

Jane Eyre by Mme von Heringen Hering

Dramatis Personae

- Mrs Sarah Reed, a rich Widow
- John, her Son, 15 years of age
- Capt. Henry Wytfield, her Brother
- Jane Eyre, an Orphan, 16 years of age in 1st Act
- Lord Rōwland Rochester
- Lady Georgine Clarence, a young widow, daughter of Mrs Reed
- Mrs Judith Harleigh, a relation of Lord Roches[ter]
- Dr Blackhorst, Superintendent of an education[al] establishm[ent]
- Lady Clawdon
- Lord Clawdon
- Sir Francis Steenworth, Bart
- Edw. Harder Esq.
- Adèle, a child, 11 years of age
- Grace Poole
- Sam, Man-servant
- Patrick, Groom.
- Tom, an old Valet at Mrs Reed's

} in Lord Rochester's House

Act I is at Mrs Reed's Landed Property; Act[s] II[–IV] at Thornfield Hall, Lord Rochester's Estate.

Act I

A room with book-cases and statues. Centre door in back scene, and side doors to right and left. In the first coulisse to left of actors, is a high window with damask curtains, before which a chair. To the right, a fire-place, and, above this, a life-size portrait of a handsome gentleman of upwards of 40 years of age; before this, a sofa, and, by the side of it, an arm chair and a table. Everything indicates wealth.

Music

[Scene 1]

Enter Jane from side door left. She first puts her head in, enters on tip-toe, and looks around her cautiously and listens; then she hastens lightly over the stage, to the fire-place; her face is pale and surrounded with dark, waving hair; she is clad in a dark cotton dress, over which she has on a black apron, and a small white handkerchief round her neck; she stops before the picture, clasps her hands, and looks at it in a melancholy way.

Jane (after a pause): Uncle Reed, my dear Uncle Reed! Do you see me? – You smile, you do see me! Why do you smile? No, you should rather weep, as they all of them say that I am wick[ed] and corrupt, and that I am an ungrateful child – so [I] suppose it must be true! Ah, why did you leave me[?] I loved you so dearly, and you were so fond of me, – the others all hate me; am I then, to thank them for their hatred? That would only amuse them, and the[y] would laugh at me. Yesterday it was Christmas Da[y] – they made each other presents, but not one of them thought of you, Uncle Reed – (She falls on her kn[ees]) although it is your birthday, today; you gave them all the wealth they roll in; but they do not think of you. Oh, Uncle Reed, I can bring you nothing but my tea[rs] – I have nothing else, but accept them – I weep with love and gratitude – and they say I am ungrateful – Do y[ou] believe it, Uncle? No, no, you do not believe it. (Music ceases.)

[Scene 2]

Jane, Tom

Tom (entering from left): {God} bless me! If I didn't think so! Jane, what [are] you doing here? You come in here, where you are forbid[den] to set foot! One can't leave you to yourself for a momen[t.] What are you doing now?

Jane (jumps up with a wild look, when he enters): I have come to see Uncle Reed on his birthday! I did so, Tom, because nobody else thinks of him.

Tom (perplexed): What say is it really today?

Jane: Yes, the day after Christmas Day, which was never forgotten while Uncle Reed lived, and used to make presents to everyone in the house.

Tom (as before): But Jane, he died five years ago! ... really one can't think of everything ... why, it's an age since that happened.

Jane: Five years! Yes you are right indeed, it is an age. What a happy child I was then! Before Uncle Reed died, I knew not that good people die and that a poor orphan can be so wretched.

Tom: I know you had, nevertheless, at that time, lost both your father and mother.

- Jane (shaking her head sorrowfully)*: I never knew my parents. Uncle Reed took me in his arms, and was so tender and kind! While he live[d] I felt not that I was an orphan! (*With a wild burst of emotion*) Oh! Uncle Reed, where are you gone? When will you come and take me away with you?
- Tom (sorrowfully)*: Come, Jane, come! Now you are beginning the wild talk again, to which you have accustomed you[r] self since you had the fever last year! (*Kindly*) No[w] you are getting naughty again.
- Jane*: Why don't you scold me as you used to do? W[hy] don't you drive me away? Why don't you beat me, as Mrs Reed has ordered you to do?
- Tom (perplexed)*: Because you are no longer a child ... because you are a big girl, now.
- Jane*: Oh, that is not the reason; I have grown older, if you will, but I am still a helpless, ignorant child. The r[ea]son is you dare not, because you have not forgotten the night I was locked up in the room where Uncle died, a[nd] from whence you carried me out, next morning, like a corpse. Now you are frightened of killing me.
- Tom*: I am afraid of making Mrs Reed hate you stil[I] more than you yourself have done and ... well, I consider it my duty to spare you, because your nerves ... (*he pauses*). Come along with me, Jane. Only think if anyone were to come and find you here
- Jane (with defiance)*: I won't go.
- Tom*: Jane! ... (*In a supplicatory tone*) Now be good, and don't grieve me.
- Jane*: Ah, Tom, do not scold me, you know not what I suffer.
- Tom*: Why what a strange girl you are! Now you are good again, but before ...
- Jane*: I cannot help it, Tom! You are so often unkind to me, and so seldom indulgent! Do let me stop here a little! Nobody thinks of the books here, today. I should also like to keep my Christmas, and read, for an hour! It is so long since I had a book in my hand, because Georgine locks them all up. Let me read a little, Tom, it is the only pleasure I have!
- Tom (in conflict with his feelings)*: I should like you to have the pleasure, but, if anyone saw you ...
- Jane (hastens to a bookcase, takes out a book quickly and says joyfully)*: No one, no one shall see me! here it is! Hume's History of England! (*She comes back with a face beaming with joy.*) Do you see, I made no mistake, I knew where to find it. (*Hastens to the window, which has a very broad sill, places the chair against it, and jumps on the chair. Sits on the sill, and says joyfully.*) Just look, Tom, now I shall draw the curtains so that nobody can see me, and then I can sit quietly, and study the history of my country. (*Pleased*) That will do beautifully, won't it? I ought to know something, and they won't let me learn anything at all.
- Tom*: Well, then, have your own way! I shall come and fetch you in an hour's time ... don't stir, and think of me, if you don't of yourself. You know Mrs Reed!

- Jane (draws the curtains before her in such a way that she cannot be seen)*: Don't be afraid; I'll be as quiet as a mouse.
- Tom (aside)*: Now Mrs Reed may scold as much as she likes – I haven't the heart to deny the poor creature the only pleasure I can do her, and at Christmas, too. (*About to go; left*)

[Scene 3]

The former

Enter John from door in back scene; he is very elegantly dressed

- John (roughly)*: Tom, what are you doing here? stop here!
- Tom (perplexed and frightened)*: I have not time, Sir.
- John (in a commanding way)*: You shall stop, I want somebody to talk to. Uncle Wytfield, who has returned from Spain, talks nothing but nonsense that no sensible person can stand, and Georgine sits as stiff as though she had swallowed the poker, and makes grimaces like a fine lady, when I only shoot a bread pill at her!
- Tom*: But it is not proper for you to sit and shoot bread at your sister. Miss Georgine is older than you, and you ought, therefore to show her the respect she is entitled to.
- John (throws himself down on the sofa, with his hands in his pockets, and stretches out his legs)*: Respect! for her! – I do not respect anyone, not even Mama. They will, all of them, one day, be dependent on me, as this wretched Jane Eyre is, now, on my mother! When I am of age, and take possession of the Estate, then I'm the master here, and he who does not obey my orders, and do what I want, will rue it! Don't forget that, Tom.
- Tom (dryly)*: Yes, but that won't be just yet awhile.
- John (jumping up)*: You bore me, Tom ... you don't amuse me at all! What a pity Mama has forbidden Jane to come here
- Tom (as before)*: Yes, it really is a pity you have nobody to plague. Are you not ashamed of yourself, John, to beat the poor child, as you have done so often! Is that proper for a young gentleman of your position?
- John*: I beat her because I hate her! But it is some time since I thrashed her last, and then she both scratched and bit me, the beastly cat!
- Tom*: So she did, but then she was in a state of desperation because you struck her with a hammer, and the poor girl had nothing else to defend herself with.
- John*: She had no right to defend herself at all, when I struck her, for I am the master here, and she is only a beggar, who eats our bread. (*Looking at the curtain*) But what's this! ... Look how the curtain's moving.
- Tom (looks also at the curtain, frightened)*: Yes, you're right! Come, young gentleman, let us go; perhaps it's the ghost.

John (triumphantly): The ghost? Not a bit of it; there must be someone behind. I bet it is the cat herself – (*running to the curtain, which he throws aside*) Right, by Jove! What are you doing here, you beast? (*Aside*) Good heavens! Didn't I just think so?

Jane (sits, as before, on the window-sill, with her feet on the chair, holding the book on her knee with both hands; she has a wild look, she trembles in every limb, and stares at John in a threatening way.)

John (recedes somewhat abashed): Well, what are you staring at me for? Why don't you answer? Why do you hide yourself here, to frighten people? I'll pitch you down, if you don't answer me at once, you beast. (*Stretches out his hand to take hold of her*)

Jane (as before): Don't touch me, John! A year ago, I was still a cat and scratched you, because I would not let you kill me with a hammer, but now I'm bigger!

John (laughs scornfully): I suppose you think I dare not beat you now? You shall soon see ... (*Goes towards her*)

Jane (with flashing eyes, but without moving): If you do that, John, I shall not scratch you (*she jumps from the window-sill to the ground*) but I will kill you! So you had better let me be!

John (receding, frightened): Oh, ho! I dare say you'll take care not to do that.

Jane (calmly): Yes, if you don't beat me.

Tom: (takes her kindly by the hand): Come along with me, Jane.

Jane (without taking her eyes from John): No, he shall go first.

[Scene 4]

The former

Enter Mrs Sarah Reed and Henry Wyfield

Mrs Reed (a tall lady upwards of 40 years of age, proud, repulsive and dark; very elegantly and splendidly dressed, her manner calm, cold and not without dignity): What is the matter here? (*Sees Jane, and turns away with a look of considerable disgust.*) What is that creature doing here? ... How can she dare ...

John (going to her): Mama, Jane has hidden herself behind the curtain, and she threatens to kill me, if I come near her!

Mrs Reed (trying to control herself): Why did you have anything to do with her? It is your own fault, you have not done as I told you. – (*To Jane*) What do you want here?

Jane (who, from the moment Mrs Reed entered has stood trembling and motionless; looking down, softly): I was reading, Aunt Sarah.

Mrs Reed (with self-control, but still coldly and seriously): Have you not been forbidden to come into these rooms[?]

Jane: Yes.

Mrs Reed: How can you then dare to secrete yourself here, when you know my orders?

Jane: Georgine and John have locked up all the books, likewise those which Uncle Reed was so kind as to give to me. You have given me an attic, where it is cold and wretched. I longed so dreadfully for a good book, and here it is quiet and warm.

Henry (shaking his head; to Mrs Reed): Sarah, let her read!

Mrs Reed (gives him a threatening look; then says in the same tone as before to Jane): You could have asked me for a book, then you would not have been disobedient.

Jane (with a sharp look): I did not come here on account of the book{s} alone.

Mrs Reed: What did you come for, then? To listen to what was going on here, I suppose?

Jane: No, but to visit Uncle Reed (*pointing to the picture*) and to send him a grateful thought, as I have no flowers to adorn his portrait with, on his birthday.

Mrs Reed (startled, biting her lips; aside): The serpent.

Henry (with a look of astonishment at Mrs Reed): Yes – it really is the day after Christmas day! In my brother-in-law's time, it was always a great festival here; but now, it seems to be quite forgotten.

John (puffed up): It's a long time since Papa died; one can't always be thinking of that.

Mrs Reed (commanding): Silence! (*To Henry*) I can understand perfectly well, that Jane Eyre remembers this day; my late husband was always spoiling her, and that is how her stubbornness and obstinacy originated. (*Looking gloomily at her*) Have I not forbidden you to curl your hair? Do you not know that Georgine cannot bear it? This mode of dressing the hair, is only fit for the daughters of high families, like my Georgine, who are meant to command, but not for those who, like yourself, are destined to serve and obey. Why do you do this? Answer!

Jane (putting her fingers dreamily through her hair): I did not know my hair had been dressed; I do nothing with it, Aunt Sarah, but it curls naturally. My hair is so stubborn and it will not set otherwise.

Mrs Reed: Then your hair is an emblem of your character! Did you threaten to kill John?

Jane (calmly): Yes, if he beat me again, as he did before.

Mrs Reed: Then beg his pardon!

Jane (looks down, without moving)

Mrs Reed (with a piercing look): You won't?

Jane (calmly): No.

Mrs Reed: You will not beg his pardon?

Jane: Yes, when he has begged mine first, for all the abusive names he has heaped on 'the beggar'.

Mrs Reed (to Wytfield): Do you hear, Henry, do you hear? *(To Jane)* Go.

Jane (holds her head down, and is about to go)

Mrs Reed: Put the book down, first.

Jane (turns round and puts it on the table)

Mrs Reed: You will only come here *once* more; but I shall send for you first.

Jane (looks inquiringly at her)

Mrs Reed: Go, and let me be rid of the sight of a wicked and ungrateful creature!

Exit Jane, left (with head down)

John (triumphantly to Tom): Well, I must go and tell Georgine this at once. How it will amuse her. *(Runs out of door in back scene)*

Tom (follows him shaking his head:—Exit)

[Scene 5]

Mrs Reed, Henry

Mrs Reed (her exasperation breaking out): Now you have seen and heard her, the serpent, who has disturbed the peace of this house, ever since she set foot in it. Can you now conceive what I have suffered in fulfilling the duty my husband was unreasonable enough to impose on me? Thank {God} \goodness/ it is now over.

Henry: I have been away from here too long to \be able to/ comprehend all the details of this case, at so short notice, but so much I can see: that this poor orphan has received but a very indifferent education, and is suffering under your hatred.

Mrs Reed: Yes, I hate her! I may, possibly, not have understood how to bring her up, or would not understand it; I only know that this creature has grown up among us, as a weed and a perfect plague to me and my children, and I have been a conscientious fool for putting up with it so long! I have tried everything to make her obedient and tractable but she is

incorrigible – \she hates my children and defies me/ – she must go, as I can only have peace in my house again in this way, for she is as like her mother, as she possibly can be, and every bit as stiff and obstinate as she was.

Henry (shaking his head): To the best of my recollection, you had a similar antipathy for her mother.

Mrs Reed: And was I not right? She has covered our name with shame; she ran off with a poor naval officer, married this creature who squandered her fortune, and, some few years afterwards, she was a beggar, a penniless widow! I can't tell you what I suffered, the evening she came to our house, with her child, and the weak-minded, romantic Reed received her with open arms! I was obliged to put up with the sight of her, I had to nurse and attend her, until death released me of this martyr! I breathed freely, I imagined my cup of bitterness was drained; but I deceived myself – \the worst was still to come/ ; she had left the child to his care! Then you went to Spain, and knew not what a cross I was called on to bear! Reed was a severe, obstinate man, and I dared not let him suspect how much I hated the little wretch he was so passionately fond of! He made a perfect idol of the child, could sit for hours \together/ with her on his knee, playing with her hair and listening to her prattle! For her sake, he neglected his own children; indeed, when they all three of them had the Scarlet fever, he sat, day and night, by Jane's bedside – his only thought was for her, and he left his own children to me and their fate! I was obliged to submit in silence; even when death suddenly overtook him, his last thoughts were with this horrid creature, for he made me take an oath that I would never abandon the child, but consider it as entitled to the same rights as my own! The same rights! This beggar! Thus, in his last moments, he heaped a fresh burthen on my shoulders; but I have borne it long enough for my conscience not to smite me for throwing it off, so as to breathe freely again in my own house, after the lapse of fourteen long years!

Henry (astonished): But what do you intend to do with her?

Mrs Reed: I shall send her to the Establishment at Lowood; I have settled with the Director, who was here yesterday, and I expect him, every minute, to fetch her.

Henry: The Establishment at Lowood? Is not that an Orphan Asylum, a kind of charity school supported by voluntary contributions, in a very unhealthy neighbourhood, forty miles from hence?

Mrs Reed (coldly): It certainly is an Orphan Asylum. I am not acquainted with the locality, but I know that young girls are brought up, there, in humility and the fear of God, and that they learn to do something useful. I am to pay £18 a year for her, there, and will pay this sum, in advance, for four years. Jane Eyre will receive the education suitable for her station, and, from thence, she can look out for a place either as servant or governess,

according to the way she may avail herself of the four years she has before her. In this way, I believe I confer a real benefit on her, and fulfil my duty at the same time.

Henry: It is somewhat late to take this step, Sarah. Some years ago, she might have been able to stand so terrible a change, but at present, she is too old to be sent to such an establishment. Besides, it seems to me that, in this {way} manner, you do not keep the promise you made to your late husband: he certainly cannot have wished she should have been brought up at an Orphan Asylum.

Mrs Reed (bitterly): No, that is certain! According to his ideas, the first educational establishment in London, would not have been good enough for her, and, if he had had time to make a Will, he would, doubtless, have remembered her liberally to the detriment of his own children! But God is just, and willed it otherwise. (*Turning quickly to him*) For the rest, if, as it seems, you do not approve of my plan, you are quite at liberty to provide better for her future welfare. I leave her to you, with pleasure.

Henry: You jest at my expense, Sarah. You must remember that you had nothing before Reed made a rich lady of you, and that I am a soldier without fortune. My circumstances do not allow me to provide for this orphan.

Mrs Reed (coldly): Then you had better leave her to the fate I have marked out for her. I am commended, by the whole county, for what I have done for this strange child, and I believe I merit the praise.

Henry (shrugging his shoulders): It is well for you, if your conscience do not say the reverse!

Mrs Reed (is about to give a sharp reply)

[Scene 6]

The former, Tom, Blackhorst; afterwards Jane

Tom (comes in from door in back scene): If you please, Ma'am, Mr Blackhorst wishes

...

Mrs Reed (enlivened): Ah, he is welcome; call Jane Eyre!

Tom: I have sent James for her; she will be here directly. (*Goes and opens door for Mr Blackhorst*)

Enter Blackhorst (dressed in black, in a sort of clerical costume, about 50 years of age; he is submissive towards Mrs Reed, but his features are hard and cold.)

Blackhorst: You allowed me, Madam ...

Mrs Reed (whose expression, when he enters, suddenly changes, and becomes mild and affable): You are very welcome, my dear Sir! (*Goes to the sofa, and points to a chair by the side of it*) I have been quite longing for you.

Blackhorst (sits down, after having bowed to Henry): You are really too good, Madam.

Mrs Reed (sanctimoniously): Yes, I may say I have longed for you, for I see, in you, the servant whom the Almighty has ordained to lead erring hearts, with firmness, to the right path.

Blackhorst: Sometimes even with harshness, Mrs Reed, when harshness is the only remedy! God Himself has indeed chosen me for such a servant, and I will praise Him, if, by His goodness, I may succeed in leading the young lamb back, which, notwithstanding all your charitable deeds, of which you wrote me, has strayed from the flock.

Mrs Reed: I considered it my duty to name this lamentable fact, to lighten your task.

Enter Jane (from left entrance; remains standing near door)

Mrs Reed (perceives her, and beckons her to approach): Come here, you shall not say I have spoken ill of you behind your back.

Jane (astonished, approaches timidly)

Mrs Reed: I have done, for {you,} Jane Eyre, what {God} \we are/ commanded {us} to do for the fatherless. Since she was two years old, she has lived under my roof, she has shared everything with my children, and has been brought up with them. But the seeds of my benevolence, have fallen on barren ground, (*with a deep sigh*) for she has no heart! She is ungrateful [–] she tells falsehoods and is a hypocrite, and I feel that for her future welfare, it is necessary that she should be under the care of a stricter person than I am.

Blackhorst: What you tell me is perfectly dreadful! But you need be under no apprehension whatsoever. I have already softened many a youthful disposition, \many a hardened heart./ With God's help I shall likewise succeed in this case, though it is already somewhat late, in bringing the young lamb back to the fold.

Mrs Reed: Jane Eyre. You see this excellent gentleman. From this time forward he will take charge of your future welfare. In a few days, you will leave for the Institution at Lowood, where I have settled for your remaining for four years.

Jane (with a burst of joy): Indeed? Shall I really leave here?

Mrs Reed: I suppose you heard what I said.

Jane: You will send me to a school?

Blackhorst: Where young girls are taught to fear God.

Jane (looking at him from top to toe): You can spare yourself that trouble, Sir, for Uncle Reed has taught me that – I fear and love God, who mercifully takes me away from this house – but tell me, Sir, what *else* can I learn there?

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