

Shadow of Love – First Extract: Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte

CHARLOTTE: You have read my books?

ELIZABETH: Of course. And more than once. Since the appearance of “Jane Eyre”, I have thirsted to become acquainted with the author. It is the greatest love story of our times. You have read “Mary Barton”?

CHARLOTTE: With the utmost admiration. Such sympathy and warmth. I read it at a time when I suffered great loss in my life and found much consolation in its compassion. You write from the heart.

ELIZABETH: At that time, from a broken heart. My infant son...had died.

CHARLOTTE: You have lost a child? *(she seems suddenly distraught)*.

ELIZABETH: I wrote to give myself a sense of purpose when there seemed so little point in going on.

CHARLOTTE: *(recovering herself)* We have much in common.

ELIZABETH: But I have a husband and daughters whom I sadly neglected in my grief and who are now dearer to me than ever. I see you are not married.

CHARLOTTE looks self-consciously at her ring-finger.

CHARLOTTE: No. I...

ELIZABETH: You are not so plain, Charlotte, as to remain a spinster all your life.

CHARLOTTE: It is my intention to marry but...

ELIZABETH: There must be no buts. Marriage offers the greatest of all consolations in this life. Believe me.

CHARLOTTE: Companionship?

ELIZABETH: Forgive me. We should not be speaking of these concerns so early in our acquaintance.

CHARLOTTE: No – please – you must treat me as if I were an established friend.

ELIZABETH: I trust you are not easily shocked. Some of my friends **are**.

CHARLOTTE: I try not to be.

ELIZABETH: Then...not to put too fine a point upon the matter... I speak of intercourse.

CHARLOTTE: To converse freely with one you love...

ELIZABETH: Sexual intercourse.

CHARLOTTE is discomfited.

CHARLOTTE: Mrs Gaskell, I...

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth. So, I have shocked you, my dear. I perfectly understand - there are all too many who will not speak of such matters.

CHARLOTTE: Forgive my embarrassment. I would be grateful if you would continue.

ELIZABETH: If you are certain. Your books make quite explicit that your lovers respect the mind – but, believe me, the body is not to be altogether neglected. “Jane Eyre” spoke to me of repressed passion, love hidden away until it needed to burst out. We do ourselves a considerable mischief by containing that which should be expressed. As you, yourself, should understand. By all means love with the mind and soul, but never neglect that the heart is a bodily organ.

CHARLOTTE: I am, to my occasional regret, the daughter of a clergyman....

ELIZABETH: And I the wife of one. No –one should ever be so prudish or so proud as to imagine they were conceived immaculately. Even men of the cloth have been known to seek solace under the bedclothes.

CHARLOTTE walks away a little, uncertain as to whether to be shocked or amused.

ELIZABETH: Let us not fall out on our first meeting. I am perhaps too forthright in my views.

CHARLOTTE: No, no. The blame lies with me. I am beginning to realise my life has perhaps been too sheltered. You have seen and known so much more of what life has to offer. Too much of what I know I know only because a book has told me so.

ELIZABETH: You say you wish to marry. Do you have anyone in particular in prospect?

CHARLOTTE: I believe I do, but it would be unfair, at this moment, to reveal who.

ELIZABETH: Your discretion does you credit. But we are, I feel it already, to be the best of friends and, when that is so, you must tell me everything.

CHARLOTTE: We are friends already. We have already spoken of matters that have never been mentioned to me before.