



Hideous and Horrible: 5. Wuthering Heights

Emily Bronte

Mr Lockwood, tenant of Thrushcross Grange, has come to visit his landlord Mr Heathcliff, who lives up on the moors at Wuthering Heights. Owing to a sudden and heavy snowfall, Lockwood is forced to stay the night. He is shown into a very strange room by Zillah, Heathcliff's servant.

While leading the way up the stairs, Zillah the housemaid recommended that I should hide the candle and not make a noise; for her master had an odd notion about the chamber she would put me in, and never let anybody lodge there willingly. I asked the reason. She did not know, she answered.

Too stupefied to be curious myself, I fastened my door and glanced round for the bed. The whole furniture consisted of a chair and a large oak case, with squares cut out near the top resembling coach windows. I looked inside, and perceived it to be a singular sort of old-fashioned couch, the ledge of a window, which it enclosed, serving as a table. I slid back the panelled sides, got in with my candle, pulled them together again, and felt secure against the vigilance of Heathcliff.

The ledge had a few mildewed books in one corner; and it was covered with writing scratched on the paint. This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small – *Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and to *Catherine Linton* I leant my head against the window, spelling over Catherine Earnshaw – Heathcliff – till my eyes closed; but they had not rested five minutes before a glare of white letters started from the dark as vivid spectres – the air swarmed with Catherines; and rousing myself, I discovered my candlewick reclining on one of the antique volumes, and perfuming the place with an odour of roasted calfskin. I snuffed it out and spread the injured tome on my knee.

Lockwood began to read the book until he fell into a doze and started to dream. He was awakened by a loud rapping on the window pane.

...merely, the branch of a fir tree that touched my lattice, as the blast wailed by, and rattled its dry cones against the panes! I listened doubtingly an instant; detected the disturber, then turned and dozed, and dreamt again: if possible, still more disagreeably than before.

This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: but it annoyed me so much, that I resolved to silence it, if 'possible; and, I thought, I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple: a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. 'I must stop it, nevertheless!' I muttered knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in - let me in!'



5. Wuthering Heights

Page 2

'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.

'Catherine Linton,' it replied, shiveringly; 'I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!' As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear.

'How can I?' I said at length. 'Let me go, if you want me to let you in!' The fingers relaxed, I snatched mine through the hole, hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it and stopped my ears to exclude the lamentable prayer.

I seemed to keep them closed above a quarter of an hour; yet, the instant I listened again, there was the doleful cry moaning on! 'Begone!' I shouted, 'I'll never let you in, not if you beg for twenty years'

'It is twenty years,' mourned the voice: 'twenty years. I've been a waif for twenty years!' Thereat began a feeble scratching outside, and the pile of books moved as if thrust forward. I tried to jump up; but could not stir a limb; and so yelled aloud, in a frenzy of fright.

Lockwood's yell of terror wakens Heathcliff who comes to investigate, in the hope that the ghostly Catherine has returned to the house where she lived as a girl.

'Is any one there?' he said in a whisper.

I considered it best to confess my presence, for I knew Heathcliff's accents, and feared he might search further, if I kept quiet. With this intention, I turned and opened the panels. I shall not soon forget the effect my action produced.



Heathcliff stood near the entrance, in his shirt and trousers: a candle dripping over his fingers, and his face as white as the wall behind him. The first creak of the oak startled him like a shock! The light leaped from his hold to a distance of some feet, and his agitation was so extreme, that he could hardly pick it up. 'Only your guest, sir,' I called out, 'I had the misfortune to scream in my sleep, owing to a frightful nightmare. I'm sorry I disturbed you.'

'Confound you, Mr Lockwood! I wish you were at the -' - 'menaced my host, setting the candle on a chair, because he found it impossible to hold it steady. 'And who showed this room?' he continued, crushing his nails into his palms and grinding his teeth. 'Who was it? I've a good mind to turn them out of the house.'

'It was your servant, Zillah,' I replied, flinging myself on to the floor and resuming my garments. 'I should not care if you do; she richly deserves it I suppose that she wanted to get another proof that the place was haunted, at my expense. Well, it is - swarming with ghosts and goblins! You have reason in shutting it up. No one will thank you for a doze in such a den!'

'What do you mean?' asked Heathcliff, 'and what are you doing? Lie down and finish out the night since you are here: but for heaven's sake! don't repeat that horrid noise: nothing could excuse it unless you were having your throat cut!'

5. Wuthering Heights Worksheet

Words

Look at the words that are underlined in the passage. Find the correct meaning of each in the list below.

- a. interrupting, causing a disturbance
- b. holding on very strongly
- c. miserable
- d. decided to
- e. ghostly images
- f. keeping a close watch
- g. give some advice
- h. old-fashioned type of window
- i. covered in mould
- j. extremely sad
- k. anger and shock
- l. not very clearly
- m. half asleep, not very wide awake.

Understanding

1. Who was Zillah? What did she tell Lockwood about the chamber?
2. Why did he think she had shown him to this particular room?
3. Use the details from the text to describe the bed Lockwood slept in.
4. When he fell into a doze, what was the noise that disturbed him? What did he do to try to stop the noise?
5. What did the ghost of Catherine tell him about herself?
6. "Terror made me cruel" - What did he do?
7. How did Heathcliff react to Lockwood's yell of terror?

Group Work - Points to Discuss

1. Do you think that the whole story was just a nightmare or do you think it really happened?
2. Describe your own most vivid dream or nightmare.

Ideas for Writing

Write a story or a poem based on one of these titles:

1. A Night in a Strange Place
2. The Ghostly Visitor
3. The Old Tree

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