



Cathy and Heathcliff

from Emily Brontë's book
Wuthering Heights

Emily Brontë was one of three sisters—all of them writers—who lived in the first half of the nineteenth century. Their father was a clergyman and their home was Haworth Parsonage, a bleak, rather forbidding house with the gravestones of the churchyard on one side and the wild, desolate Yorkshire moors on the other.

*Their lives were spent in this lonely little village of the West Riding, and the Yorkshire character and landscape colour all their writings. Emily, particularly, loved the windswept, moorland country which surrounded their home, and *Wuthering Heights*, her only novel, owes its sombre, fascinating atmosphere to the background of her life.*

*Of the three sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, only the work of Charlotte gained recognition in the author's lifetime; but now, a century later, we recognise the true genius of Emily. The beauty of her poetry, and the power and dramatic quality of her novel far excel anything written by her sisters (even Charlotte's masterpiece, *Jane Eyre*).*

Wuthering Heights relates the histories of two neighbouring Yorkshire families, the Lintons and the Earnshaws, through three generations; and the changes of fortune brought upon both of them by the chance action of Mr. Earnshaw, which is described in the excerpt from the book which follows. The strange little foundling boy grows up to be the principal actor in the drama. This is Heathcliff, a character drawn with a power and assurance which at once mark Emily Brontë as a great English writer.

J. K.

CATHY AND HEATHCLIFF

(The story is told in the first person, and is taken up in turn by minor characters in the book. Here Nellie Dean, an old family servant, is telling the story.)

BEFORE I came to live here I was almost always at Wuthering Heights; because my mother had nursed Mr. Hindley Earnshaw, that was Hareton's father, and I got used to playing with the children; I ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set me to. One fine summer morning—it was the beginning of harvest, I remember—Mr. Earnshaw, the old master, came downstairs dressed for a journey; and, after he told Joseph what was to be done during the day, he turned to Hindley, and Cathy, and me—for I sat eating my porridge with them—and he said, speaking to his son, "Now, my bonny man, I'm going to Liverpool to-day; what shall I bring you? You may choose what you like: only let it be little, for I shall walk there and back: sixty miles each way, that is a long spell!" Hindley named a fiddle, and then he asked Miss Cathy; she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip. He did not forget me; for he had a kind heart, though he was rather severe sometimes. He promised to bring me a pocketful of apples and pears, and then he kissed his children, said good-bye, and set off.

It seemed a long while to us all—the three days of his absence—and often did little Cathy ask when he would be home. Mrs. Earnshaw expected him by supper-time on the third evening, and she put the meal off hour after hour; there were no signs of his coming, however, and at last

the children got tired of running down to the gate to look. Then it grew dark; she would have had them to bed, but they begged sadly to be allowed to stay up and, just about eleven o'clock, the door-latch was raised quietly, and in stepped the master. He threw himself into a chair, laughing and groaning, and bid them all stand off, for he was nearly killed—he would not have such another walk for the three kingdoms.

"And at the end of it, to be flighted to death!" he said, opening his greatcoat, which he had bundled up in his arms. "See here, wife! I was never so beaten with anything in my life; but you must e'en take it as a gift of God; though it's dark almost as if it came from the devil."

We crowded round, and over Miss Cathy's head I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk; indeed, its face looked older than Catherine's; yet, when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors; she did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for? What he meant to do with it, and whether he were mad? The master tried to explain the matter: but he was really half dead with fatigue, and all that I could make out, amongst her scolding, was a tale of his seeing it starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool; where he picked it

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up and inquired for its owner. Not a soul knew to whom it belonged, he said; and his money and time being both limited, he thought it better to take it home with him at once than run into vain expenses there: because he was determined he would not leave it as he found it. Well, the conclusion was that my mistress grumbled herself calm; and Mr. Earnshaw told me to wash it, and give it clean things, and let it sleep with the children.

Hindley and Cathy contented themselves with looking and listening till peace was restored; then, both began searching their father's pockets for the presents he had promised them. The former was a boy of fourteen, but when he drew out what had been a fiddle crushed to morsels in the greatcoat, he blubbered aloud; and Cathy, when she learned the master had lost her whip in attending on the stranger, showed her humour by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing, earning for her pains a sound blow from her father to teach her cleaner manners. They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room; and I had no more sense, so I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr. Earnshaw's door, and there he found it on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how it got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house.

This was Heathcliff's first introduction to the family. On coming back a few days afterwards (for I did not consider my banishment perpetual) I found they

had christened him "Heathcliff"; it was the name of a son who died in childhood, and it has served him ever since, both for Christian and surname. Miss Cathy and he were now very thick; but Hindley hated him: and, to say the truth, I did the same; and we plagued and went on with him shamefully: for I wasn't reasonable enough to feel my injustice, and the mistress never put in a word on his behalf when she saw him wronged.

He seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment; he would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident and nobody was to blame. This endurance made old Earnshaw furious, when he discovered his son persecuting the poor, fatherless child, as he called him. He took to Heathcliff strangely, believing all he said (for that matter, he said precious little, and generally the truth), and petting him up far above Cathy, who was too mischievous and wayward for a favourite.

So, from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house; and at Mrs. Earnshaw's death, which happened in less than two years after, the young master had learned to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges; and he grew bitter with brooding over these injuries.

In the course of time, Mr. Earnshaw began to fail. He had been active and healthy, yet his strength left him suddenly; and when he was confined to the chimney-corner he grew grievously

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irritable. A nothing vexed him; and suspected slights of his authority nearly threw him into fits. This was especially to be remarked if anyone attempted to impose upon, or domineer over, his favourite; he was painfully jealous lest a word should be spoken amiss to him; seeming to have got into his head the notion that, because he liked Heathcliff, all hated and longed to do him an ill turn. It was a disadvantage to the lad; for the kinder among us did not wish to fret the master, so we humoured his partiality; and that humouring was rich nourishment to the child's pride and black tempers. Still it became in a manner necessary; twice, or thrice, Hindley's manifestation of scorn, while his father was near, roused the old man to fury: he seized his stick to strike him, and shook with rage that he could not do it.

But the hour came, at last, that ended Mr. Earnshaw's troubles on earth. He died quietly in his chair one October evening, seated by the fireside. A high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney; it sounded wild and stormy, yet it was not cold, and we were all together—I, a little removed from the hearth, busy at my knitting, and Joseph reading his Bible near the table (for the servants generally sat in the house then, after their work was done). Miss Cathy had been sick, and that made her still; she leaned against her father's knee, and Heathcliff was lying on the floor with his head in her lap. I remember the master, before he fell into a doze, stroking her bonny hair—it pleased him rarely to see her gentle—and saying:

“Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?” And she turned her face up to his, and laughed, and answered: “Why cannot you always be a good man, Father?” But as soon as she saw him vexed again, she kissed his hand, and said she would sing him to sleep. She began singing very low, till his fingers dropped from hers, and his head sank on his breast. Then I told her to hush, and not stir, for fear she would wake him. We all kept as mute as mice a full half-hour, and should have done longer, only Joseph, having finished his chapter, got up and said that he must rouse the master for prayers and bed. He stepped forward, and called him by name, and touched his shoulder; but he would not move; so he took the candle and looked at him. I thought there was something wrong as he set down the light; and seizing the children each by an arm, whispered them to “frame upstairs, and make little din—they might pray alone that evening—he had summat to do.”

“I shall bid father good night first,” said Catherine, putting her arms round his neck, before we could hinder her. The poor thing discovered her loss directly—she screamed out, “Oh, he's dead, Heathcliff! He's dead!” And they both set up a heartbreaking cry.

Mr. Hindley came home to the funeral; and—a thing that amazed us, and set the neighbours gossiping right and left—he brought a wife with him. What she was, and where she was born, he never informed us: probably she had neither money nor name to recommend her, or he would scarcely have kept the union from his father.

Young Earnshaw was altered con-

*Heathcliff.*

siderably in the three years of his absence. He had grown sparer, and lost his colour, and spoke and dressed quite differently; and, on the very day of his return, he told Joseph and me we must thenceforth quarter ourselves in the back-kitchen, and leave the house for him. Indeed, he would have carpeted and papered a small spare room for a parlour; but his wife expressed such pleasure at the white floor and huge glowing fireplace, at the pewter dishes and delf-case, and dog-kennel, and the wide space there was to move about in where they usually sat, that he thought it unnecessary to her comfort, and so dropped the intention.

She expressed pleasure, too, at finding a sister among her new acquaintance; and she prattled to Catherine, and kissed her, and ran about with her, and gave her quantities of presents, at the beginning. Her affection tired very soon, however, and when she grew peevish

Hindley became tyrannical. A few words from her, evincing a dislike to Heathcliff, were enough to rouse in him all his old hatred of the boy. He drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead; compelling him to do so as hard as any other lad on the farm.

The boy bore his degradation pretty well at first, because Cathy taught him what she learned, and worked or played with him in the fields. They both promised fair to grow up as rude as savages; the young master being entirely negligent how they behaved, and what they did, so they kept clear of him. He would not even have seen after their going to church on Sundays, only Joseph and the curate reprimanded his carelessness when they absented themselves; and that reminded him to order Heathcliff a flogging, and Catherine a fast from dinner or supper. But it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after-punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at. The curate might set as many chapters as he pleased for Catherine to get by heart, and Joseph might thrash Heathcliff till his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again, at least, the minute they had contrived some naughty plan of revenge; and many a time I've cried to myself to watch them growing more reckless daily, and I not daring to speak a syllable, for fear of losing the small power I still retained over the unfriendly creatures. One Sunday evening, it chanced that they were banished from the sitting-room, for making a

noise, or a light offence of the kind; and when I went to call them to supper, I could discover them nowhere. We searched the house, above and below, and the yard and stables; they were invisible; and, at last, Hindley, in a passion, told us to bolt the doors, and swore nobody should let them in that night. The household went to bed; and I, too anxious to lie down, opened my lattice and put my head out to hearken, though it rained, determined to admit them in spite of the prohibition, should they return. In a while, I distinguished steps coming up the road, and the light of a lantern glimmered through the gate. I threw a shawl over my head and ran to prevent them from waking Mr. Earnshaw by knocking. There was Heathcliff by himself—it gave me a start to see him alone.

“Where is Miss Catherine?” I cried hurriedly. “No accident, I hope?”

“At Thrushcross Grange,” he answered; “and I would have been there too, but they had not the manners to ask me to stay.”

“Well, you will catch it!” I said; “you’ll never be content till you’re sent about your business. What in the world led you wandering to Thrushcross Grange?”

“Let me get off my wet clothes, and I’ll tell you all about it, Nelly,” he replied.

I bid him beware of rousing the master, and while he undressed, and I waited to put out the candle, he continued: “Cathy and I escaped from the wash-house to have a ramble at liberty, and getting a glimpse of the Grange lights, we thought we would just go and see whether the

Lintons passed their Sunday evenings standing shivering in corners, while their father and mother sat eating and drinking, and singing and laughing, and burning their eyes out before the fire. Do you think they do? Or reading sermons, and being catechised by their manservant, and set to learn a column of Scripture names, if they don’t answer properly?”

“Probably not,” I responded. “They are good children, no doubt, and don’t deserve the treatment you receive for your bad conduct.”

“Don’t you cant, Nelly,” he said; “nonsense! We ran from the top of the Heights to the park, without stopping—Catherine completely beaten in the race, because she was barefoot. You’ll have to seek for her shoes in the bog to-morrow. We crept through a broken hedge, groped our way up the path, and planted ourselves on a flower-pot under the drawing-room window. The light came from thence; they had not put up the shutters, and the curtains were only half closed. Both of us were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge, and we saw—ah! it was beautiful—a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging by silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers. Old Mr. and Mrs. Linton were not there; Edgar and his sister had it entirely to themselves. Shouldn’t they have been happy? We should have thought ourselves in heaven! And now, guess what your good children were doing? Isabella—I believe she is eleven, a year younger than Cathy



“Run, Heathcliff, run! They have let the bulldog loose!”

—lay screaming at the farther end of the room, shrieking as if witches were running red hot needles into her. Edgar stood on the hearth, weeping silently, and in the middle of the table sat a little dog, shaking his paw, and yelping; which, from their mutual accusations, we understood they had nearly pulled in two between them. The idiots! That was their pleasure, to quarrel who should hold a heap of warm hair, and each begin to cry, because both, after struggling to get it, refused to take it. We laughed outright at the petted things; we did despise them! When would you catch me wishing to have what Catherine wanted? or find us by ourselves, seeking entertainment in yelling, and sobbing, and rolling on the ground, divided by the whole room? I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange—not if I might have the privilege of

throwing Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley's blood!”

“Hush, hush!” I interrupted. “Still you have not told me, Heathcliff, how Catherine is left behind?”

“I told you we laughed,” he answered. “The Lintons heard us, and with one accord they shot like arrows to the door; there was silence, and then a cry, ‘Oh, Mamma, Mamma! Oh, Papa! Oh, Mamma, come here! Oh, Papa, oh!’ They really did howl out something in that way. We made frightful noises to terrify them still more, and then we dropped off the ledge, because somebody was drawing the bars, and we felt we had better flee. I had Cathy by the hand, and was urging her on, when all at once she fell down. ‘Run, Heathcliff, run!’ she whispered. ‘They have let the bulldog loose, and he holds me!’ The devil had seized her ankle, Nelly; I heard his

abominable snorting. She did not yell out—no! She would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow. I did, though; I vociferated curses enough to annihilate any fiend in Christendom; and I got a stone and thrust it between his jaws, and tried with all my might to cram it down his throat. A beast of a servant came up with a lantern at last, shouting ‘Keep fast, Skulker; keep fast!’ He changed his note, however, when he saw Skulker’s game. The dog was throttled off, his huge, purple tongue hanging half a foot out of his mouth, and his pendent lips streaming with bloody slaver. The man took Cathy up; she was sick, not from fear, I’m certain, but from pain. He carried her in; I followed, grumbling execrations and vengeance. ‘What prey, Robert?’ halloed Linton from the entrance. ‘Skulker has caught a little girl, sir,’ he replied; ‘and there’s a lad here,’ he added, making a clutch at me, ‘who looks an out-and-outer! Very like, the robbers were for putting them through the window to open the doors to the gang after all were asleep, that they might murder us at their ease. Hold your tongue, you foul-mouthed thief, you! you shall go to the gallows for this. Mr. Linton, sir, don’t lay by your gun.’ ‘No, no, Robert,’ said the old fool. ‘The rascals knew that yesterday was my rent-day; they thought to have me cleverly. Come in; I’ll furnish them a reception. There, John, fasten the chain. Give Skulker some water, Jenny. To beard a magistrate in his stronghold, and on the Sabbath, too! Where will their insolence stop? Oh, my dear Mary, look here! Don’t be afraid, it is but a boy—yet the

villain scowls so plainly in his face; would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts as well as features?’ He pulled me under the chandelier, and Mrs. Linton placed her spectacles on her nose and raised her hands in horror. The cowardly children crept nearer also, Isabella lisping, ‘Frightful thing! Put him in the cellar, Papa. He’s exactly like the son of the fortune-teller that stole my tame pheasant. Isn’t he, Edgar?’

“While they examined me, Cathy came round; she heard the last speech, and laughed. Edgar Linton, after an inquisitive stare, collected sufficient wit to recognise her. They see us at church, you know, though we seldom meet them elsewhere. ‘That’s Miss Earnshaw!’ he whispered to his mother, ‘and look how Skulker has bitten her—how her foot bleeds!’

“‘Miss Earnshaw! Nonsense!’ cried the dame. ‘Miss Earnshaw scouring the country with a gipsy! And yet, my dear, the child is in mourning—surely it is—and she may be lamed for life!’

“‘What culpable carelessness in her brother!’ exclaimed Mr. Linton, turning from me to Catherine. ‘I’ve understood from Shielders’” (that was the curate) “‘that he lets her grow up in absolute heathenism. But who is this? Where did she pick up this companion? Oho! I declare he is that strange acquisition my late neighbour made, in his journey to Liverpool—a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway.’

“‘A wicked boy, at all events,’ remarked the old lady, ‘and quite unfit for a decent house? Did you notice his language, Linton? I’m shocked

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that my children should have heard it.'

"I recommenced cursing—don't be angry, Nelly—and so Robert was ordered to take me off. I refused to go without Cathy; he dragged me into the garden, pushed the lantern into my hand, assured me that Mr. Earnshaw should be informed of my behaviour, and, bidding me march directly, secured the door again. The curtains were still looped up at one corner, and I resumed my station as spy; because, if Catherine had wished to return, I intended shattering their great glass panes to a million of fragments, unless they let her out. She sat on the sofa quietly. Mrs. Linton took off the grey cloak of the dairymaid, which we had borrowed for our excursion, shaking her head and expostulating with her, I suppose; she was a young lady, and they made a distinction between her treatment and mine. Then the woman-servant brought a basin of warm water,

and washed her feet; and Mr. Linton mixed a tumbler of negus, and Isabella emptied a plate full of cakes into her lap, and Edgar stood gaping at a distance. Afterwards they dried and combed her beautiful hair, and gave her a pair of enormous slippers, and wheeled her to the fire; and I left her, as merry as she could be, dividing her food between the little dog and Skulker, whose nose she pinched as he ate, and kindling a spark of spirit in the vacant blue eyes of the Lintons—a dim reflection from her own enchanting face. I saw they were full of stupid admiration; she is so immeasurably superior to them—to everybody on earth, is she not, Nelly?"

"There will more come of this business than you reckon on," I answered, covering up and extinguishing the light. "You are incurable, Heathcliff; and Mr. Hindley will have to proceed to extremities, see if he won't."



This incident marked the close of a chapter in Heathcliff's life. The Cathy who came back to Wuthering Heights had changed beyond his recognition; her stay with the Lintons had turned her into an elegant young lady with fine clothes and manners. In bitter disappointment and despair, Heathcliff fled. Tears later he returned, a grown man. Hatred and a desire for revenge had taken complete possession of him, and his one reason for living had become vengeance upon Hindley.