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Opening extract from

Wuthering Hearts

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Wuthering Hearts

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Chapter One



'Noooo!' wailed Emily, dramatically. It was Drama, after all. And if she couldn't get away with being dramatic in Drama, where could she get away with it? Besides, this was an emergency. Drama was required.

Uh-oh. Emily froze as Miss Edwards turned towards her, looking thunderous.

Ah. Apparently she couldn't get away with being dramatic here either.

In agonising slow motion the Drama teacher angled her Roman nose slowly downwards until she had a clear view over the top of gold, half-rimmed glasses. She switched on her death-ray stare.

Bzzzzzzt.

Emily's stomach lurched, but she kept her nerve. Some things were too important to ignore, and the idea of *Wuthering Heights* as the school play was one of them. Although, right now, the stunned faces of her classmates were telling Emily that her leading-lady strop might be a tiny bit OTT. She decided to tone it down a bit.

'Come on . . .' Emily said reasonably. '*Wuthering Heights* is so dark and depressing. It's always raining. And what about the characters? Everyone's called Cathy or Catherine or Cath or Kitty or Kat or Cate or, um . . . what's his name . . . ? Cliff? No, *Heath*cliff. He's a right charmer, isn't he? *Not*.'

There was an ominous silence as Emily wondered helplessly what a girl had to do around here to convince someone that *Wuthering Heights*, well, sucked. And she *had* to convince Miss Edwards of her mistake before it was too late. Frantically she scrabbled around for more ammo. 'And everyone marries their cousin and they're always miserable and soaking wet, like, all the time. Or dead. And—'

'Thank you for your eloquent critique, Miss Sparrow.' The teacher's tone was chilly. 'But if you're quite finished, I have a play to direct.'

Deep down Emily knew that her brief campaign was dead in the water, but she went for it anyway. 'Not quite finished, actually,' she said. 'What about the health and safety issues?' The road map of veins standing out on Miss Edwards' forehead made Emily's voice shoot up an octave. 'There is a lot of broken glass in *Wuthering Heights* . . .' she squeaked.

'Thank you, Emily,' said the Drama teacher with finality.

'No problem,' Emily whispered.

'For the love of Edward Cullen, will you shut up?' hissed Maia, from behind a cupped hand. 'I thought you wanted to *star* in the school play. If you don't quit whingeing, you won't even get a walk-on part.'

'I was only saying that I don't want to do *Wuthering Heights*,' Emily whispered back. 'It's not fair.'

Maia flung her eyes towards the polystyrene ceiling tiles before replying in an undertone. 'We're in Yorkshire,' she said. '*Wuthering Heights* is totally logical.'

'So's algebra,' grumbled Emily. 'I don't get that either.'

Two desks away Lexie Allinton carefully tucked

her ash-blonde hair behind one ear. 'Miss Edwards?' she said in an angelic voice. '*Wuthering Heights* is actually my favourite book, like, ever. I'd love to play Cathy. You know, the lead role? I just really relate to her. Miss, it feels like the perfect role for me.'

Emily felt as though a torrent of icy water had whooshed all over her. Playing the lead role in the school play was *her* dream. She was the one who longed to be an actress and who put in the hours, going to every workshop on offer, and actually *reading* plays. If Miss Edwards was dead set on forcing them to whinge and wail their way through *Wuthering Heights*, then the lead belonged to *her*.

Emily should be Cathy. Not Lexie.

But the other girl was already speaking earnestly about how she and Cathy were so alike that it was as if they were separated at birth. Emily realised too late that *Wuthering Heights* might be bad, but the thought of missing out on the lead was far, far worse.

'We're soul mates, miss,' Lexie went on. 'It's like the role was written for me.' She laid her hand on her heart as she spoke, looking totally sincere.

Personally Emily thought that if they were talking perfect roles here, then Lexie was more like

the whining, posh Isabella than Cathy. Silently this time, she roared another *Noooo* as the chance of a lifetime slipped further and further away. Lexie had made her case beautifully. Emily had to give it to her – the girl was good.

Lexie Allinton wasn't just good. She was cool too. *She* was the girl that all of the other girls wanted to be. If Lexie liked someone, they were instantly promoted to the big league, which meant sleepovers and shopping trips and nail bars and evenings spent in her outdoor hot tub. But if Lexie didn't like someone, then it meant none of the above. And after an incident last term when Lexie's boyfriend happened to mention that he thought Emily was 'nice', the boyfriend had become an ex-boyfriend and Emily was permanently denied access to the popular big league. Not that she'd ever wanted to join anyway. Much.

Emily's desperation increased. She had to shut her rival up. 'But—'

Lexie, who was in the middle of telling everyone how feisty she and Cathy were, turned to glower at her. 'You've had your turn to speak,' she said. 'Why not let someone else have a go? We're talking about *Wuthering Heights*, not you.'

'Yeah?' muttered Sam Harrison. 'I thought *you*

were talking about *you*, Lexie?' He snorted at his own quick wit, elbowing a dark-haired boy Emily had never seen before. The boy was sitting slumped in the next chair, looking as if he'd rather be anywhere else but a steamed-up classroom in West Yorkshire on a wet autumn afternoon.

Wow. Emily stared at him, momentarily distracted from the twin disasters at hand. He might be frowning and looking totally dejected, but there was no escaping the fact that the boy was . . . well, gorgeous. 'Who is he?' she whispered to Maia. 'Where did he come from?'

'New boy,' replied Maia under her breath. 'Robert McBride. Looks a bit miserable. Sneaked in while you were having your hissy fit.'

Robert lifted heavy lids and scowled angrily in their direction, even though there was no way he could have heard them.

A dry gulp wedged in Emily's throat and she swallowed painfully. With regret she realised that the new boy didn't look the type to leap over desks and snog her any time soon. Even worse he wasn't the only one giving her the evils. Everyone seemed to be staring at her slack-jawed. And not in a wow-how-brave way either.

This wasn't going at all well.

'Ahem.' It was Miss Edwards, still looking mad. 'Are there any other votes against one of the world's greatest classics?' Her angry gaze mine-swept the classroom for objectors and she bared her teeth in a furious smile that dared them to speak, while simultaneously promising retribution for anyone who actually did.

No one spoke.

Clearly no one was as dumb as Emily Sparrow.

'Excellent,' said Miss Edwards. 'Then, by an overwhelming majority, I'd like to announce that this year's Christmas play will be based on the novel *Wuthering Heights* written by the brilliant Emily Brontë, our local nineteenth-century celeb. It will be adapted for the stage by my good self. Auditions start next Monday at four o'clock sharp, and Year Ten Drama pupils are strongly advised to come along.' She flared her nostrils at them. 'For the hard of understanding, that means that you will all be involved in the production. All of you.' She turned to Emily, smiling with a vinegary sweetness. 'That includes you, Miss Sparrow. Don't be late.'

Emily gave a leaden nod. Her mini uprising against *Wuthering Heights* was over and already she had a new battle: how to make sure that *she* – and not Lexie – was Cathy. The big question was,

how she could stop the girl who always got her own way from, well . . . getting her own way again?

'Emily . . . ?'

She had almost forgotten that the teacher was there. 'Hmm?'

'You have read the book, haven't you? *Wuthering Heights*, I mean. It's just that you sound so knowledgeable about it that I thought you must've.'

'Yes!' This was outrageous. Of course Emily had read it. How dare Miss Edwards suggest otherwise? *Whoosh*. A hot wave of guilt flooded over her. *Oh. Oh dear.* Yes, she had started it – the summer before last while trapped inside a leaky tent in Brittany – but she hadn't actually finished it. So if they were being purist about this . . . No, she hadn't read *all* of it.

'I've read the first three or four . . . um . . . pages,' Emily admitted, seriously starting to wish that she'd never said anything about the stupid book. She tried to recover the situation. 'But that was enough. I got tonnes of stuff from those first few pages: imagery, metaphors . . . you know, masses of literary . . . um . . . literary-ness. So I've nearly read it. And I did watch the whole thing on TV last year. The two-part special, I mean. Both

parts. So it's like I've read the whole thing.' She bit her lip. 'Sort of.'

Oh no. Everyone was watching, including the new boy who looked as if he were witnessing a road traffic accident – shocked, but unable to tear his eyes away from the horror of her public humiliation. Lexie was staring at her with ill-disguised glee.

'May I suggest you *sort of* read it all the way through?' said Miss Edwards. She couldn't have looked any more triumphant if she'd just won an Oscar. 'Then you can tell me that it *sucks*.'