

Passage Exemplar for Unit 4: Prose
Extract from *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell (from Chapter III
The More Haste the Worse Speed)

Vocabulary indicates the unexpectedness and forcefulness of Lennox's action and speech and suggests Margaret's discomfort

'Margaret,' said he, taking her by **surprise**, and getting **sudden possession** of her hand, so that she was **forced** to stand still and listen, despising herself for the **fluttering** at her heart all the time; 'Margaret. I wish you did not like Helstone so much — did not seem so perfectly calm and happy here. I have been hoping for these three months past to find you regretting London — and London friends, a little — enough to make you listen more kindly' (for she was **quietly, but firmly, striving to extricate her hand** from his **grasp**) 'to one who has not much to offer, it is true — nothing but prospects in the future — but who does love you, Margaret, almost in spite of himself. Margaret, have I startled you too much? Speak! For he saw her lips **quivering** almost as if she were going to cry. She made a **strong effort to be calm**; she would not speak till she had succeeded in mastering her voice, and then she said:

The nature of Margaret's speech indicates the firmness of her refusal, but also compassion for Lennox

'I was startled. **I did not know** that you care for me in that way. I have always thought of you as a friend; and, **please**, I would rather go on thinking of you so. **I don't like to be spoken to** as you have been doing. **I cannot answer you** as you want me to do, and yet I should feel **so sorry if I vexed you.**'

Language indicates contrary emotions – Margaret's strength of character in overcoming emotion prepares for her role in the novel. Her physical actions demonstrates that Lennox's attentions are unwelcome

Lennox's insistence characterises him as a conventional lover (the number of pauses in his speech also indicate this), but also shows his insensitivity to Margaret's refusal

'Margaret,' said he, looking into her eyes, which met his with their **open, straight look**, expressive of the **utmost good faith** and **reluctance to give pain**, 'Do you' — he was going to say — 'love anyone else?' But it seemed as if this question would be an insult to the **pure serenity** of those eyes. 'Forgive me! I have been too abrupt. I am punished. Only let me hope. Give me the poor comfort of telling me you have never seen anyone whom you could —' **Again a pause**. He could not end his sentence. Margaret reproached herself acutely as the cause of his distress.

The description of Margaret's eyes is the narrator's but it is implied that it is Lennox's perception, stressing her qualities of honesty

'Ah! if you had but never got this fancy into your head! It was such a pleasure to think of you as a friend.'

'But **I may hope**, may I not, Margaret, that some time you will think of me as a lover? Not yet, I see — **there is no hurry** — but **some time** —'

She was **silent for a minute or two, trying to discover the truth** as it was in her own heart before replying, then she said:

Margaret's care and consideration is again emphasised – and her tact, despite her own discomfort

'I have never thought of — you, but as a friend. I like to think of you so; but I am sure I could never think of you as anything else. Pray let us both forget that all this' (**'disagreeable,' she was going to say, but stopped short**) 'conversation has taken place.'

He paused before he replied. Then, in his **habitual coldness** of tone, he answered:

Lennox's language takes on a bitter, almost sarcastic tone, distancing him from reader sympathy

'Of course, as your feelings are so decided, and **as this conversation has been so evidently unpleasant to you**, it had better not be remembered. That is all **very fine in theory**, that plan of forgetting whatever is painful, but it will be somewhat difficult for me, at least, to carry it into execution.'

Gaskell again emphasises Margaret's compassion

'You are **vexed**,' said she, **sadly**; 'yet how can I help it?'

She looked **so truly grieved** as she said this, that he struggled for

Lennox's final speech is dominated by self pity, as if he has been foolishly tempted from his 'prudent' ways by 'passion'.

a moment with his real disappointment, and then answered more cheerfully, but still with **a little hardness** in his tone:

'You should make allowances for the mortification, not only of a lover, Margaret, but of **a man not given to romance** in general — **prudent, worldly**, as some people call me — who has been carried out of his usual habits by **the force of a passion** — well, we will say no more of that; but in the one outlet which he has formed for the deeper and better feelings of his nature, he meets with **rejection and repulse**. I shall have to console myself with scorning my own folly. A **struggling barrister** to think of matrimony!'

Margaret could not answer this.

Margaret's inability to answer is open to interpretation. Is it because of the justness of Lennox's comments, or because she recognises their unjustness?

The passage comes from the early stages of the novel, set in the South, before Margaret moves to Milton Northern with her parents. The rejection of a proposal in Chapter 3 demonstrates the kind of novel Gaskell is *not* writing – a society romantic novel. Margaret's decisiveness and compassion are both made evident here, traits of her characterisation which will be important as the novel progresses. It also calls to mind the contrast between Lennox, the London lawyer, and Thornton, the Milton manufacturer, whose proposal of marriage Margaret does accept near the end of the novel. She accepts him because he has changed his own nature in response to Margaret's rational mind and her compassion, which lead to her understanding of the situation in Milton.