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Level Three Second Place Winner

Letter to Stephen Chbosky concerning his book, *Perks of Being a Wildflower*

Dear Stephen Chbosky:

I had my first fit when I was six-years-old.

At least, I call it a fit. I've never found a real name for it. When I become too stressed or overwhelmed, I enter the worst kind of trance. The ground slips from beneath my feet; I plummet into some deep, dark abyss; my heart pounds and the voices, so many voices echo my scream. Terror floods me in a wave and I can't take it—something inside me snaps. Just like that, I become bestial: from a well-behaved student to as writhing, tortured creature whose mind is a war with itself, fighting between life and death.

I don't know the name of my problem because I've never met anyone with the same affliction. Isolation does nothing but harm me, and it's incredibly lonesome to be a closeted freak. Then, I met Charlie. When I read the *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, I was sixteen; so was he. Charlie introduced me first to Patrick, then to Sam. Through Charlie's letters, I found encouragement to work through my struggles; inspiration to embrace myself; and a companion who understand the torture I go through.

Each of Charlie's trio faces different challenges. However, I was struck by Sam's life story. As a small child, she dealt with more than I knew existed at that age: molestation, an uncaring father, and later a "reputation" as a result. Sam and I differ in dozens more ways that we're alike, but that's exactly why she is inspiring. When something bad happens to me, I try to forget; often, I convince myself that whatever happened was my fault. But forgetting, I've found, is useless, because the pain never really goes away. It imprints on your being like a tattoo around your navel; you can have as many surgeries as you want, you can give it all the time in the world, but they'll always be a swirl of faded colors on your skin.

Sam hasn't forgotten her struggles; on the contrary, they lurk in the back of her mind, eating away at her. Yet she lives with them. She accepts that they happened. Of course she affected by her past—our experiences shape us. But Sam has a life outside the horrors she gone through. She is a loyal friend; she gets into her dream college. She laughs, she cares, she finds happiness.

If Sam can face her obstacles head-on, why can't I? The answer: I can.

I can also, thanks to Patrick, accept myself. Patrick's nickname, "Nothing," is ironic, because he is somehow everything; when I first met him, it was like he has his own magnetic field. Instantly, I was drawn in, enamored of this flamboyant, hilarious individual. Patrick is openly homosexual, and if I had to take "openly" out of this sentence, Patrick's magnetism would be tossed out with it.

I see Patrick not as being in a world of his own, but as being a world. Brad isn't a world—Brad, hiding from himself and his friends and family, is a terminal liar. Brad always seems to be crumbling apart at the seams. I'm not a world, either. I'm afraid of change in my surroundings, yet I pray for it myself. I never feel good—I feel like I have to be more polished around the edges, especially when it comes to my Fits. Part of why I hate my Fits isn't because they're frightening and dangerous—it's because they make me feel different, that ineffable curse of a word.

But Patrick got me thinking. Maybe “different” isn’t as curse. When we accept our uniqueness—flaws and all—maybe that’s when we truly become ourselves. Patrick embraces himself for everything he is, and that makes him a world, magnetic field included. He taught me that what makes me different is also what makes me great.

That don’t mean that I want to keep having my Fits; far from it. They still make me inhuman and suicidal. My Fits aren’t something I go around talking about, even with friends. I know how people would look at me if they knew the truth—at least, I fear it; I’d be That Girl, the Insane Girl, the Did-you-hear-what-she-did-to-herself Girl.

I don’t talk about it, so I don’t know anyone who understands. Except, that is, for Charlie

Charlie knows what it’s like to blame yourself for something and have that blame gnaw away at your every merit. Charles and I both do “the panicky type” of crying. Like me, Charlie’s wanted to simply not exist and at the same time desperately wished that he wasn’t thinking that. That’s something about suicides that few people realize: it’s not immediate. You don’t wake up one day and want to kill yourself without something in you fighting back. It’s against human nature—survival of the fittest—to get rid of oneself. That’s the hard part. The conflicting voices in your mind; the devil and the angel, the killer and the savior. Your head pounds, pound, pounds until you can’t think, you can hardly breathe, you can’t control your limbs because there’s too much going on, you’re sure you’re going to spontaneously combust.

Charlie’s problems aren’t the same as my Fits. But he’s the first person I’ve met who has understood how they make me feel. He’s the first person who’s made me feel like it’s okay to have therapy. That’s more than I ever thought I could ask for.

Thank you, Mr. Chbosky, for your beautiful characters. When I said I met them, I meant it: they’re so much more real than just words on a page to me. They’re my friends, pillars giving me support to stand tall. Moreover, thank you for understanding the mind of someone suicidal. Thank you for making us human rather than ticking time bombs, walking to-be tragedies.

Thank you for showing me that we can recover. Now, I can hope that one day, I will be infinite.

Sincerely,

Abby White