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Level III Honorable Finalist

Letter to author Emily Bronte concerning her novel, *Wuthering Heights*

Dear Emily Bronte:

Realization. *Wuthering Heights* helped me to realize how toxic my life had become. Like many people on this planet, I have been in a toxic relationship. None of my relationships ended in death, illness, or insanity. Despite this, *Wuthering Heights* helped bring clarity to a situation I was in.

I thought that I was in love with a boy. I invested so much of myself into this person. We talked every day and he said everything that a girl could possibly want to hear. He told me that he loved me and promised me all of these amazing things. I believed him. I let his lies misguide me. I listened to him and loved him: this led me to eventually forget myself. My actions were centered around him. My decisions were controlled by him. I loved him, and I eventually let that love define me.

For the first year that we were together, I didn't think there was anything wrong with this. I loved him and he loved me back. But one day something changed, or more appropriately, I began to see a different side to him. He became verbally abusive. He wanted to control every aspect of my life. He wanted to be the only important person in my life. He convinced me that I could only be friends with those people he deemed "appropriate." He constantly yelled at me for just being me and said that I was lucky that he put up with me. Because I was so in love with him and thought that he only wanted the best for me, I put up with it. I let him strip me of who I was, I let him convince me that I was a bad person, and I let him take away any conception of self-worth that I had.

Eventually, I started to realize that this wasn't okay, but I couldn't imagine my life without him. He was my everything. He was my only thing. This was when I began to relate to Catherine Earnshaw. She exclaimed that she was Heathcliff. She did just as I had done and completely invested her identity into this other person. Reading the novel, I watched how Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship progressed, and recognized just how similar their relationship was to mine and my boyfriend's. I began to question my thinking and be more aware of just how toxic my current situation was.

Wuthering Heights warned me of what was to come if I kept doing what I was doing. Of course, I knew that the ending of my relationship wouldn't be nearly as dramatic, but it made me realize how ridiculous my situation was. If I continued to endure the pain of this relationship for the sake of what this boy had once meant and represented to me, I would continue to suffer. Catherine invested herself into Heathcliff and Heathcliff continued to love the idea of Catherine. Sadly, I am a horrible combination of the two. *Wuthering Heights* helped me reflect on myself and my situation. Without it I wouldn't have been able to realize that I was on a path to destruction.

I recently ended that toxic relationship. Nothing could have prepared me for the heartbreak that I am going through. I am lost. I miss him. I miss what we had and some nights I regret my decision. Some nights I feel so lost that I am not sure how I will make it through the night. Because I invested so much of myself in that relationship, I am struggling with finding my own identity now. But I am taking it day by day, one minute at a time. I can thank you for the strength I find to do that. *Wuthering Heights* will always remind me that the heartbreak I am feeling now would have been so much worse had I stayed on the path that I was on.

Thank you. Thank you so much for helping me reflect and for giving me the strength to let go. I loved him so much and I was worried that losing him would be the worst thing that could ever have happened to me, but you helped me realize that it is not. I am not him. He can't live my life for me. I now know that not only can I live without him, but living with him is the worst thing that I could do. Thank you for giving me this clarity and thank you for giving me the strength. I will never forget my self-worth.

Sincerely,

Tiffany McCutcheon