

Shadow of Love – Third Extract – Arthur Nicholls and Charlotte

ARTHUR looks at the portrait of Charlotte now hanging on the wall.

NICHOLLS: It was very kind of Mr Smith to give you the portrait.

CHARLOTTE: It is **my** face, after all.

NICHOLLS: There was nothing that lay behind the gift? No reason, other than his natural generosity?

CHARLOTTE: These are very strange questions, Mr Nicholls. If you have something to say, I would be grateful if you would say it.

NICHOLLS: I simply wondered...I wondered if, perhaps, the portrait was, possibly, a pre-nuptial gift?

CHARLOTTE takes a little time to understand what Arthur is saying. Then, she lets out a laugh.

CHARLOTTE: Mr Nicholls, there is no prospect of my marrying Mr Smith. If you must know, it is my belief that he only sent me the portrait because he was tired of having to look at me all day long. And if I were to find myself engaged to be married, it would most certainly not be a matter for concealment. Has my father put you up to this?

NICHOLLS: No. No, he does not know I am here today.

CHARLOTTE notices that ARTHUR is holding a book.

CHARLOTTE: What's that book you have?

NICHOLLS: "Shirley". On loan from the Mechanics' Institute.

CHARLOTTE: I thought you had read it already.

NICHOLLS: I have. I am reading it again. There is a passage I would like to ask you about.

CHARLOTTE: Yes?

NICHOLLS: It is when Caroline and Shirley talk about the sort of man they might like to marry...

CHARLOTTE: I remember.

NICHOLLS: ...and Shirley says: "We think his voice gives the softest, truest promise of a heart that will never harden against us: we read in his eyes that faithful feeling – affection... We feel joy and peace when he comes into a room: we feel sadness and trouble when he leaves

it. We know that this man has been a kind son, that he is a kind brother: will any one dare to tell me that he will not be a kind husband?"

CHARLOTTE: What is it you wanted to ask?

NICHOLLS: I would not have approached you on this subject but for knowing your latest work is completed and that your affections do not lie elsewhere.

CHARLOTTE: Elsewhere?

NICHOLLS: Is it possible that I could be the man that Shirley describes? Is it possible that you could ever consider me as one for whom you might feel affection?

CHARLOTTE: Mr Nicholls...

NICHOLLS: Could you, Miss Bronte...Miss Charlotte...Charlotte...could you ever think of me as being your husband? *Pause.*

CHARLOTTE: Arthur, have you spoken to anyone else about this? Have you approached my father first?

NICHOLLS: I have loved you from a distance almost since the time that I have first known you. I have seen you in the happiest of times and through many of your sorrows. My heart has bled tears for you, but I have also triumphed in your triumphs. And in all of that time I have said nothing of how I feel. I can hold back no longer. Charlotte, I love you. I always will. Can you offer me any hope?

CHARLOTTE: You have not spoken to my father?

NICHOLLS: I have not dared to.

CHARLOTTE: Arthur, I have long since believed that you cared something for me, as I care for you. But I had no suspicion of the depth of your feelings.

CHARLOTTE *begins to usher* **ARTHUR** *out of the door, towards the front door.*

CHARLOTTE: You must forgive me if I can offer you no more hope than this: that I will inform my father of the offer you have made me; that I will give your offer full consideration; that I will give you a response tomorrow. Goodbye, Arthur.