

Wuthering Heights First Extract – Nelly Dean and Catherine Earnshaw

Act 1 Sc5 Nelly and Catherine

Catherine: Nelly, will you keep a secret for me?

Nelly: Is it worth keeping?

Catherine: I want to know what I should do. Today, Edgar Linton has asked me to marry him, and I've given him an answer. Now, before I tell you whether it was a consent or denial, you tell me which it ought to have been.

Nelly: Really, Miss Catherine, how can I know? To be sure, considering the exhibition you performed in his presence this afternoon, I might say it would be wise to refuse him: since he asked you after that, he must either be hopelessly stupid or a venturesome fool.

Catherine: If you talk so, I won't tell you any more. I accepted him, Nelly. Be quick, and say whether I was wrong!

Nelly: You accepted him! Then what good is it discussing the matter?

Catherine: But say whether I should have done so – do!

Nelly: Do you love Mr Edgar?

Catherine: Of course I do.

Nelly: Why do you love him?

Catherine: I do – that's sufficient.

Nelly: By no means; you must say why.

Catherine: Well, because he is handsome, and pleasant to be with.

Nelly: Bad!

Catherine: And because he is young and cheerful.

Nelly: Worse still.

Catherine: And because he loves me.

Nelly: Indifferent.

Catherine: And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband.

Nelly: Worst of all. And now, say *how* you love him?

Catherine: I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says.

Nelly: You love Mr Edgar because he is handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich, and loves you. But there are several other handsome, rich young men in the world: more handsome, possibly, and richer than he is. What should hinder you from loving them?

Catherine: I've seen none like Edgar.

Nelly: He won't always be handsome, and young, and may not always be rich.

Catherine: He is now; and I have only to do with the present.

Nelly: Well, that settles it: if you have only to do with the present, marry Mr Linton.

Catherine: I don't want your permission for that – I *shall* marry him: and yet you have not told me whether I'm right.

Nelly: Let us hear what you are unhappy about. Where is the obstacle?

Catherine: Here! And here! (*Striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast*) In whichever place the soul lives. In my soul and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong! I dreamt once that I was in Heaven but Heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to Earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights where I woke sobbing for joy. I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if Hindley had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now.

Young Heathcliff exits. Nelly notices his departure and realises that he has heard the whole conversation – but Catherine is unaware of this.

Catherine: (*continuing, after a brief pause*) Heathcliff shall never know how I love him: not because he's handsome, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.

Nelly: If you were Heathcliff's choice, he'd be the most unfortunate creature that ever was born! As soon as you become Mrs Linton, he loses friend, and love, and all! Have you considered how you'll bear the separation, and how he'll bear to be quite deserted in the world?

Catherine: We separated? Who is to separate us, pray? Did it never strike you, Nelly, that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power.

Nelly: With your husband's money? I think that's the worst motive you've given yet for being the wife of young Linton.

Catherine: It is not – it is the best! My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He's always in my mind: not as a pleasure, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again.

Nelly: If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss, it only goes to convince me that you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl. Trouble me with no more secrets: I'll not promise to keep them.