

CLARISSA HARLOWE
or the
HISTORY OF A YOUNG LADY

By Samuel Richardson

Volume VI. (of Nine Volumes)

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THE HISTORY OF CLARISSA HARLOWE
VOLUME SIX

LETTER I

MR. LOVELACE, TO JOHN BELFORD, ESQ. SAT. MIDNIGHT.

No rest, says a text that I once heard preached upon, to the wicked—and I cannot close my eyes (yet only wanted to compound for half an hour in an elbow-chair)—so must scribble on.

I parted with the Captain after another strong debate with him in relation to what is to be the fate of this lady. As the fellow has an excellent head, and would have made an eminent figure in any station of life, had not his early days been tainted with a deep crime, and he detected in it; and as he had the right side of the argument; I had a good deal of difficulty with him; and at last brought myself to promise, that if I could prevail upon her generously to forgive me, and to reinstate me in her favour, I would make it my whole endeavour to get off of my contrivances, as happily as I could; (only that Lady Betty and Charlotte must come;) and then substituting him for her uncle's proxy, take shame to myself, and marry.

But if I should, Jack, (with the strongest antipathy to the state that ever man had,) what a figure shall I make in rakish annals? And can I have taken all this pains for nothing? Or for a wife only, that, however excellent, [and any woman, do I think I could make good, because I could make any woman fear as well as love me,] might have been obtained without the plague I have been at, and much more reputably than with it? And hast thou not seen, that this haughty woman [forgive me that I call her haughty! and a woman! Yet is she not haughty?] knows not how to forgive with graciousness? Indeed has not at all forgiven me? But holds my soul in a suspense which has been so grievous to her own.

At this silent moment, I think, that if I were to pursue my former scheme, and resolve to try whether I cannot make a greater fault serve as a sponge to wipe out the less; and then be forgiven for that; I can justify myself to myself; and that, as the fair invincible would say, is all in all.

As it is my intention, in all my reflections, to avoid repeating, at least dwelling upon, what I have before written to thee, though the state of the case may not have varied; so I would have thee to re-consider the old reasonings (particularly those contained in my answer to thy last* expostulatory nonsense); and add the new as they fall from my pen; and then I shall think myself invincible;—at least, as arguing rake to rake.

* See Vol. V. Letter XIV.

I take the gaining of this lady to be essential to my happiness: and is it not natural for all men to aim at obtaining whatever they think will make them happy, be the object more or less considerable in the eyes of others?

As to the manner of endeavouring to obtain her, by falsification of oaths, vows, and the like—do not the poets of two thousand years and upwards tell us, that Jupiter laughs at

the perjuries of lovers? And let me add, to what I have heretofore mentioned on that head, a question or two.

Do not the mothers, the aunts, the grandmothers, the governesses of the pretty innocents, always, from their very cradles to riper years, preach to them the deceitfulness of men?—That they are not to regard their oaths, vows, promises?—What a parcel of fibbers would all these reverend matrons be, if there were not now and then a pretty credulous rogue taken in for a justification of their preachments, and to serve as a beacon lighted up for the benefit of the rest?

Do we not then see, that an honest prowling fellow is a necessary evil on many accounts? Do we not see that it is highly requisite that a sweet girl should be now-and-then drawn aside by him?—And the more eminent the girl, in the graces of person, mind, and fortune, is not the example likely to be the more efficacious?

If these postulata be granted me, who, I pray, can equal my charmer in all these? Who therefore so fit for an example to the rest of her sex? —At worst, I am entirely within my worthy friend Mandeville's assertion, that private vices are public benefits.

Well, then, if this sweet creature must fall, as it is called, for the benefit of all the pretty fools of the sex, she must; and there's an end of the matter. And what would there have been in it of uncommon or rare, had I not been so long about it?—And so I dismiss all further argumentation and debate upon the question: and I impose upon thee, when thou writest to me, an eternal silence on this head.

Wafer'd on, as an after-written introduction to the paragraphs which follow, marked with turned commas, [thus, ']:

Lord, Jack, what shall I do now! How one evil brings on another! Dreadful news to tell thee! While I was meditating a simple robbery, here have I (in my own defence indeed) been guilty of murder!—A bl—y murder! So I believe it will prove. At her last gasp!—Poor impertinent opposer!—Eternally resisting!—Eternally contradicting! There she lies weltering in her blood! her death's wound have I given her!—But she was a thief, an impostor, as well as a tormentor. She had stolen my pen. While I was sullenly meditating, doubting, as to my future measures, she stole it; and thus she wrote with it in a hand exactly like my own; and would have faced me down, that it was really my own hand-writing.

'But let me reflect before it is too late. On the manifold perfections of this ever-amiable creature let me reflect. The hand yet is only held up. The blow is not struck. Miss Howe's next letter may blow thee up. In policy thou shouldest be now at least honest. Thou canst not live without her. Thou wouldest rather marry her than lose her absolutely. Thou mayest undoubtedly prevail upon her, inflexible as she seems to be, for marriage. But if now she finds thee a villain, thou mayest never more engage her attention, and she perhaps will refuse and abhor thee.

'Yet already have I not gone too far? Like a repentant thief, afraid of his gang, and obliged to go on, in fear of hanging till he comes to be hanged, I am afraid of the gang of my cursed contrivances.

'As I hope to live, I am sorry, (at the present writing,) that I have been such a foolish plotter, as to put it, as I fear I have done, out of my own power to be honest. I hate compulsion in all forms; and cannot bear, even to be compelled to be the wretch my choice has made me! So now, Belford, as thou hast said, I am a machine at last, and no free agent.

'Upon my soul, Jack, it is a very foolish thing for a man of spirit to have brought himself to such a height of iniquity, that he must proceed, and cannot help himself, and yet to be next to certain, that this very victory will undo him.

'Why was such a woman as this thrown into my way, whose very fall will be her glory, and, perhaps, not only my shame but my destruction?

'What a happiness must that man know, who moves regularly to some laudable end, and has nothing to reproach himself with in his progress to do it! When, by honest means, he attains his end, how great and unmixed must be his enjoyments! What a happy man, in this particular case, had I been, had it been given me to be only what I wished to appear to be!

Thus far had my conscience written with my pen; and see what a recreant she had made of me!—I seized her by the throat—There!—There, said I, thou vile impertinent!—take that, and that!—How often have I gave thee warning!—and now, I hope, thou intruding varletess, have I done thy business!

Puling and low-voiced, rearing up thy detested head, in vain implorest thou my mercy, who, in thy day hast showed me so little!—Take that, for a rising blow!—And now will thy pain, and my pain for thee, soon be over. Lie there!—Welter on!—Had I not given thee thy death's wound, thou wouldest have robbed me of all my joys. Thou couldest not have mended me, 'tis plain. Thou couldest only have thrown me into despair. Didst thou not see, that I had gone too far to recede?—Welter on, once more I bid thee!—Gasp on!—That thy last gasp, surely!—How hard diest thou!

ADIEU!—Unhappy man! ADIEU!

'Tis kind in thee, however, to bid me, Adieu!

Adieu, Adieu, Adieu, to thee, O thou inflexible, and, till now, unconquerable bosom intruder!—Adieu to thee for ever!

LETTER II

MR. LOVELACE, TO JOHN BELFORD, ESQ. SUNDAY MORN. (JUNE 11). FOUR O'CLOCK.

A few words to the verbal information thou sentest me last night concerning thy poor old man; and then I rise from my seat, shake myself, refresh, new-dress, and so to my charmer, whom, notwithstanding her reserves, I hope to prevail upon to walk out with me on the Heath this warm and fine morning.

The birds must have awakened her before now. They are in full song. She always gloried in accustoming herself to behold the sun rise—one of God's natural wonders, as once she called it.

Her window salutes the east. The valleys must be gilded by his rays, by the time I am with her; for already have they made the up-lands smile, and the face of nature cheerful.

How unsuitable will thou find this gay preface to a subject so gloomy as that I am now turning to!

I am glad to hear thy tedious expectations are at last answered.

Thy servant tells me that thou are plaguily grieved at the old fellow's departure.

I can't say, but thou mayest look as if thou wert; harassed as thou hast been for a number of days and nights with a close attendance upon a dying man, beholding his drawing-on hour—pretending, for decency's sake, to whine over his excruciating pangs; to be in the way to answer a thousand impertinent inquiries after the health of a man thou wishedest to die—to pray by him—for so once thou wrotest to me!—To read by him—to be forced to join in consultation with a crew of solemn and parading doctors, and their officious zanies, the apothecaries, joined with the butcherly tribe of scarficators; all combined to carry on the physical farce, and to cut out thongs both from his flesh and his estate—to have the superadded apprehension of dividing thy interest in what he shall leave with a crew of eager-hoping, never-to-be-satisfied relations, legatees, and the devil knows who, of private gratifiers of passions laudable and illaudable—in these circumstances, I wonder not that thou lookest before servants, (as little grieved as thou after heirship,) as if thou indeed wert grieved; and as if the most wry-fac'd woe had befallen thee.

Then, as I have often thought, the reflection that must naturally arise from such mortifying objects, as the death of one with whom we have been familiar, must afford, when we are obliged to attend it in its slow approaches, and in its face-twisting pangs, that it will one day be our own case, goes a great way to credit the appearance of grief.

And that it is this, seriously reflected upon, may temporally give a fine air of sincerity to the wailings of lively widows, heart-exulting heirs, and residuary legatees of all denominations; since, by keeping down the inward joy, those interesting reflections

must sadden the aspect, and add an appearance of real concern to the assumed sables.

Well, but, now thou art come to the reward of all thy watchings, anxieties, and close attendances, tell me what it is; tell me if it compensate thy trouble, and answer thy hope?

As to myself, thou seest, by the gravity of my style, how the subject has helped to mortify me. But the necessity I am under of committing either speedy matrimony, or a rape, has saddened over my gayer prospects, and, more than the case itself, contributed to make me sympathize with the present joyful-sorrow.

Adieu, Jack, I must be soon out of my pain; and my Clarissa shall be soon out of her's—for so does the arduousness of the case require.

LETTER III

MR. LOVELACE, TO JOHN BELFORD, ESQ. SUNDAY MORNING.

I have had the honour of my charmer's company for two complete hours. We met before six in Mrs. Moore's garden. A walk on the Heath refused me.

The sedateness of her aspect and her kind compliance in this meeting gave me hopes. And all that either the Captain and I had urged yesterday to obtain a full and free pardon, that re-urged I; and I told her, besides, that Captain Tomlinson was gone down with hopes to prevail upon her uncle Harlowe to come up in person, in order to present to me the greatest blessing that man ever received.

But the utmost I could obtain was, that she would take no resolution in my favour till she received Miss Howe's next letter.

I will not repeat the arguments I used; but I will give thee the substance of what she said in answer to them.

She had considered of every thing, she told me. My whole conduct was before her. The house I carried her to must be a vile house. The people early showed what they were capable of, in the earnest attempt made to fasten Miss Partington upon her; as she doubted not, with my approbation. [Surely, thought I, she has not received a duplicate of Miss Howe's letter of detection!] They heard her cries. My insult was undoubtedly premeditated. By my whole recollected behaviour to her, previous to it, it must be so. I had the vilest of views, no question. And my treatment of her put it out of all doubt.

Soul over all, Belford! She seems sensible of liberties that my passion made me insensible of having taken, or she could not so deeply resent.

She besought me to give over all thoughts of her. Sometimes, she said, she thought herself cruelly treated by her nearest and dearest relations; at such times, a spirit of repining and even of resentment took place; and the reconciliation, at other times so desirable, was not then so much the favourite wish of her heart, as was the scheme she had formerly planned—of taking her good Norton for her directress and guide, and living upon her own estate in the manner her grandfather had intended she should live.

This scheme she doubted not that her cousin Morden, who was one of her trustees for that estate, would enable her, (and that, as she hoped, without litigation,) to pursue. And if he can, and does, what, Sir, let me ask you, said she, have I seen in your conduct, that should make me prefer to it an union of interest, where there is such a disunion in minds?

So thou seest, Jack, there is reason, as well as resentment, in the preference she makes against me!—Thou seest, that she presumes to think that she can be happy without me; and that she must be unhappy with me!

I had besought her, in the conclusion of my re-urged arguments, to write to Miss Howe before Miss Howe's answer could come, in order to lay before her the present state of

things; and if she would pay a deference to her judgment, to let her have an opportunity to give it, on the full knowledge of the case—

So I would, Mr. Lovelace, was the answer, if I were in doubt myself, which I would prefer—marriage, or the scheme I have mentioned. You cannot think, Sir, but the latter must be my choice. I wish to part with you with temper—don't put me upon repeating—

Part with me, Madam! interrupted I—I cannot bear those words!—But let me beseech you, however, to write to Miss Howe. I hope, if Miss Howe is not my enemy—

She is not the enemy of your person, Sir;—as you would be convinced, if you saw her last letter* to me. But were she not an enemy to your actions, she would not be my friend, nor the friend of virtue. Why will you provoke from me, Mr. Lovelace, the harshness of expression, which, however, which, however deserved by you, I am unwilling just now to use, having suffered enough in the two past days from my own vehemence?

* The lady innocently means Mr. Lovelace's forged one. See Vol. V. Letter XXX.

I bit my lip for vexation. And was silent.

Miss Howe, proceeded she, knows the full state of matters already, Sir. The answer I expect from her respects myself, not you. Her heart is too warm in the cause of friendship, to leave me in suspense one moment longer than is necessary as to what I want to know. Nor does her answer absolutely depend upon herself. She must see a person first, and that person perhaps see others.

The cursed smuggler-woman, Jack!—Miss Howe's Townsend, I doubt not— Plot, contrivance, intrigue, stratagem!—Underground-moles these women— but let the earth cover me!—let me be a mole too, thought I, if they carry their point!—and if this lady escape me now!

She frankly owned that she had once thought of embarking out of all our ways for some one of our American colonies. But now that she had been compelled to see me, (which had been her greatest dread), and which she might be happiest in the resumption of her former favourite scheme, if Miss Howe could find her a reputable and private asylum, till her cousin Morden could come.—But if he came not soon, and if she had a difficulty to get to a place of refuge, whether from her brother or from any body else, [meaning me, I suppose,] she might yet perhaps go abroad; for, to say the truth, she could not think of returning to her father's house, since her brother's rage, her sister's upbraidings, her father's anger, her mother's still-more-affecting sorrows, and her own consciousness under them all, would be unsupportable to her.

O Jack! I am sick to death, I pine, I die, for Miss Howe's next letter! I would bind, gag, strip, rob, and do any thing but murder, to intercept it.

But, determined as she seems to be, it was evident to me, nevertheless, that she had still some tenderness for me.

She often wept as she talked, and much oftener sighed. She looked at me twice with an eye of undoubted gentleness, and three times with an eye tending to compassion and

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