you so much for joining us. I could talk about this for hours with you, and maybe someday I will. But until then, thank you for joining us, Stephanie.

**Stephanie:** [00:49:36] Oh, it was certainly my pleasure. I'd be happy to talk for hours another time. [Lauren]

[Percussive synth music fades in]

**Vanessa:** [00:49:45] You've been listening to ‘On Eyre’. We're a small show, so we need your support to run. If you can, please consider supporting us on Patreon at patreon.com/hotandbotheredrompod. And if you love the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen. We are Not Sorry Productions. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman, our associate producer is Molly Baxter, and we are distributed by A Cast. We'd like to thank Elsie Mitchie and Stephanie Coontz for talking to us, Julia Argy and Nicki Zoltan, Stephanie Paulsell and all of our patrons.

[music fades out]