

Eliza Haywood, *The British Recluse* (1722)

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[footnotes added from Backscheider and Richetti anthology]

[from original title page]

The British Recluse: or, The Secret History of Cleomira, Suppos'd Dead. A Novel.

Women are govern'd by a Stubborn Fate;
Their Love's Insuperable, as their Hate!
No Merit their Aversion can remove,
Nor ill Requital can efface their Love.
Waller.¹

By Mrs. Eliza Haywood, Author of *Love in Excess*; or, the *Fatal Enquiry*.

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The British Recluse.

Of all the Foibles Youth and Inexperience is liable to fall into, there is none, I think, of more dangerous Consequence, than too easily giving Credit to what we hear: It is always the Source of a thousand Inadvertencies, and often leads the way to a numerous Train of destructive Passions. If we cou'd bring our selves to depend on nothing but what we had Proof for, what a world of Discontent shou'd we avoid! Hope and Fear wou'd then be buried in Certainty; and Love and Resentment never be at Enmity with Reason. Whereas, by relying on Appearances (and, perhaps, such too, as are form'd only by our own Wishes and Apprehensions) we, for a seeming Good, embrace a real Evil, and run into Mistakes, which, without the Interposition of a peculiar Providence, must be fatal to our Interest and Peace of Mind, in whatever Affair we suffer our Belief to be impos'd on.

LOVE! as it is one of the first Passions for which the Soul finds room, so it is also the most easily deceiv'd: [Page 2] The good Opinion which it naturally inspires, of the darling Object, makes it almost an Impossibility to suspect his Honour and Sincerity; and the Pleasure which arises from a Self-assurance of the Truth of what we so eagerly desire, is too great for a young Heart, unaccustom'd to such Struggles, to repel.

But, the following little History (which I can affirm for Truth, having it from the Mouths of those chiefly concern'd in it) is a sad Example of what Miseries may attend a Woman, who has no other Foundation for Belief in what her Lover says to her, than the good Opinion her Passion made her conceive of him.

¹ Spoken by Almintor in Edmund Waller, *The Maid's Tragedy, The Maid's Tragedy altered with some other pieces* (London, 1630), 37.

BELINDA, a young Lady of a considerable Fortune, in Warwickshire,² being oblig'd by some Business to come to London, which she had never seen before, was recommended, by some of her Country Acquaintance, to a House where she might board. The Pleasantness of the Situation, and the good Company she found in it, gave her at once the Charms both of the Town and Country; but being naturally of a reserv'd Temper, and having something in her Mind which seem'd to engross her Thoughts, she grew not presently acquainted with any body. And tho' she observ'd, that at every Meal, a Plate of whatever came to Table was carry'd away, before any other Person was help'd, yet she never had the Curiosity to ask to whom it was sent; till one Day, some Gentlemen happening to dine there, who formerly had been Boarders, they began to enquire, of the Gentlewoman of the House, how the Recluse did---if she continued her Solitary Course of Life,---- and, if she had yet been able to find out the Cause of her Retirement. To which the Landlady reply'd, That she was still in the same Mind, in which they left her;----and that to discover the Mystery of her concealing herself, she believ'd an utter Impossibility. Indeed, (said one of the Gentlemen,) to know the Certainty of such an Affair, may be a little difficult, but I think it no hard Matter to form a very probable [Page 3] Conjecture: In my Opinion, no Motive, but ill requited Love, cou'd induce a Lady (so young and beautiful, as you describe this to be) to such an obstinate and peevish Resignation of all the Pleasures of Life. I rather think (answer'd a young Lady who happen'd to be there) 'tis the Effects of Grief for the Death of some near and dear Relation; a Parent perhaps, or----How, Madam, (interrupted the other Gentleman hastily!) produce me but one Example, since, the Fall of Adam, of such a Constancy in Grief, and I shall willingly acquiese to the Sentiments of so fine a Lady: But as I am positive you cannot, give me leave to say, it is not only impracticable, but also unnatural. Nor can I agree any more with my Friend's Notion of the Matter, than with your's: All Kinds of Passion, every Body knows, wear off with Time; and Love, of all others, as 'tis the gentlest, and is subsisted only by Delight, of course must die, when Delight is at an End. How then, can it be possible that a Woman, who has for a whole Twelvemonth liv'd in a Retirement, where she neither has seen any Body, nor been seen, if it were so that Love was the Occasion, shou'd not by this be weary both of the Cause and the Effect? No, no, (continu'd he laughing,) I rather think, my Landlady, to divert herself, and amuse us, has form'd this Story of a beautiful young Creature, whom, if the Truth were known, I dare swear is some wither'd Hag, past the Use of Pleasures, and keeps herself in private, lest her Countenance should terrify. Very well, (answer'd the good old Gentlewoman,) you may be as merry as you please with Age; but, Sir, I fancy if you cou'd have persuaded me to have contriv'd some means for you to have come to the Sight of this Hag, as you call her, she has Eyes, which wou'd have convinc'd you, that there is a Power in Love, beyond what now you seem to imagine of that Passion.

All Dinner, and some Time after, was past in this sort of Conversation; which, tho' Belinda had but a [Page 4] small Share in, yet it fail'd not to excite her Curiosity to a Desire of knowing as much as she cou'd of this Adventure: And, as soon as the Company were gone, and she had an Opportunity of entertaining the Landlady alone, she took an Occasion to enquire what sort of Woman the Recluse, as they call'd her, really was,----how long she had been there, and by

² *Warwickshire*: a beautiful, historically interesting county in central England which includes the towns of Coventry and Warwick.

what Manner introduc'd. I shall make no Scruple (said she) of informing you as far as I am able; but the Account I can give is so small, that it will only serve to encrease your Desire of knowing more: About a Year past, being told a Lady in a Chair ask'd to speak with me, I went to the Door; but not knowing her, look'd a little surpris'd, fancying she might be mistaken. I believe she guess'd what my Thoughts were; and before I had Time to disclose 'em, Madam, (said she,) I have something to communicate to you, which I am not willing any Person shou'd be witness to; and, if you are at Leisure, shou'd take it as a Favour if you wou'd give me an Opportunity of discoursing you. I then immediately desir'd her to come into the Parlor; and the Door being shut, I am, (resum'd she,) an utter Stranger to you, and, indeed, design to continue so to all the World: It was but by an Accident I heard of the Accommodation you have for Boarders; and gladly wou'd become one, if you approve of it on the Conditions I shall propose. They must be very strange ones (answer'd I) that cou'd make me refuse the Company of a Lady, such as you appear to be: There are too many Charms in that Countenance, not to give me an Ambition of a nearer Acquaintance: I beg therefore, that you will put me out of the Pain of believing there is a Possibility that any Thing cou'd oblige me to deny my self that Honour. She return'd this little Compliment only with a Bow, but which had something in it of more graceful and obliging than any Words cou'd be: And after a Pause, The Conditions I mean (said she) are only these; First, That you never will endeavour to know more [Page 5] of me, than I am willing to reveal;----That you will suffer no one to enter the Apartment order'd for me, but the Servant who shall bring me in my Meat, (for I will never dine at Table,) and give that Attendance which is necessary. And Lastly, That you will be satisfy'd to accept of a Quarter's Payment, of whatever we shall agree on, always beforehand, for your Security, in taking a Person so altogether unknown to you into your House. I will give you (continu'd she, perceiving I look'd amaz'd) Time to consider on what I have said, and, in a Day or two, will wait on you for an Answer. As she spoke these Words, she went hastily into the Chair, leaving me in as great a Consternation at her Behaviour, as ever I remember myself to have been in at any Thing in my whole Life. Belinda cou'd not here forbear interrupting her, by asking a thousand Questions as to her Dress, her Beauty, and whether she observ'd any Thing of that Melancholy in her Countenance the first Time, which she had since discover'd. To all which the Landlady reply'd, That the Surprise she was in at that Time, hinder'd her from taking much Notice, either of her Garb, or Person; but that, since her being in the House, she was always dress'd rich, but extremely careless, and wou'd often go with only her Hair and a Night-gown³ for many Days together. But in spite (said she) of the little Care she seems to take of herself, Heaven never form'd a Creature more exactly lovely; nor do I think it possible for the nicest Eye to discover the least Defect, either in her Face or Shape. What is she (resum'd Belinda) as to her Wit and Conversation? I have already told you (answer'd the other) that she refuses to let us know her Perfections that way, by never stiring from her Apartment, nor permitting any of us to come into it; but if we may form a Judgment of her Genius, by the Entertainment which alone she seems to take Delight in, that of reading the best Authors, we must believe it to be very Elegant: She has an admirable Collection of Books; and my Maid, who

³ *Night-gown*: a long, loose gown designed for informal or at-home dress. The gown was an overgarment that women wore fastened at the neck only, at the waist with a sash, or with decorative buttons and loops from neckline to hem.

waits on [Page 6] her, tells me, she never goes in, without finding her engag'd in some one of them. Then you ventur'd (said Belinda) to take her, without any further Knowledge? I consider'd (reply'd she) that there cou'd be no great Hazard in it; and, besides, there was something so inexpressibly engaging in her Mein and Manner of Address, that I believe it almost an Impossibility she should be refus'd any Thing. This Account gave Belinda the greatest Desire imaginable to be acquainted with her, and never left soliciting the Landlady to use her Interest to procure it. The old Gentlewoman, who was extremely good-humour'd, promis'd to do her Endeavour; but said withal, That she was afraid it was a Work she should not be able to accomplish. You must tell her, (said Belinda,) and, perhaps, with more Truth than you imagine, that you have a Person in your House, who justly may be term'd one of the most unfortunate on Earth;---- that I am charm'd with her Manner of Life;----that I could like nothing so much as to partake such a Retirement;----and, that if she wou'd permit me, sometimes, to mingle my Tears with hers, I wou'd be satisfy'd with the Opportunity of indulging my Grief, without any farther Intrusion on her Secrets, than she shall give leave. This, (answer'd the Landlady,) if any Thing, will do. ----And as you have so ingeniously contriv'd the Plot, it must be entirely owing to my Want of Ability in carrying it on, if it shou'd miscarry: And (continu'd she) I go about it with the more Courage, because that reserv'd, and, indeed, too grave Look (for so young and fine a Lady) which you always wear, will, if she consents to see you, give some Credit to my Words. You need not, indeed, (resum'd Belinda, with a deep Sigh,) be under any Apprehensions, that my Behaviour will be in the least contradictory to whatever you shall tell her of my Disposition to indulge a Melancholy, which I have but too much Reason for. You may talk after what manner you please, (said the other,) but I am too well acquainted with your Circumstances, [Page 7] not to know that you can have no real Causes for that Pensiveness, which, to deal freely with you, very much obscures the Lustre of your Charms. I know not, indeed, (continu'd she, with a Smile,) what imaginary ones your Fancy may suggest: Young People, too often, take Pleasure, as it were, in finding out something to afflict themselves with:---- I am afraid you have seen some Gentleman too lovely for your Repose; and, perhaps, he may be (for Love is a blind Deity) of a Quality above your Hopes, or of a Degree below your Discretion, to make Choice of;----or, 'tis possible, may have prov'd ungrateful;---- or, may be already married,---or engag'd,---or else--- She wou'd, doubtless, have run on with all the Circumstances that can make a young Woman in Love unhappy, if Belinda (a little too nearly touch'd,⁴ putting on a more than ordinary Severity in her Countenance) had not interrupted her, by saying, Madam, whatever the Occasion of my Melancholy may be, I am so much of the Recluse's Mind, as to resolve to keep it secret. Pardon me, (resum'd the Landlady, perceiving she was nettled,) my Words were meant no otherwise than to divert; and to make what Reparation I can for the Inadvertency of them, will confess, that if a Person of your Age is too apt to seek Occasions of tormenting herself, one of mine is liable to as great a Fault, that of talking too much of Affairs which are not any way her Business. Some Company happening to come in, broke off the Conversation. Belinda retir'd to her Chamber; and the Landlady remain'd with her Head full of Contrivance, by what means she shou'd bring about the Performance of her Promise.

The next Day an Opportunity offer'd very lucky for her Purpose: The Recluse sent for her

⁴ *touch'd*: personally affected.

to pay her some Money; and as soon as that Affair was dispatch'd, she began to labour the Success of the other, and was so fortunate in her Negotiation, that as much averse as she found the Recluse at first, the Assurances she gave her that Belinda's Desire of her [Page 8] Society sprung only from a Belief that there was a Sympathy in their Afflictions, at last prevail'd on her to receive a Visit from her. Having obtain'd this Grant, the good old Gentlewoman, eager to acquit herself of the Promise she had made, entreated that Belinda might have leave to wait on her that Night; to which the Recluse, having permitted her coming at all, easily consented.

The Meeting of these two Ladies was something particular⁵ for Persons of the same Sex; each found, at first Sight, so much to admire in the other, that it kept both from speaking for some Moments. The Recluse consider'd Belinda, as indeed she is, one of the most lovely Persons on Earth; and Belinda found the Recluse so far beyond the Landlady's Description, something so majestick, and withal so sweet and attractive in her Air,----such a Mixture of the most forceful Fire, and most enchanting Softness in her Eyes, that she became wholly lost in speechless Wonder; till the Recluse (who, tho' as young as Belinda, was Mistress of a much greater Presence of Mind) broke Silence in these Words:

If, Madam, (said she, with a Voice and Accent no less charming than her Person,) you are enough in love with Misery, to wish to be Partaker of it with me, I heartily can bid you welcome to this Scene of Woe: But if your Grievs are of a Nature that will admit Relief, the Society of a Wretch like me, will be far from adding to your Consolation. To forget the Misfortunes I lament, (reply'd Belinda,) wou'd be, perhaps, a greater Ill than any I yet have known. ---- 'Tis my Desire always to remember them; and nothing sure can so well enable me to do it with Patience, as the Knowledge that so many excellent Qualities, as you appear to be Mistress of, cannot be exempted from Calamities. Alas! (resum'd the Recluse, bursting into Tears,) 'tis the little Knowledge you have of me inclines you to so favourable an Opinion. Believe me, Madam, (continu'd she, weeping still more,) were you acquainted with the History [Page 9] of this Wretch, you see before you, you wou'd allow; that as none like me has ever suffer'd, so also none ever has like me deserv'd to suffer. I believe, Madam, (answer'd Belinda,) one of the greatest Impossibilities you can attempt, is, that of persuading me, or, indeed, any Body that sees you, to that Opinion. These little Civilities being over, they fell into a Conversation suitable to that Melancholy their Misfortunes had involv'd them in; and they agreed so perfectly in their Sentiments concerning the Instability of all human Happiness,----the little Confidence there was to be put in the Protestations of Friendship, ----and that the only way to attain true Content, was in an absolute Retirement from the World, and a Disregard of every Thing in it; that when they parted, (as Belinda thought it improper, to make her first Visit very long,) it was with a mutual Satisfaction, and each began to conceive for the other a real Tenderness, which has ever since remain'd unshaken.

The next Day (being desir'd to do so by the Recluse) Belinda made her a second Visit; and after some Discourse like what had pass'd the Evening before, the Conversation turn'd, perhaps, undesignedly by either of them on Love; but when once enter'd, neither seem'd to grow weary of the Subject; and both spoke in so feeling a Manner, that if a third Person had been witness of what they said, he need not have been very quick of Apprehension to discover what

⁵ *particular*: unusually strong specific attraction.

was the Source of both these Ladies Troubles. They sat together till past Midnight; and when Belinda took her Leave, it was not without making an Appointment to pass the next Evening as they had done this.

As soon as Belinda was alone, she began to run over in her Mind, all the Particulars of the Conversation she had with the Recluse, and was now confirm'd in what she before imagin'd, that Love had been the sole Cause of her Retirement: She wou'd have given almost one of her Eyes, to have been let [Page 10] into the Secret of the whole Affair; but durst not attempt to ask it, for fear of disoblighing her, if the Recluse, who was little behind her in Curiosity, had not, at the next Visit, purposely given her an Opportunity.

I know not, Madam, (said she, soon after they were together,) whether there be a Possibility for you to imagine from what Cause the Miseries you see me in have proceeded, but I am half positive, that I can more than guess the Origine of that Melancholy which induces you to support the Society of a Wretch like me. ---I cannot doubt, Madam, (reply'd Belinda, blushing, yet pleas'd she had so favourable an Opportunity of speaking her Mind without Offence,) your Penetration in a much greater Matter, since I, who have but little Discernment, and less Experience, have been bold enough in my Imagination, to assure myself that whatever the Effects may be, the Cause of both our Sorrows is the same. I am so much of your Mind, (resum'd the other,) that I am willing to put it to the Tryal. Here (continu'd she, taking Pens and Paper) do you write, and I will do the same; and by reading what each other have set down, both will avoid the Confusion of speaking first. Agreed, (said Belinda, and immediately did as the Recluse desir'd.) On Exchange of the Papers, Belinda read in that which the Recluse had writ, Undone by Love, and the Ingratitude of faithless Man. And the Recluse found in that which the other had writ, these Words, For ever lost to Peace by Love, and my own fond Belief As I expected! cry'd they out both together. And after a little Pause, Not all the Ills (rejoyn'd the Recluse) which Fortune watches to oppress us with, are half so ruinous, so destructive, as this one Passion! Nothing, indeed, (reply'd Belinda, weeping,) is to our Sex so fatal. O Love! (continued she,) thou gilded Poison, which kills by slow Degrees, and makes each Moment of our Life a Death! Why, O why, do we suffer our fond Hearts to harbour thee? ---Why are we not [Page 11] like Man, (resum'd the Recluse, bearing her Company in Tears,) inconstant, changing, and hunting after Pleasure in every Shape? ---Or, if our Sex, more pure, and more refin'd, disdains a Happiness so gross, why have we not Strength of Reason too, to enable us to scorn what is no longer worthy our Esteem? In these, and the like Exclamations, they past some Times; and had, doubtless, given a greater Loose to the overboiling Passions of their Souls, if their mutual Curiosity to know each others Adventures, had not oblig'd them to leave off.

The Recluse wou'd fain have perswaded Belinda to relate her Story first; but that Lady excus'd herself, in Terms so obliging, and full of Respect, that the other cou'd not press her any farther, and only said, I shou'd hardly be prevail'd on to a Recital of those Misfortunes which, indeed, have fallen on me but too justly, till by knowing yours I shou'd have Hope to find Excuse; but, as I am confident no Woes were ever like mine, I have good Nature enough to acquaint you with 'em first, to the End that the Knowledge of mine may make your own seem less, and enable you with more Ease to the Relation of them. Belinda answer'd her only with a Bow, and a little shaking of her Head, at once to thank her for her Civility, and shew that she thought it impossible for any Affliction to exceed that which she endur'd: And the Recluse, after

having paid a Tribute of Sighs, which the Remembrance of her Misfortunes always exacted from her, began to satisfy her Companion's Impatience in these Words:

THE STORY OF CLEOMIRA.⁶

To make you perfectly comprehend the Truth of my Affairs, (said she,) I must acquaint you of what Condition my Parents were: Though their Names I shall beg leave to conceal, least by declaring to any one that so deservedly unhappy a Creature is their Child, I shou'd disturb the sacred Quiet of their Ashes. [Page 12] She cou'd not speak this without bursting into a Torrent of Tears, which, for some Moments, hinder'd her from proceeding: But as soon as she had a little repell'd the Violence of her Grief, You must know (continu'd she) that my Father was a younger Branch of a Family which boasts a Place among the Prime of the Nobility; and my Mother was descended from Ancestors whose noble Actions merited Titles, though they wore none, but that of being the Best and most Ancient of the Gentry. They had both been from their Infancy accustom'd to a Court, and had Spirits far above their Circumstances, which made them unable to endure the Thoughts either of a Retirement, or appearing in Publick with an Equipage any way inferior to what those of the same Rank maintain'd. Thus was I, who was their only Child, bred up in all the Pomp and Pride of Quality; and great Part of what shou'd have been reserv'd for my Fortune, spent in my Education, and lavish'd on those unnecessary Ornaments and Expences, which all young Girls, who are fond of making a Shew, affect. I was not much above Thirteen when my Father died: His Loss was so real a Grief to my Mother, that for a long Time she remain'd inconsolable, nor did her former Gaiety ever return. Instead of entertaining any Thoughts of a second Marriage, she transplanted all the Tenderness she had born my Father on me; and the Consideration how improbable it was for her to match me according to my Birth, or the Expectations I had been bred to, (my Father being able to leave me no more than three thousand Pounds,) every Day encreas'd her Affliction: Nor were these Reflections unaccompanied with Fears, that my Youth, and some Attractions which her Love made her fancy she saw about me, might draw on Temptations to the Disadvantage of my Reputation; she therefore resolv'd on the sudden to quit the Court, as a Place too dangerous for a young Woman to continue in, who had not a Fortune sufficient to entitle [Page 13] her to the honourable Affections of the Great, and too much Pride to listen to the Solicitations of the inferior Sort who frequented it. That the less Notice might be taken of the Change of her Humour, she pretended an Indisposition, and that the London Air did not agree with her; and in a short Time took a House about six Miles distant from it. This was like present Death to me: But all I cou'd say was of no Effect; the more pressing I appear'd to stay, the more she thought it needful I shou'd go; and the passionate Fondness I express'd for the Town Diversions, and Disdain of a Country Life, confirm'd her, that it was absolutely necessary at once to prevent the Dangers she imagin'd threaten'd me, and repel the Growth of that Ambition which she found had already taken too deep a Root in my youthful Heart. In fine, we went: And this so sudden and disagreeable an Alteration in my Manner of Living, gave me a Shock which I know not how to express. My Mother, entirely

⁶ This kind of division is common in the French romances; Haywood often used their conventions.

throwing off the fine Lady, began to practise the meer Country Gentlewoman, and us'd her utmost Endeavour to make me do so too. She was continually telling me, that my Fortune, join'd with all she cou'd be able to do for me, cou'd entitle me to no greater Hopes. ----That it was time for me to learn to play the good Housewife,⁷ and forget that there ever were such Things as Balls, Plays, Masquerades, or Assemblies.⁸ All this, which was really the Effect of her Prudence, I look'd upon as Whimsy; and the Restraint she laid me under, of not visiting, or being visited by any Persons, whom she cou'd have the least Apprehension of, I consider'd as an Affront to my Understanding. I am oblig'd (said she, my dear Belinda) to enter into these Particulars, because this sudden Change from all the Liberties in the World, to the most strict Confinement, is all the Excuse I can make for my ill Conduct. ----But why (continu'd she, after a Pause) shou'd I alledge that for my Vindication, which Time, perhaps, and Consideration, might have made easy to me, if a more fatal Enemy [Page 14] to my Repose, as well as my Interest, my Honour, and my Virtue, had not made it more hateful to me. Here was her Speech, a second Time, interrupted by her tempestuous Grief; and Belinda was forc'd to make Use of all the Arguments she was Mistress of, to persuade her to Moderation.

At last, getting leave to resume her Discourse, One Day, (said she,) one fatal Day,---wou'd to God it had been the last of my Life, as it was of my Repose, two Ladies came to visit my Mother; and speaking of a magnificent Ball that Night at Court, told her they were come on Purpose to entreat her to permit me to accompany them. By the Account I have given, you may judge how little Probability there was she shou'd consent; but whether she was really overcome by their Reasons, or only yielded to their Perswasions, being Persons she very much esteem'd, I know not; but when I least expected it, she order'd me to make myself ready to wait on them. Never was any Prisoner, who long had languish'd in a Dungeon, more rejoic'd to see the open Air, than I to find myself once more in Court, where every body welcom'd me, every body carress'd me, and, indeed, I believe, some of them with a good deal of Sincerity: For not being of a Quality great enough to create Envy, nor so mean as to beget Contempt, and tolerably well humour'd. I am sensible there were many whose kind Wishes I heartily possess'd. I had my Admirers too; at least, there were several young Sparks, and those not of the lowest Rank, who took Pleasure in making me believe so. Not that my Heart was any way affected with what they said, though I had Vanity enough to encourage it: Love was a Passion I had so little Notion of, that I consider'd it no more than as a Fiction, and only dress'd up by the Poets in such Variety of Shapes, to make the Amusement more entertaining. But this, alas! was the unlucky Hour in which I was to be convinc'd of the real Being of that Power I so slightly had regarded; and soon learn'd to pity, by my own, [Page 15] those Pains which, with an unregarding Ear, I often had heard others mourn.

⁷ *Housewife*: the word implies frugality as well as domestic skill.

⁸ *Masquerades, or Assemblies*: at masquerades men and women in costume mingled more freely than at other kinds of parties and took advantage of being, or pretending to be, unrecognized. Public masquerades became the rage in the 1720s. Count Heidegger's at the Haymarket often attracted 1000 ticket purchasers. Assemblies were fashionable gatherings attended by both sexes for conversation, news, and cards.

About the Middle of the Ball, as I was dancing with a young Nobleman, who had done me the Honour to take me out,⁹ I saw, on a sudden, the Eyes of the whole Company turn'd towards the Door; but, being too busily engag'd in what I was about, had not Time to consider what the Meaning might be, till having ended my Dance, and it being my Turn to take a Partner, a Lady of my Acquaintance whisper'd me, and said, There's the fine young Lord. ---- (I will not call him by any other Name than that of Lysander.¹⁰) He is lately (continued my Friend) come from his Travels, and but this Moment enter'd; it will be an envy'd Gallantry, if you lead him out. While she was speaking, I directed my Eyes where I perceiv'd she look'd, and saw a Form which appear'd more than Man, and nothing inferior to those Idea's we conceive of Angels: His Air! his Shape! his Face! were more than human! ----Mirriads of light'ning Glories darted from his Eyes, as he cast them round the Room, yet temper'd with such a streaming Sweetness, such a descending Softness, as seem'd to entreat the Admiration he commanded! A thousand Times have I attempted since to speak what 'twas I felt at this first fatal Interview; but Words cou'd never do Justice to the Wonders of his Charms, or half describe the Effect they wrought on me: Oh! had his Soul been worthy of that lovely, that transporting Outside, I shou'd have been too blest, been happy to as superlative a Degree, as now I am curs'd and wretched. But not to tire you with unavailing Wishes, or as fruitless Exclamations, I Lov'd!----was plung'd in a Wild Sea of Passion, before I had Time to know, or stem the Danger! I had so many disorder'd Motions in my Heart, that I am amaz'd my Feet kept any just Measure with the Musick; or that, so little us'd as I had ever been to disguise my Thoughts, my Eyes did not betray the Confusion of my Soul, and make visible to the whole Company [Page 16] what I was not yet acquainted with myself: But whether the great Concourse of much finer Ladies who were there, hinder'd me from being much regarded, or those Changes which, I am very sure, appear'd in my Countenance, were only taken for the Effects of Bashfulness in dancing with a Person who was altogether a Stranger, I cannot tell; but I scap'd that Raillery, which I must have expected to have met with, if any Body had been sensible of the true State of my Condition. When I had done Dancing, I mingled with those Ladies who came with me, and some others of my Acquaintance: Lysander soon join'd us, and enter'd into a Conversation, which shew'd his wit was, if possible, superior to his Beauty: He was perfectly well bred, obliging and gallant, and had something of I know not what peculiarly graceful and enchanting in his Voice and Manner of Address; and what added to his other Engagements, at least endear'd 'em to my (already doating) Heart, was, that though he said nothing in particular to me at that Time, yet I cou'd easily discern he aim'd at pleasing only me. But he behav'd himself not in so general a Manner the whole Night: A little after, perceiving I was separated a good Distance from the Persons I had been with, he came up to me, and making a low Bow, Madam, (said he,) how fortunate am I, who after having been in many Courts, where I have seen Ladies who justly may be call'd Beautiful, and since my Return home have met with nothing that cou'd bring me into good Humour with my Native Country, have now the Blessing of beholding a Face, which not only sums up all the different Lovelinesses of other Charmers, but

⁹ *take me out*: had asked her to dance and taken her out on the dance floor.

¹⁰ *Lysander*: the name has considerable literary resonance; in William Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Lysander was an Athenian in love with Hermia.

has also an immensely Divine Treasure of its own! ----Others may move the Heart by slow Degrees, and with some one Perfection captivate the Sense; but you have Graces which strike the very Soul, and at first Sight subdue each Faculty! Blush not, fair Excellence! (continued he, finding I was silent, as indeed I had no Power to speak,) I tell you [Page 17] but the Sense of all Mankind,----but what Millions of Tongues are full of, and what your happy Glass, as often as you look in it, informs you. If, my Lord, (reply'd I, recollecting myself as well as I was able,) there were a Possibility of being unacquainted with my own Defects, so good-natur'd a Compliment might give me Graces which before I wanted: But as I have the Misfortune of knowing myself but too well, all the Advantage I can gain by it, is the Honour of being in the Company of a Person whose Wit can find something to praise in those the least Praise-worthy. O most Angelick, (resum'd he, tenderly pressing my unresisting Hand,) most Adorable of your Sex! rob not the brightest Temple of the Deity, your Divine Self, of your just Due. ---- If (but that's impossible) you can distrust the Force of your too potent Charms, the Effects they have on me will quickly tell you what they are:---Cou'd those inspiring Eyes but look into my Soul, they wou'd perceive their Power. ----Pardon this Declaration: A vulgar Passion, and for a vulgar Object, may wait on the dull Formalities of Decorum; but what I feel for you, bursts out and blazes too fierce to be conceal'd. ----It is not to be express'd,---it is not to be imagin'd, how he look'd while he was speaking these Words, and much less in what Manner I behav'd at hearing them: Surprise, and Joy, and Hope, and Fear, and Shame, at once assaulted me, and hurried my wild Spirits with such Vehemence, that had I answer'd at all, it must have been something strangely incoherent; but, happily for me, some Company came that Instant to the Place where we were standing, and deliver'd me from the greatest Perplexity I cou'd be in. I did not, however, recover myself the whole Time of my being there; yet, so much was I infatuated, so lost to all Thought of Reason or Discretion, that whenever he approach'd me, I had not Courage to avoid him, as I might easily have done, without being taken Notice of. 'Tis sure, he took all Opportunities of entertaining me [Page 18] in the Manner he had begun, and without doubt, as he has since own'd to me, he saw enough in my Eyes to make him know the Pleasure I took in hearing him speak, far exceeded my Confusion at what he said.

It was almost Morning when the Ball broke up; and there being no Possibility of my going home till next Day, I pass'd that Time at the Lady's House who brought me out: But, though the Fatigue and Hurry of the Night wou'd at another Season have made me glad of Rest, I had now enough to keep me waking: Lysander's Charms, his Beauty, his Wit, the Declaration he had made me, and the Manner in which I had receiv'd it, gave me sufficient Matter of Reflection: I cou'd not think I had listen'd to any Protestations of Love, from a Man I had never seen before, without an inexpressible Shock to my Modesty; but these Considerations soon gave Place to others even more destructive to my Peace: Lysander was too lovely, and appear'd too deserving, for me to repent, for any long Time, the Complaisance I had shew'd him; and my greatest Trouble was the Fear that I shou'd never see him more. I resolv'd to say nothing to my Mother of what had pass'd, believing, with Reason enough, that she wou'd not only condemn me for Mismanagement, but also take such Measures as shou'd for ever deprive me of the Sight of him: Love taught me a Cunning which before I was a Stranger to; and though I burn'd with Desire to be talking something of my ador'd Lysander, and vent some Part of the Overflowings of my ravish'd Soul, yet I so well dissembled, that at my Return home I never mention'd the least Syllable which cou'd

give Suspicion; and contented myself, as well as I was able, with the Belief that Lysander (who, I found by his calling me by my Name had enquired who I was) wou'd find some Means to send to me. Nor did that Hope deceive me: The very next Day, happening to be at a Window, I perceiv'd a Fellow walking backwards and forwards [Page 19] before our House: It presently came into my Head, that there was a Probability he might be a Messenger from Lysander. I observ'd his Motions a good while, and finding he still lurk'd about, with his Eyes continually fix'd on our Door, I made a Pretence to go down; and standing there a little, the Man drew nearer, but with a Circumspection which confirm'd me my Conjectures were true. No body being within hearing, I call'd to him, and ask'd him if he wanted any thing. Madam, (answer'd he softly, and pulling a Letter out of his Pocket,) by the Description which was given me, I believe this is design'd to you. It is, it is, (cry'd I, as soon as I saw the Superscription,) and immediately ran in, too much transported to say any more. I got into an Arbor in the Garden, to peruse the dear Contents, which I very well remember, and are too deeply engraven in my Mind, ever to be forgotten.

To the Divine Cleomira.

If the most adorable Cleomira wanted any Proof of the Dominion of her Charms, besides the just Title they have to reign over the Souls of all Mankind, this had come to convince her of a Truth, which Yesterday she seem'd so cruelly to doubt. But you are too Divine to be ignorant of your Attributes; and, if there is any Thing in you, which is not of a Piece with Heaven, it is that you are not sufficiently stor'd with Mercy to look favourably on a Man who has no other Merit than his Zeal. It is with an inconceivable Terror I look back on that Declaration, which the Force of the most violent Passion that ever was, oblig'd me to make, in so unpolite and unprepar'd a Manner; and tremble when I consider how much Reason you have to condemn the Presumption of this. But, if as many Years of humble faithful Services as Fate has allotted for my Life, may purchase a Pardon for the Sin of my Temerity, I devote [Page 20] them entirely to you:---Henceforth rule my every Word and Action,---I had almost said my every Wish: But, Oh! that is not in your Power, vast as it is! for shou'd you command me to cease burning with impatient Desires to obtain the Blessing of pleasing you, I freely own, I cou'd not,---nay, I wou'd not, in that, obey you:---In spite, even of yourself I must for ever Love,---for ever Worship you! ---Permit me then to owe to your Bounty, what else my own Obstinacy will give me, the Title of, the

Most excellent Cleomira's
Truest and Everlasting Votary,
Lysander.

There was a Postscript, (continu'd the Recluse,) in which he press'd very strenuously for an Answer; the Words of which I do not very well remember: And, indeed, 'tis needless to have troubled you with this, or many others of the like Nature; but as there are some of his Letters, which, in the Course of my Story, I shall be oblig'd to repeat, I thought it proper to let you see the mighty Difference 'twixt Hoping and Possessing; to what an elevated Heighth the Wings of Fancy soar, while in Pursuit; and how low, how faint, and drooping is their Flight, when there is nothing farther to be obtain'd. I will not pretend to tell you what my Transports were while I was reading; if, as you confess, you really know the Power of Love, your own Heart will make you

comprehend what 'twas mine felt, much more than any Words cou'd do. I was almost distracted for fear the Messenger shou'd be gone, and I have no Opportunity to send an Answer: But he was better instructed by his Master; and when I open'd the Door, he presently started out from behind a great Tree that grew before the House. I made a Sign to him that he shou'd stay, and went to my Chamber to write: I durst not allow Time for [Page 21] Thought, lest any Interruption shou'd happen; and only following the Dictates of my inconsiderate and transported Passion, return'd an Answer in these Words:

To the Noble Lysander.

If Cleomira were half so worthy Adoration as Lysander truly is, she might, without any Difficulty, be brought to believe all you say to her: But, as I am sensible I have no other Graces than those your Fancy is pleas'd to bestow on me, you cannot blame me, if I am a little diffident of the Continuance of a Passion so weakly grounded. ---I shall not, however, desire you to desist giving me any farther Testimonies of it; because, as you say, while you are possess'd of it, Entreaties of that kind wou'd be altogether unavailing. I think myself extremely oblig'd to you for the Caution with which your Letter was deliver'd; and if you favour me with any more, hope you will make use of the same, which will be of the greatest Consequence to the Peace of Cleomira.

Notwithstanding the Violence of my Passion, there were some Intervals in which I endur'd severe Upbraidings from my Modesty, for engaging thus precipitately in a Love-Affair; but they lasted not long, and at every Return grew weaker than before: Lysander's Idea wou'd suffer nothing but itself to have any Prevalence in my Soul; and the Glory, methought, of appearing amiable in his Eyes, was more Happiness than all the World besides cou'd give.

The next Morning, almost the first Person I saw, was the Messenger again, walking as he had done the Day before: I made no doubt but he had another Billet for me, and the first Moment I had an Opportunity, went down to receive it. I was not deceiv'd; [Page 22] for as soon as I had open'd the Door, he slipp'd a Paper into my Hand, and retir'd to his Covert quick as Lightning. The Words of this were;

To my Ador'd Cleomira.

How much was I mistaken while I believ'd it impossible there was a Charm more touching than your Wit and Beauty: Your Goodness ravishes beyond both! --- The Brightness of your Eyes inflame the Heart;---the Harmony of your Voice enchants the Ear;---but this divine Sweetness of your Nature diffuses Heaven, and gives Raptures which Angels only, and the happier Man whom Cleomira favours, can be bless'd with! ---- Say, with what Words, thou wond'rous Abstract of Perfection! thou loveliest,----wisest,----best of all created Beings! shall I repay a Condescension so unhop'd,---unmerited! To be permitted to adore you, is Exstasy too great to bear in Silence! ----O give my impetuous Transports leave to vent themselves!----let me beneath your Feet declare the mighty Sense I have of so unvalued an Obligation!----let, on that happy Earth you tread on, my humble Body avow the lower Prostration of my devoted Soul, and never rise, till by some Arguments forcible as my Passion, I have convinc'd you with how much Truth, Purity, and everlasting Zeal, I am your Slave! I have not been so sparing of my Enquiries,

as not to know it will be almost impossible to obtain the Blessing I entreat at your House; but if you can think of any other, where with Convenience I may be favour'd, let the same unequal'd Excellence of Disposition, which has already done such Miracles for me, incline you to let me know it by the Bearer: As also if you will feast my longing Eyes with a transient View from your Window, as I pass by to Morrow-Morning on Horseback. Tho' your Idea has never been absent from my Soul, since the first Moment I beheld you, yet my impatient Sense reproaches me that I have liv'd these two long Days, without endeavouring at least a greater Proportion of [Page 23] Felicity, and testifying by all the Ways I am able, how much I am the never-too-much deify'd Cleomira's

Eternally Devoted and most
Passionate Lysander.

Any Body but me, wou'd have been too much alarm'd at the reading these Lines, to have return'd any Answer, unless it were such a one as shou'd have entirely taken away those Hopes my former Complaisance had inspir'd. The Boldness of desiring me to appoint a Meeting was so great, as all the fine Things he said to me cou'd not atone for; and was sufficient to have taught me, how dangerous it was to make any Condescensions of this kind to a Man I had so little Knowledge of: To another, I say, this might have been a timely Warning; but, alas! I was so blinded with my Passion, that I cou'd think of nothing but which way I should gratify it; and without any Struggles from that Bashfulness which till now had never forsook me, writ him a Reply in this Manner:

To the Worthy Lysander.

The Gratitude you express for that, perhaps, too great Compliance you have found in me, is infinitely obliging: For I wou'd much rather you shou'd impute it to any thing, than to that Vanity, which too often influences a Woman of my Age, to encourage Addresses her Heart is no way affected with; and, tho' it may appear too free a Declaration, I am so little acquainted with disguising the Truth, that I cannot forbear telling you, it is to your Merits alone you are indebted for the Liberty of a Correspondence, which you are pleas'd to think agreeable. Your Information, that it is impossible [Page 24] for me to receive the Honour you wou'd do me at our House, has not deceiv'd you; and I must also let you know I am too strictly confin'd to promise it at any other. I must therefore leave it entirely to Fortune, to procure me any farther Pleasure in your Conversation than what your Letters afford: But, in the mean time, shall not fail being at the Window that overlooks the Road, in the Hope of seeing a Person, whose Regard shall always be most valuable to

Cleomira.

When I had sent this away, I feign'd myself a little indispos'd, to avoid the Necessity of Talking; for Speech was now become a Pain, since I durst not employ it in the Praise of my adored Lysander. I pass'd the whole Day, and good Part of the Night, in contemplating the Happiness I shou'd enjoy next Morning; and it cou'd be call'd scarce Dawn when I got up, and took my Post at the appointed Window, whence I believe it wou'd have been impossible for any Thing to have remov'd me. My Mother was no sooner out of Bed than she enquir'd after my

Health; her Tenderness making her doubt the Disorder I complain'd of was increas'd, because I had not been in her Chamber, as it was my Custom every Morning, to entreat her Blessing: And being told where I was, came in to me, not a little surpris'd to find me in a Room, which, by reason of the great Dust of the Highway, was very seldom made use of, and the least pleasant of any in the House. She did not fail to ask the Cause of my being there; and I told her, That not being very well, I hop'd some Benefit from the Air, which I thought blew fresher on that Side of the House, than on the other. She cou'd have no Suspicion of the Truth, and this Excuse pass'd well enough. Breakfast being ready, she sent a Servant to call me; but I not being prevail'd on to come, she order'd it shou'd be brought where I was. This vex'd me to the Heart; for I was not willing that any body, much less that she shou'd be a [Page 25] Witness of this Interview, tho' at such a Distance, with Lysander. I knew she had discerning Eyes; and fear'd she might discover more than I wish'd she shou'd, in one or both of our Faces. I refus'd to drink Tea, scarce spoke, or if I did, it was so peevishly and unmannerly, that I am amaz'd she did not leave me in a Rage to indulge my ill Humour: But she, taking my Behaviour for the Effect of Vapours;¹¹ continued to sooth me by a thousand endearing Expressions, which were wholly lost upon me: I had no Eyes, no Ears, no Heart open for any Thing but Lysander. At length he came, and with a Mein and Air, so soft, so sweet, so graceful, that Painters might have copy'd an Adonis¹² from him, fit, indeed, to charm the Queen of Beauty. He was dress'd in a strait Jocky-Coat¹³ of green Velvet, richly embroider'd at the Seams with Silver; the Buttons were Brillians, neatly set in the Fashion of Roses; his Hair, which is as black as Jet, was ty'd with a green Riband, but not so straitly but that a thousand little Ringlets stray'd o'er his lovely Cheeks, and wanton'd in the Air; a crimson Feather in his Hat, set off to vast Advantage the dazzling Whiteness of his Skin. In fine, he was all over Charms!----all over glorious! and I believe it impossible for the most Insensible to have beheld him without adoring him! ---- What then became of me? ----O God! how fruitless wou'd any Endeavours be to represent what 'twas I felt! ----Transported! ----Ravish'd! ----I wonder the violent Emotions of my Soul did not bear my Body out of the Window! -----Oh! wou'd it had been so that Love and Life might then have had an End, and 'scap'd the Woes which both have since endur'd! The great Trampling which the Horses made, (for he had four Servants in rich Liveries,¹⁴ and gallantly mounted, attending him,) oblig'd my Mother to rise from her Chair, to see what it was that occasion'd it. She came to the Window the Moment that Lysander was making me a profound Reverence. I know not how I return'd it; but, doubtless, with a Confusion [Page 26] suitable to what I felt within, and which was but too visible to my Mother's

¹¹ *Vapours*: nervous disorders exhibited in depression, moodiness, light-headedness, hysteria.

¹² *Adonis*: beautiful youth loved by Venus and Proserpina.

¹³ *Jocky-Coat*: great coat with large brass buttons, affected by aristocrats as it was originally a coat worn by horse dealers.

¹⁴ *Liveries*: distinctive suit and badge worn by servants to identify them with their employers.

Observation: For after he was pass'd by, and my Eyes were pursuing him as far as I was able, she rouz'd me from the enchanting Dream I had been in, by pulling me by the Sleeve from the Window, and looking earnestly in my Face, as tho' she wou'd penetrate into my Soul, bad me tell her who that Gentleman was. I know not, Madam, (answer'd I, with a Voice which sufficiently discover'd the Insincerity of my Words.) I am afraid, (said she, changing her Countenance to more Severity than ever I had seen her wear,) you know him but too well: Acquaint me therefore this Moment with the Truth; where, when, and how often you have seen him. I cou'd not immediately gather Courage to make any Reply to this Command; and, when I assur'd her, as I truly might, that I had never seen him, but at the Ball, she was so far from giving Credit to what I said, that she flew into the greatest Passion I had ever seen her in: And after she had a little vented it in some Exclamations on the Follies of Love, and Disobedience to Parents,¹⁵ left me alone to meditate on her Words.

This was a dreadful Alloy to the Pleasure I had lately enjoy'd: I perceiv'd the Secret I had taken so much Pains, and fancy'd myself so artful in concealing, was, by my own Inadvertency, discover'd. ---I cou'd not reflect on the Indignation of a Mother, who, bating¹⁶ the Restraint she laid me under, I had reason to think a most Affectionate one, without a Concern very near Remorse, for doing any Thing to occasion it: But when I reflected on the Injustice she did me, (for so my Love taught me to consider it,) in condemning my Admiration of a Person so every way deserving as Lysander appear'd to be, I regretted nothing but the Power she had over me, lest she should exert it yet more, and deprive me of any future Means of seeing him. I had been happy never to have been more deceiv'd than I was in my Conjecture, that she wou'd take all possible Precaution to [Page 27] prevent my having any Conversation with a Person, whom she so justly believ'd dangerous.

I had not past many Hours in contemplating the Misfortunes I fancy'd myself in, before an old Woman (formerly my Governess, and now a sort of Overseer¹⁷ in the Family) came into the Room, and took upon her to reprove me, in Terms I cou'd not well support. On my giving her some tart Replies, she told me, That she had Orders from my Mother to confine me to my Chamber, till I had learn'd the Lesson of Humiliation. I was forc'd to obey; and, indeed, was well enough contented to be any where, to avoid the hearing of such Sermons: All that I thought an Affliction was, that 'twou'd be impossible for me to receive or answer any Letters from Lysander; and, it was only on this Account that I pass'd three Days of my Confinement in mortal Inquietudes: On the fourth, I saw the Mercury to my Jove,¹⁸ mounted on a little Heap of Rubbish that the Gardiner had thrown out, and peeping over the Wall. The poor Fellow, as I since

¹⁵ *Disobedience to Parents*: the eighteenth century took the fifth Commandment, 'Honour thy Father and thy Mother that thy days may be long upon the Land which the Lord thy God giveth thee' (Exod. 20:12) very seriously, and it is the subject of many novels.

¹⁶ *bating*: leaving out, not taking into account.

¹⁷ *Overseer*: a head servant who directs other servants and may keep accounts.

¹⁸ *Mercury*: messenger to Jove, the supreme Roman deity, lord of heaven and of light.

understood, had been every one of those Days watching about the House; but not being able to get a Sight of me, either at the Door, or Windows, he at last came round that way. The Appearance of this Man made me almost mad; till casting in my Mind, if there were not a Possibility of giving him Notice of my Condition, Invention furnish'd me with this: I open'd the Window, and thrusting myself out as far as I cou'd, made a Sign to him that he shou'd tarry a little where he was; then taking a Piece of Paper, writ it in these Words:

I know who you come from; and therefore guess your Business. ---Let your Lord know I am in the strictest Confinement imaginable on his Account. ---I fear it will be impossible for me to continue the Happiness of a Correspondence with him. It will be to no Purpose for you to stay, or return any more on the Design you are sent on; but if you are taken Notice of, may occasion worse Usage, if possible, than what I now endure.

Cleomira. [Page 28]

I pull'd a Lead out of the Sleeve of my Gown,¹⁹ and wrapping it up in this Paper, to give it Weight, made a Shift to hurl it to the Place where he cou'd reach it. He took a Letter out of his Pocket, and held up to shew me, making several Motions; by which I understood he was charg'd to give it me; but by shaking my Head, and putting my Handkerchief to my Eyes, I testify'd the Impossibility of his Attempt, and part of the Concern I was in. I say, but part; for after he was gone, and I began to reflect, that indeed I never shou'd be able to see Lysander more, no Tongue can express the Emotions of my Soul. For many Days I did nothing but weep, and that in so violent a Manner, that the Servants, whom my Mother sent in to wait on me, apprehended I shou'd fall into Fits. This, when it was told her, gave so considerable an Alarm to her Tenderness, that it half dissipated her Anger; and, when I least expected it, she order'd I shou'd come down into the Parlour; and receiving me with her usual Affability, You have suffer'd enough (said she) for the Imprudence of contracting an Acquaintance without my Approbation; but as I shall forget it, at least so far as never to reproach you with it, so I wou'd have you remember it enough to make you avoid, for the future, any Faults of the like Nature. And, to convince me that there is nothing farther between you and this Gentleman, than what you wou'd have me believe, you must resume that Cheerfulness which is becoming your Youth, and the little Cause you yet have met with to be otherwise. My Heart was too full to suffer me to make any other Reply to these Words than a low Curse; but when I had gather'd Courage enough to speak, I endeavour'd to assure her, that my Melancholy proceeded from no other Cause, than being on a sudden depriv'd of all those Diversions I had ever been accustom'd to; but that, since it was her Pleasure, I wou'd use my utmost Efforts to make it easy to me. She seem'd satisfy'd with what I said; and, perhaps, believing she had been a [Page 29] little too severe, from that Time took me abroad with her wherever she went: She carry'd me to visit several Relations, and a great many Acquaintance, whose Society I formerly took Delight in: But, alas! this now cou'd afford no Comfort to my bleeding Heart; it rather encreas'd than diminish'd the Anguish of my secret Discontent; and since I cou'd not see Lysander, I cou'd have been better pleas'd to have seen no body. There was no

¹⁹ *Lead*: pieces of lead were used as weights to make sleeves hang in desired, flattering positions.

Possibility of conveying a Letter to him; I knew not where to direct; or if I had, notwithstanding the Privileges my Mother now allow'd me, she scarce ever trusted me out of her Sight. Thus, for two Months, did I languish out my Nights in fruitless Wishes, and my Days in the most tormenting (of all) Employments, that of being oblig'd to wear a seeming Gaiety, when all my Soul was full of Horror and Distraction. In this Time a new Family came into the Neighbourhood; they soon made an Acquaintance with ours; and my Mother was so well pleas'd with the good Breeding and Gravity of the Master and Mistress of it, that she enter'd into an Intimacy with them much sooner than was her Custom to do with any body. They visited frequently at our House; and my Mother always made me accompany her to return them, though much against my Inclination; for, as I have already told you, my own Thoughts, unquiet as they were, gave me more Satisfaction than any Company's but Lysander cou'd bestow. Both the Man and the Woman seem'd wonderfully charm'd with me; took all Occasions of complimenting me; and Mrs. Marvir (for that was the Name they were call'd by) wou'd often endeavour to engage me in particular Conversation; which I, as carefully as I cou'd, without being rude, avoided: Till one Day, she began a little kind of Raillery on my affecting a Demureness in my Behaviour, which (she said) she was sure was not in my Nature. My Mother, who was willing to take all Opportunities of perswading me to Chearfulness, join'd with her in this Assertion; and between [Page 30] 'em both I was pretty much put to it (so inwardly perplex'd as I was) to make any Defence; which, by the Aukwardness of it, discover'd that I had, indeed, something at my Heart which clouded the Gaiety of my Looks. I am afraid (said Mrs. Marvir to my Mother) that your Daughter is in Love: I warrant if we shou'd search her Chamber, we shou'd find a Number of amorous Books, and Epistles of the same Nature. I never had that Curiosity, (reply'd my Mother;) but I hope she wou'd receive none of the latter without my Knowledge; and I have taken Care to instil such Principles in her Mind, as will not let her be over fond of the other. Will you give me leave to search? (resum'd she laughing.) Yes, with all my Heart, (answer'd I, glad to put an End to this Discourse.) I waited on her up Stairs; where, after she had a little look'd about her, and prais'd the Pleasantness of the Chamber, having a full Prospect of the Garden, I told you (said she) that I shou'd find something here more tender than you wou'd have the World be sensible of. I dare swear (continu'd she, taking a Letter from my Toilet, and giving it to me) the Contents of this may justly be call'd Amorous. I had no sooner cast my Eyes on the Direction, than I knew the Hand to be Lysander's: The Consternation I was in may be more easily imagin'd than express'd: I had not Power to break the Seal, but continu'd looking sometimes on her, sometimes on the Table, and sometimes on the Letter, as wond'ring by what means it had been convey'd there. Cease your Surprise, (resum'd she:) It was no other who laid the Letter on your Toilet than she who took it off, and deliver'd it to your Hand, and she who you need make no Scruple to confide in, since your Lysander; your adoring, dying Lysander, has thought me worthy of the Trust of bearing you his Soul, his Vows, and everlasting Faith. I will make some Excuse (continu'd she) for leaving you above, that you may have Time both to read this and return an Answer, which I have engag'd to [Page 31] bring him. I cou'd not get leave from my Astonishment to make any Reply to what she said; but when she was gone had my Senses enough about me to lock the Door, and then fed my impatient and transported Wishes with these Lines.

To my Soul's only Treasure, the Adorable Cleomira.

How easily might be spar'd the Stings,---the Scorpions, ---the never-dying Fires, and all the fancy'd Tortures which Priests invent to ride the frighted World, if any of those Soul-enslavers knew what it was to love like me! Absence from Cleomira is a Hell which all their labour'd Policy wants Skill to paint! ----Within my burning Breast ten thousand real Furies rage, and tear me with Variety of Anguish! ----Mad with Desire, and wing'd with daring Hopes, sometimes I cou'd tear down the envious Walls, and baffle all Impediments which hold you from me! ----Sometimes, despairing, chill'd with deadly Horror, I fancy you regardless²⁰ of my Woe, and easy under this Restraint! ----One Moment imagine I see a favour'd Rival bask in your Smiles, gaze on your Eyes in happy tranquil Pleasure, and kiss that Hand, which, but to touch, I wou'd forego my Life! ---- The next, distracted, think I behold you dragg'd by a cruel Mother to some detested Choice your Soul abhors! Then soften into more than Female Tenderness, and weep for you and for myself! ----O Cleomira! all the Names of Misery, of Woe, of Anguish insupportable, are poor to what, indeed, my Soul endures for you! ----My Passion, and my Pains, are, like your Charms, unutterable! and only can be felt! ----This Age of Absence has been spent in nothing but Contrivances to shorten it, till these good People, whose Fidelity you may rely on, were so fortunate to get into your Acquaintance. ----O then, thou dearest, brightest, loveliest of thy Sex! indulge the fond Design, and let them not be less regarded by you, now you know they are the Instruments by which you must receive the Testimonies of a Passion too sublime to be [Page 32] inspir'd by any but your divine Self; and which can be felt, in so high a Degree, by none but

Your eternally Devoted
Lysander.

I need not tell you the Raptures of my overjoy'd Soul at reading this Letter: My Answer to it will sufficiently inform you, that I had no Consideration but of the Exstasy it produc'd.

To the most Excellent Lysander.

You paint the Woes of Love in so extravagant a Manner, that one had need be more than ordinarily sensible of that Passion, to be able to give any Credit to a Description so far beyond what is commonly conceiv'd of it. I am afraid Lysander is too well acquainted with his Perfections not to know the Effects they must produce, and but feigns to feel what he alone is capable of inspiring: Were I really possess'd of as many Charms as your all-powerful Wit wou'd dress me up in, you have a thousand Opportunities of diverting your Thoughts: Business,----Variety of Objects,----and gay Conversation, make your Hours slide away in vastly different Entertainments;---while I, of much the softer Sex, and consequently susceptible of a deeper Impression, have nothing to do but to indulge a Passion, which in the Beginning seems delectable. ----The Dawn, indeed, promises ten thousand future Joys;----what the Meridian will be, is wholly in your Faith and Honour to be prov'd. ----But, I have so implicate a Dependance on both, that I will make no Scruple to confess the Transport of hearing from you again, is more than Recompence for all those Inquietudes you have so perfectly represented in yours, and which, I hope, will be no more the Portion of

²⁰ *regardless*: unaware or giving no regard to.

Your Cleomira. [Page 33]

When I had finish'd this, I went down to the Company, and soon found an Opportunity, unperceiv'd, to slip it into Mrs. Marvir's Hand. Scarce a Day pass'd after this without my receiving a Letter, either through hers or her Husband's Means. I will not trouble you with the Repetition of them, being of no great Consequence to my Story, and would draw it into a Length too tedious for your Patience. By those you have heard, you may guess the Purport of the rest; so shall only tell you, that every one of his grew more pressing for an Engagement of my Affection, and mine still more complying. I pass'd my Time contentedly enough, tho' not so happily as I wish'd: The continual Assurances he gave me of his Passion, and the Hopes that thro' these Peoples Means I should soon enjoy the Blessing of his Presence, were Cordials sufficient to keep a Love less ardent than mine alive. And, indeed, I had no great Exercise for my Patience: Lysander was too eager, and his Agents too industrious, to permit me to grow cool in my Desires, or imagine him to be so.

One Evening, my Mother and I being invited to sup at Marvir's House, while he engaged her in a serious Discourse, his Wife took me into the Garden. The Transports of my beating Heart inform'd me to what End I was brought there, before she had Time to tell me that Lysander waited my Approach in the Arbour. But, when I came near enough to see him, no Confusion sure was ever equal to mine:----The Reflection that this was but the third Time I had seen him,----but the second in which I had an Opportunity to speak to him;---- the Condescensions of my Letters;----and that which I now gave of meeting him, came all at once into my Head, and I was ready to sink with Shame. But never did any Votary approach the Image of the Saint he worshipp'd with more Humility and awful Reverence than Lysander me: He fell at my Feet,----embrac'd my Knees, and kiss'd my Hands [Page 34] with such a tender Transport,----such an enchanting Mixture of Delight and Fear, as one would think no false Love could feign, and was impossible to behold unmov'd: My Spirits were in too violent an Agitation to suffer me to raise him from the Posture he was in, till gaining Confidence to do it himself, and interpreting my Disorders in his Favour, he took me in his Arms, all blushing,----trembling, and incapable of Defence; and laying his Head upon my panting Bosom, seem'd to breathe out all his Soul in fervent Tenderness. He held me thus some Moments before I knew what I was doing; and when, at last, I struggled to get free, it was so faintly, that he might easily perceive the Liberties he had taken were not unpardonable. I look'd for Mrs. Marvir, designing to upbraid her for the Boldness her Guest had been guilty of; but she was gone, and the Reproaches I made him were such as did not discourage him from a Repetition of his Crime. In short, all the Time of our being together (which I believe was above an Hour) was past in nothing but offending, and forgiving. I found by myself that Love is a Passion that disdains Restraint, and thought it unjust to be angry at almost any Thing the Force of it might influence him to commit. To go about to tell you what he said,----in what Manner he look'd,----and with what Graces every Thing he did, and spoke, were accompanied, would be to wrong him; for no Words, no Accents, no Motions but his own, can give you a just Idea of his Perfections. ----Never was any so form'd to charm, and to betray! ----Never was such foul Deceit, Hypocrisy, and Villany, couch'd in such seeming Sweetness, Softness, and Sincerity. ----Heaven! with what a counterfeited Vehemence has he exclaim'd against the Inconstancy of his Sex! ----With what an Appearance of Sanctity and Truth has he

invoked the Saints and Angels to be a Witness of his Vows! when, lavish of them, he has a thousand ----thousand Times protested, that Cleomira should [Page 35] ever be more dear to him than Life! Oh! record 'em, all ye blessed Spirits, and in the last great Day, when I alone can hope for Justice, bring 'em in dreadful Testimony against him, and force his black, his leprous Soul to own Conviction!

Here the Remembrances of some Passages made this unhappy Lady, wholly unable to prosecute her Discourse; and all that Belinda could say to mitigate the Rage of Temper she was rais'd to, prov'd of no Effect, till a Shower of new returning Tears in part allay'd the Tempest. When she was a little come to herself, After this, (resum'd she,) I had many Opportunities, by Mrs. Marvir's Contrivance, of indulging my fond Wishes in Lysander's Presence; and so zealous was he in making me believe the Passion he pretended was sincere, that in those Days, when there was no other Way to see me, he would come disguis'd, and walk before the House till I had taken notice of him: Then by some Motion discover who he was, and tell me by his Eyes a thousand tender Things; nor stir from the Place, till by my withdrawing myself he knew it was improper he should stay any longer. I cannot but say, fierce as my Passion was before, this uncommon Assiduity of his made a vast Addition to it; and I thought it the greatest Hardship in the World that I could not have the Freedom of conversing with him, without all this Difficulty on both Sides. Mrs. Marvir, who kept continual Watch over my Humour, took this Advantage of my Discontent, and whenever we were alone, endeavour'd to heighten it: She was always representing the Injustice my Mother did me, in debarring me from all those Liberties young Ladies in this Kingdom are permitted to enjoy; and made use of all her Cunning to convince me, that those Restrictions were laid upon me, only to wean me by Degrees from the Pleasures of the World, that I might be the more willing to accept of a Husband, who, she told me, my Mother had provided for me: By what I can guess from her Discourse, [Page 36] (said she,) you are to be married to a Country Gentleman; and that in so short a Time, as will amaze you. She spoke this in such a Manner, as gave me no Suspicion of the Truth; and recollecting how much my Mother had labour'd to perswade me into a good Opinion of a Country Life, was assur'd in my Mind that she had really some Body in View, to whom she design'd to sacrifice me; and 'tis impossible to represent the Perplexity this Belief involv'd me in. If any such Thing happen, Madam, (said I,) how should I avoid it? I know not, (answer'd this wicked Woman, having brought me to the Point she aim'd at,) unless, by chusing a Guardian, you entirely divest your Mother of the Power of disposing of you. She said no more at this Time, because my Mother happen'd to come into the Room; but whenever they had an Opportunity, it was with such like Speeches, both she and her Husband entertain'd me; till at last, the Fears of what they infus'd into my Imagination,----the Hopes of enjoying my belov'd Liberty, and my infinitely more belov'd Lysander's Company uncontroul'd, made me resolve to do as they advis'd. I could think of no Person so proper for me to make choice of for a Guardian, as Marvir himself. It was not very difficult to perswade him to it, (it being the only Thing he wanted,) tho' at first he seem'd averse. Every Thing being concluded on, one Morning, before my Mother was out of Bed, I left her House, and went to Marvir's, whence immediately I took Coach with him for London; and by electing him according to Law, put it out of her Power to oblige me to return. Her Behaviour, on the first Knowledge of what I had done, was all Distraction; she fell into Fits, rav'd, came to Marvir's House, and without any Regard to that Decorum she was us'd so strictly to observe, loudly exclaim'd against

their Treachery, and my Ingratitude and Disobedience. I had not Assurance to appear before her; and they (having gain'd their End) could endure [Page 37] the Brunt of her Upbraidings. In a few Days we remov'd to London, and I was out of the Fear of meeting her; but her Tenderness soon getting the better of her Indignation, she sent a Letter to me, full of Perswasions, in the most endearing Terms, to return to her again. I had the Courage to write to her, tho' I had not to see her, and return'd an Answer of Excuses for the Measures I had taken; but told her it was wholly owing to that unreasonable Restraint she had laid me under;----that I abandon'd her, only in Pursuit of that innocent Liberty, which all Persons of my Age were desirous of enjoying; and that I never would make use of it to the Disadvantage of my Reputation, or the Dishonour of my Family; and that in all material Affairs of Life, tho' I had chose a Guardian, I would do nothing without consulting her. This was far from being any Satisfaction to her; she writ me several Letters, sometimes entreating, sometimes commanding and threatenng; and engag'd all those Relations who were near enough to interest themselves in my Behaviour, to come, and talk to me: But the People I was with took care I should be seen by none of them; alledging, as a Proof of their Love to me, that they would not have me teas'd with any Sollicitations of that Nature. I was very well satisfy'd with their Proceedings: I saw Lysander every Day; and while I listen'd to his Vows, should not have been pleas'd with an Interruption of any kind: That ardent, yet respectful Passion which appeared in all his Words and Actions, was to me a Heaven, which nothing else could give. I had not, for some time, any Reason to suspect he had the least dishonourable Thought; for tho' the little Power I had of disguising my Sentiments, had made me guilty of many imprudent Actions, and embolden'd him to the taking greater Freedoms than otherwise he would have dar'd to have attempted, yet he offer'd nothing which justly could be call'd offensive to Virtue; till one Night;----Oh! ever be accurst that Night,---- [Page 38] that Hour,----that damn'd undoing Minute, when all the good Angels slept, and left to Fiends the Fate of Cleomira! I had undress'd, and thrown my self on the Bed, restless and uneasy that Lysander had not been to visit me that Day; for it was now become an inconsolable Affliction to me to pass four and twenty Hours without seeing him. I was so buried in Thought, that I heard not the Tread of any Body coming into my Chamber, till I saw a Man stand close by me: It was about Ten a-Clock, at that Time of the Year when there is scarce any Darkness; and willing to indulge Contemplation, I had not call'd for Candles, and could not presently discern who was there; but not suspecting it any other than Mr. Marvir, (who might be come to call me to Supper,) without removing from the Posture I was in, ask'd carelessly what he wanted. He must be a very ill Judge of Happiness, (answer'd he,) that could form a Wish beyond the Treasure which this Bed contains. These Words, and the Accent of his Voice, always dear and charming to my Ears, soon told me it was Lysander, and oblig'd me to endeavour to rise; but he had thrown himself down by me while he was speaking, and seizing both my Hands, and gently forcing them to circle his Waste, join'd his Lips to mine with too strenuous a Pressure to suffer me to reproach the Liberties he took. ----What could I do! surpris'd in this unguarded Moment! ----Full of Desires and tender Languishments before, his glowing Touch now dissolv'd my very Soul, and melted every Thought to soft Compliance! ----In short, I suffer'd,----or, rather let me say, I cou'd not resist his proceeding from one Freedom to another, till there was nothing left for him to ask, or me to grant. The guilty Transport pass'd, a thousand Apprehensions all at once invaded me! Remorse and Shame supply'd the Place of Exstasy! ----Tears fill'd my Eyes,----cold Tremblings seiz'd my

Limbs,----and my Breast heav'd no more with Joy, but Horror!---- [Page 39] too sure Presages of that future Woe, which this black Hour brought forth! ----It was not in the lovely Undoer's Power, dear as he was, to make me satisfied with what I had done; and the whole Time he stay'd with me, which was best Part of the Night, I utter'd nothing but Reproaches: The next Day, and many following ones, I entertain'd him in no other Manner; and it was some Weeks before all his Wit, his Tenderness, and seeming Truth, cou'd make me hope I had not done a Deed, I shou'd, all my Life, have Occasion to repent. But what is it a Woman may not in Time be perswaded to, by the Man she loves? He behav'd himself in such a Manner, so kind, so soft, so ravishingly tender, respectful and engaging,----made so many solemn Protestations of eternal Faith, and imprecated such unheard-of Curses on his Falshood, if ever he shou'd give me Cause to tax him with it, that one wou'd think indeed the most harden'd Villain cou'd not thus have dar'd to dress his Perjuries in such a Form of Sanctity! ---- How cou'd I then, who lov'd him, disbelieve him? --- No, it was not in Nature,----it was not in Reason, that, after what he had sworn, I cou'd be doubtful of his Sincerity or Honour; and I must have consider'd him as monstrously unworthy of my Love, before I cou'd think there was a Possibility he shou'd ever cease to love me. Thus was I, at last, rais'd to the highest Pinnacle of human Felicity! an Assurance of the real and everlasting Tenderness of the Man who took up all my Wishes! But when I thought myself most happy,----most secure, I was on a sudden thrown from all my Height of Transport, to the lowest State of Misery and Despair. Ever since my being at Marvir's House, I had not pass'd one Day without seeing Lysander; and the first Absence, which was about a Week, fill'd me with most terrible Suspicions: I did not fail to acquaint him with 'em by Letters; which he answer'd with the same Fondness he had accustom'd me to, and made Excuses for not visiting me in that Time, which seem'd [Page 40] plausible enough: When next I saw him, nothing seem'd more endearing,----nothing more ardent than he seem'd to be, yet he pretended some Business, and stay'd not with me so long as he was wont. After he was gone, happening to cast my Eyes on the Ground, I saw a Paper lying, which I, imagining it might be dropp'd by him, hastily took up: Part of it had been torn off, and what remain'd was so blotted that I could scarce read it; I discover'd, however, that it was a most passionate Declaration of Love to some Woman; but who, I was altogether a Stranger, for there was no Name. ----You may believe (my dear Belinda) this was enough to give a Heart, so truly tender as mine, a most terrible Alarm! I laid it up carefully, designing to shew it him when he shou'd come next Day, as he had promis'd he wou'd; but, alas! I expected him many succeeding ones in vain; till growing quite out of Patience, I writ to him according to the Dictates of my Jealousy and Discontent. This, indeed, engag'd a Visit from him; and after he had again made some slight Pretences for his Absence, began to rally me, with so much Artifice, for the Imagination I had form'd of his being in Love in another Place, that I was weak enough, on his swearing it was so, to believe the Letter I had found was only a foul Copy of one he intended to send to me, in that Time when he had not an Opportunity of seeing me; and was pretty well satisfy'd as to his Constancy. But tho' I assur'd him, my whole Dependance on the Truth of what he said hung on the Proof of his visiting me as usual, and he seem'd willing I shou'd judge his Truth by that Testimony, yet I saw him not again in another Week. Now the Mist, my good Opinion of him had cast before my Eyes, began to wear off, and Reason, unobscur'd by Passion, shew'd me how truly wretched I had made myself:----But what did it avail? My Fame, my Virtue, and my Peace of Mind were lost, no more to be retriev'd:

Penetration was but the Mirror which shew'd me my Deformity, but cou'd [Page 41] direct me to no Means which cou'd restore those Beauties, which Guilt and Shame had utterly defac'd. From seeing me every Day, he had already fallen to once a Week; soon, he came but once a Fortnight; afterwards a Month; and that too was to be accounted a Favour. ----Soft as I am by Nature, and made more so by Love, this Usage turn'd me all to Indignation: I rav'd, upbraided, threaten'd, said I know not what, and sometimes was resolv'd to reveng'd my Injuries by his Death; but, alas! he grew not less lovely, for his being less faithful; and whatever I determin'd against him in his Absence, was in his Presence all dissolv'd. 'Tis true, he never came without renewing his former Protestations of eternal Faith, and coin'd each Time some new-invented Oath to assure me he was still the same. He seem'd to mourn the Necessity of being so often absent, with a Tenderness equal to that I truly felt; but as perfect a Master as he was in the Art of Feigning, I was too well acquainted with the Force of Love, not to know that where it is sincere, no Obstacles wou'd be able to impede the Gratification of it; and one Day, when he had been telling me a tedious Tale of Business, and Hurry of Affairs, and I know not what, which had prevented his coming, I cou'd not restrain the Violence of my just Resentment; Ungrateful Man! (said I,) when watchful for my Ruin, no Business had the Power to hold you; all Day, and every Day, each flying Minute was Witness of your Vows:---- But now,----now, when I have given up all my Soul!----am lost to all the World but you! I may alone, unpity'd, mourn my Fate, and curse the Fondness that betray'd me to your Scorn! ----He wou'd not suffer me to go on long in this Strain; but taking me in his Arms, and tenderly embracing me, Unjust and Cruel Charmer, (interrupted he,) if I cou'd be capable of the Coldness, the Perfidy you reproach me with, I cou'd not sure have Courage to appear before you:----Nor cou'd you, if you really believ'd me guilty, with that dear, that Angel-Look behold me:----No, [Page 42] 'tis the Height of Passion only makes you talk thus: As such I take it; and tho' I grieve to see you rend your gentle Breast with causless Agonies, yet I consider it with a kind of Transport, since it assures me I am indeed more valuable to you, than any Merit but my Truth can give me Title to. O the Dissembler! with what an Air of Tenderness did he utter these, and a thousand the like Expressions? and with what inexpressible Endearments were they accompany'd? ----Enrag'd and stormy, as I was before, my Soul, now all becalm'd, again Believ'd!----and was again Deceiv'd! ----In this Manner did I continue for a considerable Time; sometimes hoping,---sometimes despairing,---but never certain or confirm'd of any Thing!----all Horror in his Absence,---all Exstasy in in his Presence! ---The Business he pretended, which was Attendance at Court, where he daily expected Preferment, was feasible enough; but then I thought it impossible that no Hour, no Moment in a Week, or in so many Weeks, cou'd not be spar'd. ----In fine, my Brain was in a perpetual Whirl;----Reflection, tost in wild Uncertainty, became disjointed quite; and tho'I was always Musing, yet I was often without the Power of Thinking;----all my Days were spent in doubtful Expectation, and my Nights in Tears, and Heart-rending Agonies, too terrible for Description;----and if sometimes Nature o'er-weary'd sunk into a Slumber, it cou'd not be call'd Rest; for even then, my ever-wakeful Fancy hurry'd my Spirits with confus'd Idea's in tormenting Dreams:---- Lysander's Image was never from my Sight, and always he appear'd unkind, and far unlike the Dear,---- the Soul-enslaving Lover he had been, and still wou'd feign. To add to my Affliction, I was with Child, and every Motion of the unborn Innocent increas'd at once my Tenderness and Grief. ----'Tis not in Thought to form any just Notion of what I felt:--- All Passions, but Hatred, took

their Turn to persecute me; and sure, had not Heaven reserv'd me for an Example of its Power in length'ning Woe to a Degree [Page 43] beyond what cou'd be imagin'd, I cou'd not have surviv'd the Torments of an Hour. On his first declining to visit me, I writ often to him; but of late had desisted from giving him that Trouble, because he had told me, his Father, whose Hands they might possibly fall into, wou'd have Curiosity enough to open them. Whether this was Reality, or whether he said so only to spare himself the Pain of counterfeiting a Tenderness any oftner than he was oblig'd to, in my Presence, I know not; but I had that implicate Obedience to his Will in every Thing, that I very seldom put it to the Venture. But, one Day, after silently enduring an Absence of five Weeks, I was no longer able to restrain the impatient Struggles of my Soul, and sent him these Lines:

To my Too-dear Lysander.

Pardon me, if, convuls'd and torn with Pangs too dreadful for Expression, the Anguish of my Soul, in spite of me, breaks forth into Complainings. --- Am I for ever to live this Life of curs'd Uncertainty? --- Is there a Necessity your Actions must always contradict your Words? --- Oh! be once sincere, and tell me which I must believe! --- There was a Time when with a thousand Vows you swore, that Absence was the severest Tryal a Lover cou'd go through, --- yet now you bear it, --- bear it with Ease, --- with Unconcern! --- and can I then still hope you Love? --- O Heav'n! it is not, cannot be! --- By your own Arguments you stand convicted, and I endeavour to deceive myself in vain. --- Heart-rending Thought! I long have held you True, --- believ'd your Oaths with such a Faith, as what we pay to the Divine Mysteries of Salvation; and 'tis difficult, --- 'tis wondrous to think you can be false! --- What then must be the Proof? Madness! --- Confusion! --- Everlasting Woe! --- Horror without a Name! --- Save, --- save me from it! Dissemble yet a little longer; my [Page 44] Fears will quickly send me to my Grave; let not Despair weigh down my sinking Soul, as well as Body. --- If I no longer have the Power to please you, let the Remembrance of those happy Moments in which I had, engage, at least, your Gratitude, --- if not your Love: Bless me with your Friendship: --- Pity me, if, no more; for, my Lysander, sure I merit that. --- The Thoughts of you anticipate my earliest Prayers, and still continue for my Evening Theme! --- How often, when all have slept, and nothing but the Stars and silent Moon were conscious of my Watchings, have I pour'd out the Anguish of my bleeding Heart, and to those dumb and unavailing Witnesses vented the wild Extravagance of my Passion, rather than wound your Ears with the unwelcome Tale! 'Tis harder to accuse you, than to die; --- yet, while I have Breath, 'twill all be spent in Wailings, if you are still cruel enough to suffer me to linger in a Condition which justly gives me the Title of

The most Injur'd,
and most Miserable
Cleomira.

At the Return of my Messeger, I receiv'd an Answer, which you will scarce believe cou'd be writ by the same Hand, or dictated by the same Heart, from which those you have already heard proceeded.

To the Lovely Cleomira.

Your Sexes Souls are of such narrow Space, that the least Passion swells them even to bursting: I wou'd have the Woman I admire endeavour to enlarge her Genius, and find room for other Views than Love. ---- Not but I think myself infinitely oblig'd to yours, and [Page 45] shall never cease the Professions of mine. ----I will see you in a few Days, and, if possible, convince you that I am

Your most Faithful
Lysander.

One wou'd think I needed no other Proof than the Style and the Shortness of this Billet, to inform me, that I was, indeed, as wretched as I cou'd be; but spite of Reason, I must join in his Barbarity, and be my own Tormenter. ---My Soul, too curious, wou'd search deeper still, though sure to find what wou'd but more distract me. The Fellow, whom I employ'd to carry my Letter, told me, that not finding Lysander at home, he was directed to the Place where he was, and deliver'd it to him in the Presence of a young Lady, whom he was leading to a Chariot; and that as soon as he had writ the Answer they went out together. This was enough to give my already justly-suspecting Heart a jealous Curiosity; and I immediately dispatch'd him again to find out, if possible, who the Lady was. He was so successful in his Enquiry, that he brought me word that her Name was Melissa, and that Lysander was frequently with her;---that they had been seen together at the Play, at the Ring,²¹ in the Mall,²² and several other publick Places. If I was before alarm'd, what now became of me, at this Information? I had formerly had an Acquaintance with this Woman, and knew her Temper to be the most intreaguings²³ upon Earth; and though from a very mean Fortune, and worse Character, a Gentleman of a good Estate had rais'd her to an envy'd State of Grandeur, she had neither Gratitude nor Conduct sufficient to prevent her from coquetting with every Man that thought her worth taking Notice of; nay, she was so notoriously Imprudent, I may say Shameless, that she sought all Opportunities of dishonouring her Husband, and cou'd not hear of a Man fam'd for any Perfection, [Page 46] without desiring to engage him: She wou'd write to the most absolute Strangers; and her being often repuls'd by those whose Discretion made them despise her, did not discourage her from attempting others. This is (Belinda) the true Character of this vile Woman; and the Reflection, that a Creature so every way undeserving shou'd rob me of his Heart, rous'd that little Pride which all Women have some Share of, to a Disdain which, not able to overcome my more superior Softness, gave me Disorders which cannot be express'd. Since I am to be abandon'd, (said I to my self,) I ought to be pleas'd that he has abandon'd me for a Creature whom none will envy him the Possession of:----One, who is not of a Humour to regard any one farther than the Reputation of being admir'd by him:----One, to whom all Men are alike; and, as charming as he is, will not fail to sacrifice him to the next that makes his Addresses to her. And yet, who knows (cry'd I again) but this unfaithful,----this inconstant Creature, may engage him longer than I, with all my Truth and

²¹ *Ring*: circular course in Hyde Park for driving and walking.

²² *Mall*: fashionable walk in St James's Park, a place to see and be seen.

²³ *intreaguings*: scheming, plotting.

Tenderness, cou'd do:---She has Arts to which my Innocence is a Stranger, and will, no doubt, make use of them all to secure a Conquest so much to the Advantage of her Glory. In this Manner did I torment myself; and though I thought nothing cou'd add to what I felt before, yet now I found, that to be neglected for another was a Sting more terrible than the Neglect itself. Once I believ'd that the Death of Lysander wou'd be the extreamest of all Woes; but now I wish'd him dead, rather than in the Possession of a Rival.

When next I saw my Traytor, I utter'd all that my Rage and Jealousy suggested; but, with his usual Artifice, he appear'd unmov'd: And when I upbraided him with the Leisure he had to wait on others, when he had none for me, he swore, That being an intimate Acquaintance of her Husband's, and meeting them by accident at a Place where he had Business, was desir'd by him to conduct her where she was [Page 47] going; which Piece of Gallantry, he said, he cou'd not handsomely refuse. To give the more Credit to this, he seem'd to dislike her Person,----redicul'd her Humour,----and laugh'd so heartily at my being capable of any Uneasiness on her Account, that I was half perswaded to believe him. I had not, however, so entire a Dependance on his Truth, but that I employ'd (unknown to Marvir's People, who I found were his Creatures) the same Man, who had brought me the first Intelligence, to watch him wherever he went, resolving to be satisfy'd one way or other. Alas! I fancy'd that if I cou'd be once throughly assur'd of his Perfidiousness, I shou'd be able to tear him from my Soul, at least extirpate all the Tenderness I had for him: But, how little did I know myself? When by the Diligence of my Spy, I found out that he visited her often,----was with her even at those very Times when he pretended the utmost Regret that he cou'd not be with me;----nay, discover'd that they had private Meetings; and, by all Circumstances, was convinc'd, not only that she was a Rival infinitely more belov'd than I, but also that she was in Possession of all those Joys, which to obtain, I had forfeited my Innocence, my Honour, and my Peace of Mind for ever:---In spite, I say, of all these Proofs,----these stabbing Proofs of his Ingratitude, I cou'd not,----did not love him less. I reproach'd him, indeed, and endeavour'd to make him think my Resentment had extinguish'd my Tenderness; but he still deny'd each particular of my Accusation, and, at last, seem'd angry that I distrusted his Sincerity; till I, mean-spirited Wretch, was forc'd to appear satisfy'd with what he said, least by persisting to alledge what, I found, he was determin'd never to confess, I shou'd provoke him never to see me more. And when I consulted my fond doating Heart, found I cou'd better bear to share him with another, than have no Interest in him at all: But what I suffer'd in such a Submission may, perhaps, be guess'd, but never describ'd. It was now [Page 48] my Woes fell thick upon me; my Pregnancy began now to discover itself to all who saw me; and Marvir and his Wife, who had all this Time counterfeited an Ignorance of what had pass'd between me and Lysander, seem'd prodigiously uneasy at it; pretended a Concern for the Reputation of their House; us'd me in a Manner which I little expected from them, of all the World; and told me plainly, that I must not continue with them any longer; but if I wou'd go into the Country till I was deliver'd of my Burden, they wou'd enquire for a Place where I might be in private. I complain'd to Lysander of their Unkindness; but receiv'd very little Consolation from him: He only told me he was sorry they shou'd behave otherwise to me than I had Reason to expect, but that he believ'd they meant well; and that he cou'd not help joining with them in the Opinion, it was best for me to go into the Country. My Concern for leaving a Place which contain'd all I valu'd in the World, and the cool Tranquillity with which he advis'd me to banish myself from him, were new Stabs to my

already-bleeding Heart: But I had now been a good while accustom'd to receive Wounds of that Nature, and my Spirits were too much depress'd with a continual Weight of Sorrow, to be able to exert them selves to resent almost any Usage. Besides, what could I do? helpless as I was! I had no Friend to whom I durst make Application; and must be oblig'd, in the Condition I was, to do whatever those, in whose Power I had put myself, would have me. They were so eager for my Departure, that a Place was soon found for me to go to; and in a few Days I took leave of that Town, and that Person, for whose sake I had renounced every Thing that ought to have been dear to me. Lysander had indeed the Complaisance to accompany me a few Miles on Horseback; and perceiving me ready to die with Grief, made a thousand Promises of coming down to visit me in a short Time, tho' I had no Reason from his late Behaviour, to hope he would [Page 49] do as he said; yet this seeming Kindness a little reviv'd me, and I went thro' my Journey with more Fortitude than I imagin'd I could. As soon as I arriv'd at the Place destin'd for my Abode, I writ to him, reminding him of the Promise he had made, and conjuring by every tender Plea I could invent, to make it good; but I receiv'd no Answer. Always willing to excuse him as far as I was able, I fancied my Letter had by some Accident miscarried, and sent another; but to as little Purpose as before. ---Then I grew wild with Grief, and was ready, in some ungovernable Sallies of Passion, to lay violent Hands on my own Life. --- I resolv'd at last, if possible to extort an Answer from him; and prevail'd on a Countryman, for a considerable Gratification,²⁴ to ride to Town on purpose to deliver a Letter into his own Hands, and charg'd him not to return without some Token he had seen him. The Contents of what I writ were these:

To my Inhuman and Unrelenting Charmer.

Is it then possible that Lysander, the protesting Lysander, can from all Angel change to a very Fiend? For only they delight in the Perdition they occasion. --- Have you with your Love thrown off all Pity too and Complaisance, that you vouchsafe not to condole, at least, the Ruins you have made? ---O most ungrateful, cruel, barbarous, of all that ever was call'd Man! ----What have I done that can deserve such Usage? --- Is it because I have forsook the Ties of Duty, Interest, Honour,----given up my Innocence,----my Peace, and everlasting Hopes, that you despise me? ----Monster, for whom have I done this? ----Can you reflect it was for you, and your whole Soul not melt in Tenderness and soft Compassion? ----Yes, yes, you can! ----Wretch that I am! ----I have cast away all that could make me truly valuable, and now am justly subjected to your Scorn:----But tho' I live unworthily of your Love, my [Page 50] Death must farely give you some Concern,----at least, the Manner of it, when you shall know it was for you I died:----That my last Breath form'd nothing but your Name;---and in the extreamest Agonies of my departing Soul, lamented more your Cruelty than all that dreadful Separation could inflict. ---O do not, therefore, trifle with a Passion, which, if the Strength of Reason in your Sex keeps you from being too deeply touch'd with, is too impetuous for the Weakness of mine to resist; and who can tell how far the Torrent may transport me? --- History is not without Millions of Examples of Women, who have dar'd to die, when Life became a Burden; and sure, if any e'er could justify Self-Murder, the wretched Cleomira may:----None ever lov'd,----none ever despair'd like me, or had so just a Cause for both. --- The Means of Death are always easy to be obtain'd; and I am

²⁴ Gratification: tip, gratuity.

this Moment hurried to that Rage of Temper, that I know not how long I shall be able to refrain the Use of it. ---O then be quick, and save my Soul the Guilt of Murder, and your own the Pangs of never-ending Remorse, which, when too late to remedy, you'll feel! ---Yes, forgotten and abandon'd as I am, when I am dead, my Ghost will be before you ever, haunt all your Dreams,---poison your Pleasures, and distract Reflection: Then, though I want a Voice, my Wrongs will speak, and rouse your sleeping Conscience to Remembrance of your Vows,---your broken damning Vows! ---Heaven! that Heaven, whose Blessings you have renounc'd, whose Curses you have imprecated, if ever you prov'd false, will then exert the Power of swiftest Vengeance, and Penitence be vain to wash away your Guilt, or call me back to Life! ---For me, I have nought to fear; I feel already all the Pains of Hell; nor can another World torment me worse than this has done;---Horror and Madness overtake me! ---I know not what I say, and to my other Crimes am ready to add Blasphemy;---cou'd curse Heaven,²⁵ and Earth, and Man;---wish to behold the World in Flames;---the Universe dissolv'd;---for all, all are Foes to wretched Cleomira! ---O ease [Page 51] me,---pity me,---write to me,---see me; if not for mine, yet for the sake of the Dear yet unborn;---the tender Pledge of our once mutual Love! ---Think how the frighted Innocent starts at its Mother's Anguish, and is a sad Partaker of all the Sufferings you inflict on me. ---I will, if possible, support the galling Load of Life till the Return of my Messenger; but in your Answer is the Fate of

The Undone
Cleomira.

All the Horror and Distraction which I endeavour'd to represent in this Letter was infinitely short of what I truly felt. I had so little Hope of Comfort from him it was sent to, that all the Time of the Fellow's being gone I had one continu'd Agony, with the Apprehension that at his Return I should be more ascertain'd of Lysander's Cruelty; and had his Stay been long, I believe it would have been impossible for me to have supported it with Life; but the poor Man's Speed out-run my Expectations, eager as they were; and though it was fifty Miles to London, he dispatch'd his Business, and came back in two Days. As soon as he saw me, he gave me a Testimony of his Success in the Business I employ'd him in; and trembling between Hope and Fear, I found in it these Words;

To the Unkind Cleomira.

The Discovery you make of your causless Uneasiness, gives me an infinite Concern: I had writ to you before, but that I waited to hear first from you, which, by all that is sacred, I never have done till now; and if you have sent, as your Messenger informs me you have, your Letters have miscarried. Be assur'd that I am still the same I ever was, and if any Part [Page 52] of that Rapidity which in the Days of Courtship I profess'd, be now abated, it is sufficiently made up by an Encrease of Tenderness. ---I beg, for the sake of the dear Infant you mention, and for mine, who suffer with you in the Knowledge of your Grievs, that you will entirely banish them as Enemies as well to Reason, as to Happiness. I hope the Hurry of my Affairs will shortly have an

²⁵ *curse Heaven*: reference to the third Commandment, 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain', Exod. 20:7.

End, and I shall enjoy the boundless Pleasure of seeing you again; till when I hope you will be satisfy'd with this Assurance, join'd to the innumerable others I have given you, that I am,

Yours for ever,
Lysander.

You will certainly believe I was not in my Senses, when I shall tell you, that these few, and indeed but ill-dissembled Lines of Kindness, drove from my Bosom all the Anxiety that had possess'd it. I thought of nothing now but Joy and Rapture; and, in spite of all the Reasons Lysander had given me, accus'd myself of Injustice for writing to him in the Manner I did; and to make Reparation for the Reproaches of my last, dictated another according to the Transport I now was in. ---I ought to blush at the Memory of so shameful a Weakness; but as I have promis'd you a faithful Relation of my Story, will omit nothing that may give you a just Notion of my Folly, or his Perfidiousness and Ingratitude. The Lines I writ were these;

To my Ador'd Lysander.

To make you able to conceive the Extacy with which I read your dear obliging Letter, I must be able to inspire you with that Sublimity of Passion which Charms, like your own, have only the Power of doing. But think, Lysander, think what a Soul must feel, [Page 53] rais'd from the lowest Hell of Misery to the highest Heaven of Felicity:---Oh! if I may credit those endearing Lines, I have all that Fate can give! ---If, did I say? I must,---I will:---Lysander is all Honour; and he a thousand Times has sworn himself my everlasting Votary:---How have I wrong'd you then,--- Divinest of your Sex! ---But you must pardon me;--- I love,---am absent,---am unworthy;---and in such a Circumstance, Patience were a Virtue out of Season. --- O therefore, let it not be too long before you bless me with your Presence, lest I again relapse;---again be wretched:---Haste to my Arms, while Hopes are quick within me, while vigorous Transport sparkles in my Eyes, and my Soul glows with pleasing Expectation. --Let not the Fervour of my Joy abate, till in your Arms I have nothing left to wish, and I indeed can say thou art all mine, as I am thine: My for-ever-dear Lysander.

Thine in the most passionate
and tender Manner,
Cleomira.

After this, I liv'd for some Time in more Tranquility than I had known for many Months; and tho' it was past my Doubt that he had intrigued with Melissa, yet believing it but a transient Amour, of which he was now grown weary, found it no Difficulty to pardon him; and this renewing of his Tenderness to me, made me assure myself it wou'd be in the Power of no Woman, hereafter, to engage him so far as to render him forgetful of what he owed to me: But, alas! this Peace of Mind was not of any long Continuance: Eight or nine Days being elaps'd, without my receiving any Letter from him, I still thought he was on coming, and the Hopes of seeing him, made full Amends for the not hearing from him; but after that, my Fears again [Page 54] return'd, and I grew restless as before. I constantly walked out every Evening into a Field that overlooked the Road, my Expectations of meeting him not having quite forsook me. One of the Times that I was thus employ'd, I encounter'd a Person whose Sight gave me as much

Surprise, as the News she brought me did Affliction. It was my Nurse, an honest faithful Creature, who hearing I had left London, enquir'd at Marvir's House where I was gone; but receiving no Satisfaction from them, by diligently asking among the Neighbours, heard by one, who, by some Accident had learn'd it, that it was at and so, by describing me to the Stage-Coachman, discover'd what Part of the County I was carried to, and had travell'd down on purpose to acquaint me that my Mother lay at the Point of Death;---that it was believed her Grief for my Behaviour had been the Cause of her Illness;---that all she seemed to lament, was the Misfortunes she feared wou'd fall upon me,---and wish'd for nothing but to see me before she died. This sad Account given me by the poor Woman, in the most moving Circumstances, struck me to the very Soul:---I now began to consider whom it was I had abandon'd, and for whom; and the more I reflected on Lysander's Ingratitude, the more ingrateful did I appear myself:--- To be the Occasion of a Parent's Death,---a Parent who had always most tenderly lov'd me, and from whom I never had been absent (till the Time of my utterly forsaking her) two Days together in my Life, fill'd me with so just a Horror, that I know not if it wou'd have been even in Lysander's Power to have consol'd me! How gladly wou'd I now have return'd to her, and implor'd her Pardon for my Errors,---endeavour'd to give her Comfort, and never leave her more: But, alas! the Condition I was in deterr'd me from the Execution of these pious Wishes: I could entertain no Thoughts of appearing before her till I was deliver'd of that Witness of my Shame: Nor cou'd the poor Woman perswade [Page 55] me to it; she rightly judg'd, that to see me as I then was, would rather be an Encrease of her Affliction, than any Mitigation of it; and told me she would return without saying she had seen me, since there was no Excuse to be made for my not coming to London, but that which had better remain untold. The Concern which I perceiv'd in the Countenance of this faithful Creature, and the mannerly Freedom which she took in expressing her Grief for the Misfortunes I had brought on myself and Family, oblig'd me to give her the whole History of my Affairs since the fatal Choice I made of Marvir for my Guardian; and withal, conjur'd her to make all possible Enquiry into Lysander's Character and Behaviour, and to give me a faithful Account of what she could discover. But it seems she had never learn'd to write, and I was unwilling the Secret should be trusted to any other Hand, therefore desir'd she would treasure it up in her Memory till I came to Town; which I resolv'd to do as soon as I was brought to Bed. I did not think it proper to carry her to the House where I was, but giving her something to refresh herself in her Journey back, took my Leave of her, who parted from me with Tears in her Eyes, and all the Marks of an undissembled Grief. The more I ruminated on the sad Relation she had made me, the deeper Impression it made in my Soul; and that, join'd to Lysander's Unkindness, who, in spite of his Promise, neither came, nor sent to me, threw me into a Condition which is not to be conceiv'd. The Horrors of my Mind had such an Influence over my Body, that it was impossible I shou'd be able to bring a living Child into the World: My Youth, however, and the natural Goodness of my Constitution, brought me through that dangerous State, in which those who find most Ease, have little Reason to be assur'd of Life. ---I was safely deliver'd of a Boy; but, alas! the Grief-kill'd Infant never saw the Light, and I knew nothing what it was to be a Mother, but the Pains. It was certainly only my Impatience [Page 56] to be gone from a Place where I cou'd hear nothing of Lysander, which made me willing to use any Means proper for the Recovery of my Strength; but the Hopes of seeing him, and knowing from his own Mouth my Doom, envigorated my drooping Spirits, and enabled me to endure Life, rather than

die in the terrible Uncertainty I then was in. I found I was in a little more than a Month's Time in a Condition to travel, and was too eager to delay a Moment. I wou'd not go to Marvir's House; because I was assur'd I should hear nothing there, but what they were order'd by Lysander to tell me; and the late Unkindness they had shew'd me, made me resolve never to live with 'em again, but as soon as I got to London, went directly to my Nurse's; where I had the mournful Account of my dear Mother's Death told in so tender and moving a Manner, that I too was ready to expire at hearing it. When the first Hurry of my Grief, for so great and irretrievable a Loss was over, I began to question her about Lysander. She told me she had neglected nothing that might be conducive to my Peace; but that all she had been able to learn concerning him, was, that he had lately an Intrigue with Melissa; that by their ill Conduct it had been discover'd to her Husband, who, as a just Reward for her Infidelity, had entirely cast her off; that she was now reduc'd to the same wretched Circumstances this injur'd Gentleman took her from; that Lysander had little Regard to the Miseries he had contributed to bring her to; and she was become one of the most expos'd and unpitied Women in the World. I confess I was ungenerous enough to find some little Consolation in the Knowledge of my Rival's Misfortunes; not but, as much Reason as I had to hate her for being the first Occasion of estranging the Affection of Lysander from me, I should have highly discommended him for his Neglect of her in her Affliction, had it fallen on her only through her Love to him; but as I knew her Inclination to be so amorous, (to give it no [Page 57] worse a Name,) that it had influenc'd her to commit numerous Faults of the like Nature, and even without the least Temptation, I look'd on her as an unworthy Commiseration. ---But, to leave her to all the Miseries which attend a common Prostitution, I resolv'd to know how I now stood in Lysander's Opinion. I writ to him, acquainting him that I was come to Town, desiring to see him. When I had done that, I began to consider my Affairs as to my Money: I thought it unsafe to be lodg'd any longer in Marvir's Hands, and employ'd one to bring him to an Account; but that Villain had made such Bills, and manag'd every Thing so much to his own Advantage, that of my three thousand Pounds, I found I had not much more than fifteen hundred remaining. The Person who I had engag'd in this Business knew very well what my Father left me, and perswaded me to have Recourse to Law; but the other knew himself secure enough as to that Point, and when it was hinted to him, he writ me a Letter to tell me, That if I insisted to bring him to any publick Account for the Money he had laid out, he cou'd easily prove it had been expended only for my Use; and bid me consider, that in the Condition I had been there was Occasion for more than a trifling Sum, to bribe those to Secrecy who were oblig'd to be entrusted with the Knowledge of it. This was enough to let me see, if I attempted any Thing against him, he would expose me in the most shameful Manner he could. I was glad therefore to accept what little I cou'd get, without daring to molest him for the rest. But I will not (my dear Belinda) detain your Attention with any Particulars of this, which (in Comparison with my others) I look'd on as a trifling Vexation. Above a Week was past since I sent to Lysander, and he had not yet answer'd my Letter. I was very well assur'd he had received it; and tho' I had little Hopes of the Continuance of his Affection, I expected from his Complaisance some sort of an Excuse for the Inhumanity he had been guilty [Page 58] of: My Amazement at this unlook'd-for Slight was almost equal to my Grief: I now indeed felt more Resentment than I had ever been capable of before: Neither to come to me, nor write, after so long an Absence, and all I had suffer'd on his Account, cou'd make me consider him no otherwise than as the vilest, and most justly to be abhor'd of all his

Sex: And since I had no other way to revenge, resolv'd to use my Pen to him in such a Manner as shou'd let him know I was no less insensible of his Indignities, than I had been of his Love. But before I did so, an Accident happen'd, to give me a fresh Theme for my Reproaches. Going thro' the Strand²⁶ one Day in a Chair, it was suddenly stopp'd by a Footman, who told me his Lady desir'd to speak with me, and entreated I wou'd come into her Chariot. Neither the Livery, nor the Wearer of it were Strangers to me, and I knew he belong'd to a Lady, who, when I frequented the Court, was one of my greatest Intimates; and I immediately discharg'd my Chair, and did as he desir'd. Nothing could receive me with greater Demonstrations of Kindness than Semanthe, (for so I shall call her;) and after she had gently upbraided me with Breach of Friendship, for not letting her know where I had been all the Time of my absconding, began to ask me a thousand Questions about my Affairs. But mine was a Story very improper to be related to her, who, tho' I knew she had a great deal of good Nature, was not of a Temper to have approv'd my Proceedings, and therefore I turn'd the Discourse as soon as I could into an Enquiry after her Affairs; which she very ingenuously inform'd me of, little suspecting the Effect of what she told me. I am (said she) very near changing my Condition; but the Person who has prevail'd on me to do it, is so truly deserving, that without a Blush I may confess, that the sooner I yield to his Desires, the sooner I make myself the happiest of my Sex. Ah, Madam! (cried I, interrupting her,) take care how you depend [Page 59] on the Sincerity of Mankind; it requires more Experience than you or I are Mistresses of, to form any just Judgment of their Deserts.²⁷ It is no Wonder that you talk so, (reply'd she,) since I have not told you the Name of my Charmer; but when I have, I doubt not but you will acknowledge, as all the World who know him do, that every Perfection that Heaven can adorn a Mortal with, are center'd in my Admir'd ---O God! who was it but my Lysander that she nam'd. ---Lightning could not have blasted me more than this one Word; and I believe the most artful of all my Sex cou'd not in such a Circumstance have dissembled her Confusion; but the Shock was too mighty for my Weakness to sustain, and wholly depriv'd of Speech, I fell against the Side of the Chariot senseless, and in all Appearance dead, and came not to myself till I was brought to Semanthe's Lodgings. The first Thing I saw when I open'd my Eyes was her, busily employ'd in helping the Maids to use Means for my Recovery: The Sight of her, and the Remembrance of what she had told me, threw me again into Convulsions, which lasted for some Time; and when, at last, I had gathered Power to speak, it was in such a Fashion, so wild, and so confus'd, that the Standers-by believ'd I was taken with a sudden Fit of Frenzy. I desir'd a Chair might be call'd to carry me home; and making some sort of an Apology, I know not what, for the Trouble I had given, took leave of my happy Rival. My poor Nurse (for I had been at her House ever since I came to Town) was terribly alarm'd at the Condition she beheld me in; and, when I repeated the Occasion of it, join'd with me in the most bitter Curses we could both invent on the Perfidiousness of Mankind. I remain'd for some Time in mortal Agonies, unable to determine on any Thing; sometimes I was for returning to Semanthe, to acquaint her with Lysander's

²⁶ *the Strand*: the street that links Westminster to the law courts in the Old City (the one square mile of London that was within the Roman walls and is still the heart of the business and banking district). Originally, it was a bridle path along the river, as its name signifies.

²⁷ *Deserts*: worthiness, merit.

Engagements to me, and implore her to forbear any farther Invasion on a Right²⁸ I had so dearly purchas'd;--- [Page 60] sometimes I was for going to Lysander's House, and by publickly reproaching him with his Vows, deter him from the Breach of them:---But Modesty rejected both these Resolutions as soon as form'd; and, by my Nurse's Perswasion, (who fear'd that proceeding to any Violence, would be altogether unavailing, and only serve to expose me more,) I contented myself with uttering the Fury I was possess'd of in a Letter; which, tho' incoherent and distracted as my Mind, I believe you will not think it too severe for the Occasion.

To the Inconstant, Ungenerous, and Perfidious Lysander.

I have so long been accustomed to Indignities from you, that had I not in Possession your Letters, those Witnesses of your well-dissembled Tenderness, I shou'd believe I had been enchanted with some delightful Dream, and that there never was any such Thing, in Reality, as that Lysander cou'd take the Pains to make me believe he lov'd me, since for no other Cause than returning the Passion he pretended, he now can use me with a Brutality as unexampled as my own Meanness of Spirit, which has hitherto suffer'd me to sit down tamely with my Wrongs, and not endeavour, at least, a suitable Revenge. ---Poisons and Daggers are the Upbraidings you should receive from me:--- Yet I, fond Wretch, have still subjected my very Will to yours, wrung my own Hands, while you have wrong my Heart;---and when a thousand Times, with more than Devil-like Cruelty you've conjur'd up all that was raging in me, with my own Tears I have appeas'd that Tempest, which only Blood,---your dearest Blood should have had Power to quell. ---Not one Particular of your Baseness is unknown to me;---Cold,---Cold Betrayer; ---Dark designing Villain, your Neglect, your Absence, your Silence all sprung but from one Cause, that cursed Mutability of Temper, which damns half [Page 61] your Sex, as fond Belief and Tenderness does ours. ---I was not ignorant of your Intrigue with Melissa, even from the Beginning, to the guilty Rapture which concluded it:---Yet I was patient, and but to Heaven accus'd you of Perfidiousness:--Fool that I was, I hop'd my Truth, my Constancy, and Softness, in Time, might make a Convert of you;---But now, now that I find you are for ever lost! that Marriage is about to give another that Title, which alone is due to me by your own Vows, and by all those Sufferings I have bought it with!---now I grow, indeed, like you, a very Fiend, and methinks cou'd smile at Mischief! ---Yes, if you can,---if you dare attempt to make Semanthe yours, may the Priest, about to join you, be struck speechless;---may Earthquakes shake the Ground,--- the Temple's Roof unclose;---Thunder, and darting Lightnings proclaim Heaven's just Abhorrence of your Mockery of the sacred Ceremony, and mark the Bridegroom for a vile Prophaner! ---But, Oh! shou'd all the Curses which my Injuries deserve, and jealous Fury can invent, fall on you,---shou'd Judgments terrify, or even Pity for me dissuade you from her Arms, what wou'd it avail? ---Cou'd it afford one Grain of Comfort to my tormented Soul? ---No,---Since you're mine no more, no matter whose:---Your Heart is lost, for ever lost to me; and when compar'd with that, your Body is a Trifle. ---Go on then,---pursue the Dictates of your changing Nature; be proud of Perjury, and wanton in Deceit: A Time will come, when Remorse

²⁸ *Right*: before the 1754 Hardwicke Marriage Act, Lysander's promises were actionable as a contract. Lawrence Stone notes that they were 'far more successful than actions of seduction', *Road to Divorce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 86.

will be sufficiently my Avenger---For me, I shall not long endure the Pain of Thought; Madness or Death will ease me of Reflection; but while I have Life or Sense to know how very wretched you have made me, be kind enough, at least, to feign Compassion for the Woes you give, and lay the Blame of your Inconstancy on Fate,---the unavoidable Impulse of your Nature,--- or any Thing which may make me think you pity me; for since, in spite of all you have done, I still must love you, I wou'd fain imagine you possess'd of some one good Quality, to justify my Passion. ---O God! [Page 62] I can no more! ----Farewel, dear, cruel Destroyer of the Soul, and Ruin of the Everlasting Peace of

The most Wretched
Cleomira.

In about four or five Days after I sent, I receiv'd an Answer; which I think proper to repeat, that you may see there is nothing of Rude or Base impossible for a Man to do, when once a Woman, by forfeiting her Honour, has put it in his Power to use her as he pleases.

To Cleomira.

I Receiv'd your Letter with some Surprise, but with none of that Tenderness you seem to aim at inspiring, or what really has possess'd my Soul at reading some of your former ones; nor can you blame my Change of Humour, since your own Extravagance has been the Cause. Believe me, Cleomira! whatever in our Days of Courtship we profess, the Excess of any Passion is ridiculous to a Man of Sense; and Love, of all others, more excites our Mirth, than our Pity. ---That foolish Fondness, with which your Sex so much abounds, is before Enjoyment charming, because it gives us an Assurance of obtaining all we ask; but afterwards 'tis cloying, tiresome, and in Times grows odious. ---Had your Passion, at least the Shew of it, been less violent, mine might have had a longer Continuance; and as there is nothing more unnatural, than that a Woman shou'd expect a Man can be in Love with her always, the best Way to retain his Complaisance, is, not to take Notice of his Alteration, or oblige him, by a troublesome Importunity, to explain himself in the Manner I now am forc'd to do to you: I confess, indeed, that I am going to be marry'd to a Lady, whose Discretion will, I hope, prevent any of those Discontents and Jealousies [Page 63] which first made my Amour with you grow uneasy. That I once lov'd you, I shall ever acknowledge, and desire you wou'd be as just in assuring yourself, that your own Mismanagement was the Cause I cou'd do so no longer. The little Storms of Fury which appear in your Letter, are too frequently met with in Stories, to be wonder'd at, and are of as little Consequence to move me to either Fear or Pity, as your proclaiming the Occasion wou'd be to the Disadvantage of my Reputation; but if you can resolve to confine your Passion within the Bounds of Prudence, tho' you lose a Lover, you shall always find a Friend in

Lysander.

I am very apt, indeed, to believe that Lysander in this spoke the Sense of all his Sex; and one wou'd think that such an Eclaircissement²⁹ was enough to have cur'd me of all Passions, but Disdain and Hate. --- Nothing sure was ever so insulting, so impudent, so barbarous; yet was my

²⁹ *Eclaircissement*: clarification.

Soul, and all its Faculties, so truly his, that tho' at the first Reading I resolv'd not to think of him but with Detestation, I relaps'd immediately, and instead of wishing I had never seen him, found a secret Pleasure, even in the midst of Agony, in the Reflection that he had lov'd me once: And, if at any Time a Start of just Resentment rouz'd itself within me, when I wou'd give it Vent in Curses, a Power superior to Rage arrested the flying Breath, and chang'd it into Blessings. I still lov'd him with such an Adoration, that I cou'd not bring myself to think that any Thing he cou'd do was wrong, and began indeed to lay the Blame of my Misfortune on my own Want of Merit to engage the Continuance of his Affection, rather than on any Vice in him; and it was with all the Difficulty in the World, I forbore writing to him again, to tell him so. ---Was ever any Infatuation,---was ever any Madness equal to mine! ---O God! the bare Remembrance of it makes me contemn myself, and acknowledge, that a Creature so meanly Soul'd³⁰ deserv'd no better Fate. [Page 64]

The poor Recluse for some Moments was able to proceed no farther; a thousand mingled Passions now struggled in her labouring Breast, with too much Vehemence to be suppress'd; and throwing herself down on the Couch she sat on, began again to pour out the Anguish of her Soul in a Torrent of Tears. Tho' Belinda cou'd not forbear simpathising with her, yet finding that her Grievs were indeed past Remedy, thought nothing she cou'd say wou'd any way avail to her Consolation, and only bore her Company in this dumb Scene³¹ of Sorrow: But the Recluse had too much Complaisance and good Nature, to be able to endure the Influence she perceiv'd her Afflictions had over the tender Disposition of the other, and composing herself as well as she cou'd, continu'd her Discourse in this Manner:

If (said she) I cou'd have found Words of Force sufficient to have vented any of those various Passions which tormented me, my afflicted Soul, perhaps, might have receiv'd some little Intervals of Ease; but there were none to express a Condition such as mine! ---To love to the highest Degree of Tenderness, what I ought to have abhorr'd;---to adore what I knew deserv'd my utmost Scorn;--- to have bury'd Hope, and wild Desire survive;--- to have Shame, Remorse, and all the Vultures of conscious Guilt gnaw on my aking Thought;--- to wish for Madness, and yet Sense remain, was Misery! was Horror, sure, without a Name! A thousand Times in a Day I was about to put an End to Life, and all its Weight of Anguish: Nor was it Reason or Religion, but meerly the Consideration that Death wou'd take from me all Power of hearing what became of Lysander, that preserv'd me.

Thus did I live, if such a State can be call'd Life, till the Day of Lysander's Marriage; but when I heard that, imagine you behold a Wretch in the most raging Fit of Lunacy, and it may give you some Idea, though but a faint one, of what I then [Page 65] appear'd: I tore my Cloaths, my Face, my Hair, threw myself on the Floor, beat my Breast, made the House ring with echoing Shrieks and Lamentations, and was scarce restrain'd by my Nurse from running in this Manner to the Church where the Ceremony was perform'd; and it was but when I had no longer Strength to rage, that partly by Force, and partly by Perswasion, she got me into Bed. The Violence of my Agitations threw me into a Fever; but though I would take nothing but what I was compell'd to,

³⁰ *meanly Soul'd*: endowed with a mean or ignoble soul.

³¹ *dumb Scene*: i.e. wordless.

and committed Extravagancies in this Illness enough to have kill'd twenty of a much stronger Constitution than myself, yet I could not die: In spite of the Malignity of the Distemper, in spite even of myself, I recover'd. But not all the bodily Indisposition I had endur'd, had been able to weaken the passions of my Soul: I still lov'd, and still despair'd. ----My Thoughts were always with Lysander, and pursu'd him every where, even to the bridal Bed, that Grave where all my Hopes were buried! My Nurse's House happening, unluckily to stand in a Street pretty near that in which Lysander liv'd, as soon as I had Strength to walk about my Chamber, I had the Mortification from my Window to behold him and Semanthe, now his Wife, pass by in their Chariot almost every Day. You may believe this Sight gave no small Addition to the Horrors of my Despair: But I will not pretend to repeat what it was I felt whenever these grating Objects met my Eyes; it shall suffice to say, 'twas more than I cou'd bear; and I resolv'd to rid myself of what I then endur'd, without any Apprehensions of what Futurity might give. Death was my determin'd Care: But in what Manner I should apply it was now my only Study; and, after a long Debate in my Mind, Poison was the Means I fix'd on, as being not only the most decent, but also the most private Way I could perform this Deed of Desperation; for I was unwilling the World should be sensible of [Page 66] what I had done; and when I was no more, preserve my Shame still flagrant with those scurril Ditties,³² which Actions of the kind I was about to do, are always Themes for. I took care to conceal my Intentions from my Nurse; and that she might be the less watchful over me, began to counterfeit a Chearfulness, which Heaven knows was far distant from my Heart. The poor Woman was overjoy'd to find me, as she thought, so much more easy than I had been; and I went out one Day, unsuspected, to procure the fatal Drugs. I had Recourse to an Apothecary who had been us'd to make up Medicines for our Family; and because I knew how scrupulous People of that Profession are oblig'd to be, I told him, I had a little favourite Dog, which by some Accident was run mad, and having made use of a thousand Experiments for a Cure for him in vain, and not enduring to have him destroy'd any other Way, I wou'd have something to give him, to put an End to his Misery in the most gentle Manner I could; something of a sleeping Potion, I said, which by Degrees shou'd seize upon the Seats of Life, and give a sure, but easy Death. The Man look'd on me with a good deal of Surprise, and, as I thought, more Penetration than I desir'd he should have; but, after a little Pause, went about mixing the Composition. I was very well pleased to think I had so artfully deceiv'd him, and came home with the Physick,³³ which I design'd should make a perfect Cure of all my Miseries. As I was going to drink it, I began to think I cou'd not leave the World in Peace, without a Farewel to my unjust, but still too dear Lysander; and taking up some Paper, writ to him these Lines: [Page 67]

To the Dear Ruiner of my Soul and Body.

As my Passion for you was built on a more lasting Foundation than that of your's to me, so not all your Cruelty can have Power to shake it: I must be your's, though you cease to desire I shou'd be so; and since I cannot hope, nay, now you are another's, dare not wish any future

³² *scurril Ditties*: scurrilous street ballads, often rapidly composed about crimes and other sensational news events and sold as cheap broadsides.

³³ *Physick*: medicine, poison.

Testimonies of my Affection should be pleasing, I take the only Means to rid you of the Trouble: A Draught of Poison stands before me; and the Moment I conclude this Letter, I take my Journey to that World, whence there is no Return:--- What will be my Portion there I know not; but I am sure of this, that if departed Souls have any Intelligence of what's acted here, your Pity for my Fate will mitigate the sharpest Torments. A tender Sigh sometimes, not even my Rival wou'd deny; and perhaps, a Time may come, when you shall own I merited much more. I do not, however, wish you shou'd be touch'd too deeply with Remorse:---You are too dear to me, for me to desire to give you Pain. Remember me, if you can, with some little Softness;---make not my Sufferings the Subject of your Ridicule, nor seem pleas'd if you hear others do so; and whenever my Want of Beauty, Wit, or any other Charm, rises as an Evidence against me, let my exalted Tenderness still ballance that Deficiency, and reflect, that as I have liv'd, so now I die, my Dear, Dear Lysander.

Only your's,
Cleomira.

I kept my Word, indeed; for as soon as I had seal'd this up, I drank the Ingredients I had brought home with me:---I drank it without the least Alarm, or any of those Apprehensions, which so terrify the Minds of most People at the Approach of [Page 68] Death, so much had Despair hardened my Heart, and stupified my Reason. In above an Hour, either the Draught it self, or the Force of my Imagination that it must be so, operated so strongly through my Veins, that I grew exceeding sick; and fearing the Effects wou'd come before I had settled those Affairs I had in my Head, I call'd hastily for the good old Nurse. It was almost Midnight, and she was in Bed; and believing I had been so too, was not a little frighted when she came into my Chamber, and found me dress'd as I had been all Day, and with something in my Countenance, as she said, of a Horror impossible to be express'd. I sent for you (said I) to take my everlasting Leave,---to thank you for the faithful Services I have received from you, and to make what Recompence my lessen'd Circumstances have left me Power to do. The poor Creature star'd in my Face all the Time I was speaking; but the Astonishment she was in made her either incapable of understanding me, or took away the Power of answering. Be not surpris'd, (resum'd I,) I tell you this Night,---I know not but this Hour is the last of my Life:---Therefore, while I have Voice to utter the Meanings of my Soul, I charge you be attentive, and perform my last Requests. She certainly thought my Grievs had turn'd my Brain; and hastily interrupting me, as I spoke these Words, For Heaven's sake, Madam, (said she,) give not way to the Suggestions of your Melancholy: You are now, God be prais'd, pretty well recover'd from an Illness in which we had just Reason to despair of you:---You are now, as it were, risen from the Grave, and the signal Deliverance shews that you are destin'd for happier Days than those you yet have seen. ---Ah! do not then (continued she, with Tears in her Eyes) endeavour to disappoint the Designs of your all-wise Preserver, by indulging Grief to prey upon your Senses for the Loss of an unworthy Person, whom, at your Return of Reason you must scorn. I could not suffer her to proceed [Page 69] in this Manner, but cutting her off from what she was going to say, No more, (cried I,) if by an ill-tim'd and unmannerly Zeal you would not forfeit all that good Opinion your Fidelity and Obedience has hitherto inspir'd:---Once more I tell you, that I cannot,---will not live:---Death is already busy at my Heart; and, if I make not haste, may rob me of the only Wish I now can form,

and you of the Glory of serving to the last a Mistress, who, if she had the Power, would more express her Gratitude. ---Therefore, in few Words, by all that Truth and Honesty which I believe you possess'd of, I conjure you to deliver a Letter you will find on the Table into Lysander's Hands, the Moment I expire,--- to tell him that his Inconstancy was my Death, and to relate the Manner of it in the most moving Terms you can invent. This is all I have to ask, or to command. ---As to my Funeral, order it as you please; but let me not be laid too near my Parents, lest my guilty Ashes shou'd disturb the sacred Repose of theirs. ---All that remains of my broken Fortune, after I am laid in the Earth, is yours. Though I spoke this with all the Solemnity imaginable, it was to little Purpose; she still took it for the Effects of my Melancholy, and began to resume her Disswasions from letting such sad Thoughts get the better of my Reason; and I was forc'd to tell her what I had done, before I could make her believe I was in Danger of Death. But never did Amazement and real Grief appear more lively than in the Face of this poor Wretch, at what I told her. At first she was entirely mute, and when she had Power to speak, her Words were nothing but Exclamations. Then, on a sudden, thinking they were fruitless, was running for a Physician, for a Divine, and raising the whole Town for my Preservation; nor cou'd any Thing I should have said, have prevented her, if my Strength had not prevail'd to force her into a Chair, and holding her there, oblig'd her to hear me tell her, That the Poison I had taken was [Page 70] not of a Nature to be expell'd, or if it were, had now lain too long in me to be depriv'd of its Operation: Nay, (said I,) put the Case that what I had done, shou'd by any Means that I shou'd be compell'd to use be render'd fruitless,----not all the World shou'd force me to live another Day:----If I cannot die the Way I chuse, still I will some Way;----If not by Poison, there are Knives, or Cords:----My Garters may be my Executioners:----Or if deny'd these Instruments, you cannot hinder me from strangling myself with my own Hands, or dashing out my Brains against the Wall:----To those resolv'd, Death always is at Call. I spoke these Words with a real Design to do as I said; and if she had got Liberty to have brought any Persons in to restrain me, I had certainly that Moment taken some unfailing Method to prevent any Thing they cou'd have done to save me. But with these, and the like Speeches, at last I perswaded her to content herself with lamenting my Desparation, without endeavouring to do any Thing to remove it. And having convinc'd her of my Obstinacy to die, to spare the Infamy of Self-Murder, she promis'd me to keep the Deed conceal'd, and give out I died of an Apoplexy.³⁴ But I thought I shou'd never have prevail'd on her to carry the Letter to Lysander: Her Abhorrence to him, as the Author of all my Misfortunes, and now of my Death, was so great, that she assur'd me the Task of dying with me wou'd be far less severe than the beholding such a Monster: But my Tears and repeated Entreaties at last overcame all her Scruples, and I engag'd an Oath from her, (for I wou'd not in that Case trust her Promise,) that she wou'd in the Morning see him, and say all that I requir'd. In a very little Time after I had brought her into the Disposition I desir'd, I found a prodigious Heaviness, like that, indeed, of Death, seize on my Spirits; and making no doubt but that the fatal Moment was at hand, with my Nurse's Assistance, (though, poor Soul, she was in too great an Agony to be able to afford me much,) [Page 71] I got my self undress'd, and put to Bed, where I had not lain long before I lost all Sense of every Thing:----Lysander's Charms,----his Cruelty,---- my Ruin and Despair, were now no more remember'd! ----Oh! if one were sure to enjoy that Tranquility in a

³⁴ *Apoplexy*: stroke or other sudden attack that destroys the senses and ability to move.

real Death, that I did in my imaginary one, none wou'd survive their Happiness! At my return to Thought, that is, when I was loos'd from the Bands of Sleep, for it was no more which had bound down my Senses, I was in a Consternation impossible to be express'd:----I look'd on myself, then round the Room, and I believe 'twou'd have been pleasant enough, if any body had been Witness of it, to have observ'd the Oddness of my Behaviour at my first waking: I remember'd very well what had pass'd before I went to Bed, and cou'd not reconcile so seeming a Contradiction, as that I shou'd be still in a World I believ'd I had taken such effectual Measures to be freed from. As I was in this Dilemma, my Nurse came into the Chamber, not with her Eyes o'erflow'd with Tears, and wringing her Hands, as she had done the Night before, but with all the Marks of a most perfect Satisfaction, and kneeling down by the Bedside, testify'd her Joy in most fervent Thanksgivings to that Divine Power which had so graciously been pleas'd to disappoint the unnatural Purpose of my Heart. I cou'd not forbear interrupting her Ejaculations by some wild sort of Enquiries, how I came to be still living; which she presently satisfy'd me in these Words: When I had left you, (said she,) in all Appearance dead, I began to consider of the Promise you had oblig'd me to make; and it being near Morning, got myself ready to go with your Letter, resolving to take no Notice of your Death to my Family till my Return. After I had discharg'd that unwelcome Errand, I found a Man waiting at home to speak with me; and he told me, the chief of it was to enquire if a Lady who lodg'd here was well; and then nam'd you: I was too much confounded at the Question to be able [Page 72] to answer him without trembling and faltering in my Speech, though, as well as I cou'd, I said I hop'd you were well;----that I left you so last Night. I wish (resum'd he, taking me aside) she may continue so. Then, Madam, he told me he was the Apothecary from whom you had demanded Poison; but suspecting you design'd it for some other Use than what you pretended, and fearing if he shou'd deny, you might procure it from some other, he had deceiv'd you with an Opiate,³⁵ which cou'd be no way prejudicial to the Health of the Person that took it, though it wou'd hold the Senses in a much deeper and longer Sleep than what was natural. ----He said also, That he had caus'd you to be watch'd home, to the End that he might relate the Truth to those about you, if any Thing of what he imagin'd shou'd happen. I was so impatient to know what Lysander had said, since I found she had been with him, that I cou'd not give myself much Time to reflect on what she told me concerning the Apothecary; but I found her willing to evade the repeating the Manner of his Behaviour, and guess'd by that he was inhuman to the last. ----What, (said I) was he not shock'd to hear I died for him? ----If I cou'd believe, that after so fatal a Proof of Love he cou'd persist in his Barbarity, I shou'd rejoice my Purpose was defeated, and would live to scorn him. ----If you are in earnest, (interrupted she,) and can, indeed, continue in a Resolution so truly noble, I will inform you of all. Which after my assuring her I wou'd do, she went on in this Manner: I gave your Letter to him, (said she,) and after looking it carelesly over,----Your Mistress sure is mad, (cry'd he, with an Air of Contempt,) I long have thought her so; and the romantick Stuff she has writ me here, confirms it. Indeed, Madam, (continued the good Creature,) I had scarce Power to refrain flying in his Face; but though my Hands forbore any Indignities, I gave my Tongue free Scope; and when I had told him,----nay, swore, (as well I might, for firmly I believ'd it,) that you were really [Page 73] dead, I call'd him every Name I cou'd invent, of base, perfidious, and deceitful; but he

³⁵ *Opiate*: sedative containing opium.

seemed as little to regard the Fury I was in, as the News I brought him, and only saying,---If she be dead the Letter requires no Answer, therefore be gone, and cease your Clamour; but not finding I was very hasty to do as he bid me, for methought it was some little Satisfaction to upbraid this Monster, he call'd one of his Servants to turn me out of Doors, and walk'd from me as unconcerned as though I had brought him an Account of the most indifferent Affair that cou'd have happen'd. I was too well satisfied in the Integrity of this good old Woman, to doubt the Truth of what she said; and it was now that I began to feel that Resentment, which by a thousand Barbarities he had long before deserved. And, after some little Struggles between departing Tenderness and growing Hate;---'Tis done, (said I,) Reason, at last, has gain'd a Conquest over all that Softness which has hitherto betray'd me to Contempt. ---Now I will live, and Love alone shall die. ---Nurse brought so many and well-grounded Arguments to strengthen me in this Resolution, and express'd her Meaning in a Manner so much beyond what could be expected from her, that I have often thought she was that Moment inspir'd by Heaven to assist my Weakness. In short, I gave the Thoughts of Death entirely over. I cou'd not endure, however, to appear publicly in the World again; and as Lysander believ'd me dead, I was willing every Body else shou'd do so too: I order'd a Will to be drawn according to Law, in which I made Nurse my Heir and sole Executrix; and she has perform'd every Thing I desir'd with such Exactness and Fidelity, that not a Relation or Acquaintance has the least Notion of my being living. It was she who heard of the Convenience of this House for boarding in; but I wou'd not let her come to make any Agreement for me, because she might chance to be known, and consequently the Person she recommended guess'd at. Since the [Page 74] Time of my being here, she manages my little Fortune, receives the Income of it when due, and gives me an Account of it every Quarter; which is all the Business I have to do in this uneasy World. Thus, Madam, have I given you a faithful Account of the Causes which induc'd me to this Retirement; and I believe, you will own that they are such as merit no less than my whole Life's Contrition. For, as Mr. Waller very elegantly expresses it,

Our Passions gone, and Reason in her Throne,
Amaz'd we see the Mischiefs we have done!³⁶

Though Belinda had conceiv'd the highest Esteem and Friendship imaginable for this fair Unfortunate, and was willing to offer every Thing in her Power for her Consolation, yet she cou'd not disapprove the Justice of her Lamentations, or the Resolution she had taken of concealing herself. So much of the Night was taken up in the Recluse's History, that Belinda was oblig'd to defer her's till the next Day; but the other engag'd her to come into her Chamber early in the Morning, and, as soon as Breakfast was over, demanded the Performance of her Promise; which she readily comply'd with, and struggling with some Sighs, which her aking Heart sent forth on recollecting the passages she was about to utter, began her Relation in this Manner.

THE STORY OF BELINDA.

³⁶ Adapted from lines spoken by the King in Edmund Waller, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Maid's Tragedy altered with some other pieces* (London, 1630), 41.

I Cannot, (said she,) boast either of a Family, or any natural or acquir'd Endowments, which cou'd entitle me to those Hopes the lovely and accomplish'd Cleomira might reasonably depend on: My Father was, indeed, a Gentleman; and if his Estate was not the greatest, yet it was superior to most Commons,³⁷ who had taken no other Measures to enlarge their Possessions than what was consistent with Honesty, and that tranquil State of Life, which, [Page 75] I believe, he wou'd not have forsook to have been Master of both Indies.³⁸ And though my Education was only such as the Country affords, yet, had I follow'd those Precepts which my Infancy was taught, it had been sufficient to have restrain'd me from doing any Thing which cou'd draw on me the Contempt of the World. I had the Misfortune to lose both my Parents within a year of one another; but my Father, (who was the longest Survivor,) had, a little before his Death, provided me a Husband, a Gentleman who long had lov'd me, and who was, indeed, deserving of a much better Match: His Person was extremely graceful and well-turn'd; his Behaviour affable to all, and complaisant as far as Sincerity wou'd permit; his Solidity of Judgment and sound Reasoning surpriz'd those of twice his Years; and though he had a peculiar Sweetness of Disposition, which made it impossible for him to be an Enemy to any one, yet was it temper'd with a due Regard to that Principle of Honour which forbids any Friendship with the vicious Part of Mankind, or for any private End or Interest to pretend it. Virtue and Wit, though in Rags, never fail'd to excite his highest Praises and most zealous Esteem; and Folly and Baseness, though adorn'd with Grandeur, his Contempt and open Detestation. It was impossible for a Heart so entirely unpreposses'd as mine then was, to make any Objection to a Person such as I have describ'd, especially when recommended by a Father, who I knew tenderly lov'd me, and was most watchful for my Happiness; but as I had no Repugnance, so also I had no extraordinary Satisfaction in the Thoughts of this Match: I felt no Hopes, no Fears, no Wishes, no Impatience, nor knew what 'twas to be uneasy or transported. When I saw Worthly, (for that was the Name of this excellent Man,) I was well enough pleas'd, indeed; but when I saw him not, I was the same: In fine, every Thing was indifferent to me; and had this Insensibility continu'd, I had liv'd one of the most contented Women in the World. Every [Page 76] Thing being concluded on, a Day was fix'd for the Celebration of our Marriage; but on the sudden Death of my Father, which happen'd about a Week before, for Decency's-sake, it was put off to a longer Time: Nor cou'd Worthly, (ardent Lover, as all his Actions spoke him,) say any Thing to the contrary. He constantly visited me every Day, and I looking on him as a Man ordain'd by Heaven, and him who had the Disposal of me, for my Husband, allow'd him all the Freedom of Conversation imaginable. The Alteration which the Death of my Father had made in our Family, gave him an Opportunity of proving his Love and Generosity in a Manner which justly render'd him very dear to my Esteem, (Oh! wou'd

³⁷ *Commons*: commoners, neither nobility nor gentry. [But cf. Blackstone, *Commentaries* (1765): "The commons consists of all such men of property in the kingdom as have no seat in the house of lords."]

³⁸ *both Indies*: the East Indies (India, adjacent regions in Asia, and Indonesia) and the West Indies (the Antilles, islands between North and South America). [But often enough, as here, "both Indies" means not just the "West Indies" in the modern sense, but all of the lands of the Western hemisphere, especially the rich lands held by the Spanish, such as Peru and Mexico.]

to Heaven it had to my Affection too!) but I have since found there is an Infinity of Distance between Love and Friendship. My Father, little suspecting he was so near his End, had made no Will, and being possess'd of scarce any personal Estate, and the real³⁹ descending to my Brother, then a Student in the University, it was generally fear'd among our Relations, that myself and younger Sister wou'd be entirely Portionless. This Discourse soon reach'd Worthly's Ears; and he came to me one Day with a more than ordinary Satisfaction in his Countenance, to tell me, That nothing cou'd have happen'd more lucky for his Wishes, than this Means of testifying to me and the whole World, that it was my Love alone he was ambitious of; and that he was so far from desiring my Brother shou'd make good any Thing of what my Father had promis'd, that he wou'd not be depriv'd of the Glory of proving himself not altogether unworthy my Regard, by marrying me without a Fortune, to receive with me the Treasure of an Empire. I must have been void both of Gratitude and common Sense, if I had not acknowledg'd this Behaviour to have been generous above the Rank of ordinary Lovers; especially, when I consider'd it cou'd be none of those idle Compliments which Men are often full of, when they think we have no Occasion [Page 77] to make use of their Service. I knew Worthly's Temper too well to suspect the Sincerity of what he said, and knew also, that he was too well acquainted with my Brother's Character to expect any Thing from him. He was when he left our House extremely Wild and Thoughtless, wholly addicted to his Pleasures, and seem'd so little inclinable to any solid Reflections for the Good of his Family, or himself, indeed, that it was the universal Discourse of the Country, that he would make but an ill Use of his Patrimony: But he disappointed the Belief of every Body; and when he came from the University, (as he did soon after my Father's Death, to take Possession, he being more than of Age,) he made it appear that Learning is the best Polisher of the Principles, as well as Manners of those who apply themselves seriously to it. He settled the Affairs of the Family in a Fashion beyond what cou'd have been hop'd; and having heard of my intended Marriage with Worthly, and what my Father design'd to give me, said he wou'd be far from contradicting the Will of so good a Parent, tho' not compell'd to it by any Form of Law; and sending for a Scrivener,⁴⁰ not only made me Mistress of the Fortune which had been promis'd, but bound himself to give my Sister the same, whenever she shou'd Marry, or come of Age; and because there was no ready Money left, he made over the Estate to pay it, reserving only to himself a Competency to maintain him at the University, whither he soon went back, and designs to continue some Years. My Brother's Generosity did not, however, lessen my Obligations to Worthly; my Esteem for him encreas'd daily, and he had, indeed, so many excellent Qualities, that it was impossible, but the more one knew him, the more one shou'd find to admire: In fine, all that I knew of Love was his; nor had I the least Notion, there was any Thing farther in that Passion, than what he had inspir'd me with. ---Happy had I been never to have been undeceiv'd! But my ill Fate decreed it otherwise, and sad Experience soon [Page 78] inform'd me that the Effects of Love are not Tranquility and Ease.

Not having been at any publick Place, (except Church,) since the Death of my Father,

³⁹ *real*: real estate, that is, property, as opposed to stocks, bonds, and annuities.

⁴⁰ *Scrivener*: professional copyist and notary.

Worthly wou'd needs perswade⁴¹ me to go in his Coach to see a famous Horse-Race, which was to be run a few Miles distant from the Place where we liv'd. There was a prodigious Concourse of People, and great Part of them of the best Fashion in the Country round about; the Sight gave us a great deal of Diversion; and when it was over, Worthly conducted myself and Sister, (for I took her with me,) to a House, where there was a noble Collation⁴² prepar'd for our Entertainment; and in this, as in every Thing else, he testify'd the Pride he took in obliging me. As we were returning home, the Coachman having drank too plentifully, drove in such a furious Manner, (in spite of his Master's often calling to him to take Care,) that we were over-turn'd. None of us were hurt: But this Accident was the Occasion of a Misfortune much worse than any Thing that cou'd have happen'd by the Fall. A Gentleman, who was riding the same Way, and saw all that pass'd, came up to us, and alighting from his Horse, made us several Compliments on the Occasion, and, perceiving the Condition our Coachman was in, entreated Worthly to accept of a Servant he had with him, who, he said, had often drove a Coach, and understood it very well. The Fright that my sister and I were in made Worthly gladly accept of the Offer; and immediately the young Man, by his Master's Command, chang'd Seats with the Coachman. All the Time of our little Journey, the obliging Stranger rode by the Coachside, and entertain'd us with a World of Gallantry; for, besides the Charms of his Person, which nothing sure cou'd ever equalize, his Manner of Address had something in it so inexpressibly engaging, that had Cleomira seen him, Lysander wou'd have appear'd less lovely. The Recluse cou'd not ferbear shaking her Head and sighing at these Words, [Page 79] as believing it impossible for any Man to be possess'd of Graces, which cou'd obscure those of her Lysander; but she wou'd not interrupt the other by entering into an Argument, which 'twas probable they shou'd not easily agree upon, and Belinda went on thus: Worthly (continu'd she) was infinitely charm'd with his Conversation, and gave me to understand, when we came near home, that I cou'd do no less, in return to the Civilities he had shew'd us, than invite him in. My Complaisance for him was sufficient to have made me yield to his Desire, in a much greater Matter; but, alas! I granted this with a Pleasure, which, at that Time, I knew not the Meaning of, nor once imagin'd, that from the Wit and Beauty of this lovely Unknown I had drawn in an Infection at my Eyes and Ears, which, mixing with my whole Mass of Blood, was to poison all the Quiet of my future Days: I cannot tell you what 'twas I felt, while in his Presence, but it was a Mixture of Delight and Pain, a kind of racking Joy, and pleasing Anguish. He stay'd not very long at our House, Worthly was impatient to have him at his own, that he might, in a Fashion which he wou'd not take the Freedom to use in ours, requite the Civilities we had receiv'd from him on the Road; and it was not till I was left alone, and had Leisure for Reflection, that I found myself unhappy enough to feel for this Stranger, what Worthly's constant Assiduity, and my Knowledge of his many Virtues, never cou'd inspire. I suffer'd many Conflicts on the first Discovery that it really was Love, which so suddenly, and without Reason, had taken Possession of my Soul: My just Sense of the Obligations I had to Worthly, and my Engagements to him, (from which I cou'd not without both Ingratitude and Dishonour recede,) and my wild Passion for

⁴¹ *wou'd needs perswade*: colloquial, combining the sense that he needed to persuade her and that he thought it would be good for her and was determined.

⁴² *Collation*: table of refreshments.

a Man, who, perhaps, might never regard me with any Thing more than an Indifference; ----a Man, who 'twas likely might be already married, or prepossess'd with a more deserving Object; ----a Man, whose Temper, Principles, and Circumstances, [Page 80] were altogether unknown to me, fill'd me at once with Shame, Remorse, Confusion, and Despair. My Mind in this Disorder, 'twou'd be needless to say it was impossible for Sleep to enter my Eyes: I pass'd the Night in a Manner vastly different from all I had ever known before; nor did the Day bring any more Tranquility. In the Afternoon, Worthly, according to Custom, came to visit me; but, alas! his Presence was now no longer welcome, nor cou'd all his good Qualities have render'd him supportable, had not his whole Discourse been of the too lovely Stranger. He told me, that he had been inform'd by himself of all his Circumstances; that he was a Baronet, his Name Sir Thomas Courtal; that having made the Tour of Europe, he thought his Travels wou'd not be compleat, unless he cou'd be able to give as good an Account of the Kingdom he was born in, as of others; and to that End, was proceeding in his Progress thro' every Country in which there was any Thing rare or valuable to be seen. He added to this Relation, so many Encomiums on the Graces of his Person, the Charms of his Wit, and and the seeming Sweetness of his Disposition, that had I not been already too much prepossess'd in his Favour, what he said was enough to have made me so. Presuming on my Interest with you, (said this unsuspecting Lover,) I have engag'd, that you shall give me leave to bring him to wait on you sometimes, while this Part of the Country is happy in his Presence; which I hope (continu'd he looking tenderly on me) will be long enough to see me blest in the Title of your Husband. O God! with what Emotions did my Bosom swell, when he pronounc'd these Words! a thousand Times I was about to lay open all the Weakness of my Soul, and warn him of so dangerous a Guest; but Shame as often depriv'd me of the Power:----Yes, I protest, it gave me a Concern I cannot well express, to see this generous, this undesigning Man, thus lay a Snare for the Destruction of his own Hopes: Yet, how cou'd I avoid [Page 81] it, without making a Confession too shocking for my Modesty, or his Passion, to be able to sustain? In fine, I having said nothing to oppose it, he brought him the next Day to visit me, and they became so intimate in a little Time, that he scarce ever came without him. O what a Trial was this for a Heart so inexperienc'd as mine! How did I struggle to repel my daily-encreasing Wishes? And how strenuously did I endeavour to out-balance Courtal's enchanting Graces, by the solid Perfections of the other? But all in vain; the tow'ring Flame grew higher by my Attempts to quell it, and a little Time convinc'd me, that Almighty Love despises all Controul. Worthly's continual Sollicitations for the Celebration of our Marriage, render'd him more disagreeable; and the Trouble he put me to in finding Excuses to delay it, made the Sight of him intollerable: He had too much Penetration, not to discover there was an Alteration in my Behaviour; but having never receiv'd Testimonies of any Thing more than my Esteem, imagin'd it proceeded only from the little Inclination he had always found in me to change my Condition; and redoubled his Pressures in such a Manner, as made me stand in need of much more Artifice than I was Mistress of, to put him off, without letting him into the Secret of my Reason for it. To heighten my Aversion, and strengthen my Obstinacy in refusing him, I had of late observ'd in the charming Courtal's Eyes a certain Languishment they were not us'd to wear; I often heard him sigh, observ'd him to look pale and trembling, when, on any Occasion, he touch'd my Hand: Symptoms which I now began to know were infallible Tokens of a Tenderness, far beyond that which springs from bare Esteem. And while I flatter'd my fond Wishes with a Belief, that I was

secretly belov'd by him, I began insensibly to hate the other, whom I look'd upon as the only Bar 'twixt me and all the Joys this World cou'd give. Tho' Worthly was one of the most obsequious Lovers that ever was, yet he was too eager to brook a Delay, [Page 82] for which he cou'd assign no Reason; and finding me still more and more averse to any Discourse of Marriage, he sollicitated all my Relations and Acquaintance to speak to me, and learn the Cause, if possible, why I shou'd now refuse what (if my Father's Death had not deferr'd) had been granted with my free Consent many Months before. I suffer'd a vast deal of Persecution from all those People he had engag'd in his Interest; and I know not what the unanswerable Arguments they pleaded in his Favour might not at last have perswaded me to, if he had not (O ill-directed and unlucky Choice!) employ'd even his ador'd Rival too in this Affair. I was one Day in my Chamber musing, and full of unsettled Resolutions, when I was told that Courtal was below: His very Name alarm'd me; but when I came down, and found he was alone, 'tis impossible to guess at my Surprize! He easily perceiv'd it in my Countenance; and approaching me with the most humble and submissive Air, A Guest, Madam, (said he,) of so little Merit as the unhappy Courtal wou'd have small Reason to hope a Welcome here, if his Presumption were not autoriz'd by him, who, blest with the Divine Belinda's Love, knows the way to obtain Pardon for himself and me. ----From Worthly, Madam, (continu'd he, perceiving I was silent,) the fortunate Worthly, I am sent to tell you how much he languishes under the Impossibility of waiting on you this Evening, and to assure you, (if you can doubt it,) that tho' unlucky Affairs detain him from your Presence, his Soul and all his Wishes are with you. Tho' I was prodigiously confounded to find that Worthly had engag'd him to this Visit, yet I was much more so at his Manner of telling it me: But after I had desir'd him to sit, Any Friend of Worthly's (answer'd I,) shall always find Welcome from Belinda: But, I think, so much is owing to the vast Merits of Sir Thomas Courtal, that there can be no need of any second Name to introduce him any where. I design'd these Words no other than a Compliment; [Page 83] but the Confusion with which I spoke them, gave him too much Reason to believe I had a farther Meaning; and looking on me with Eyes which seem'd to read my Soul,----O God! (said he,) what sweet Enchantment do those Words contain! The powerful Spells disclose an opening Heaven to my ravish'd View! and wrapp'd with Joys immortal, make me forget the Hell of Misery I am doom'd too! ----Then, after a little Pause, and venting two or three Sighs, which seem'd so vehement as though at each his Heart were rent in sunder, Pardon, Madam, (resum'd he,) the Violence of a sudden Transport, which some delusive Hopes that Moment fir'd me with, and made me neglect the Business which alone has given me the Boldness of waiting on you. I felt, all the Time he was speaking, Motions, which I know not how to account for; I have already told you that I had discover'd, or fancy'd that I had discover'd, by some Looks and Words, which seem'd to be unguarded, that he lov'd me; and though I desir'd nothing so passionately as to be assur'd he did so, yet I dreaded the Eclaircissement, and began to tremble with Fear that he should say something which I was altogether unprepared to answer: I have often reflected since how silly my inward Perturbations made me seem: Courtal must certainly guess from what Source the Disorders he perceiv'd in my Countenance proceeded, or believe me to be extremely wanting in Conversation; and I was so ambitious of appearing amiable in his Eyes, that I know not if I wou'd not have chose he should be sensible of the Truth, rather than impute my Behaviour to any natural Defect: But whatever his Thoughts were, he eas'd my Confusion, by immediately falling into a Discourse of Worthy. He gave him Praises, which, tho' not more than

he deserv'd, were more than I was willing to hear, at least, from the Mouth that spoke them; and than began to tell me how ill the Impatience of his Love made him brook my delaying to give him a Happiness, which he had so much Cause [Page 84] to hope would long since have been compleated; and that he begg'd I would assign some Period to his Sufferings, that he the better might be enabled to endure them. If before I was alarm'd at the Apprehension of Courtal's entertaining me in another Manner, I was now ten Times more so that he did not:---It stung me to the Soul to find, that when he had so favourable an Opportunity to discover his Sentiments, he should employ it in a Theme, which (if he had those Inclinations that I had flatter'd myself I had inspir'd,) must be so disagreeable to his own Desires. My Fears now turn'd to Indignation! I rag'd to think my Wishes had deceiv'd me, and half despis'd him for his Insensibility! I wonder (said I, with an Air, which I believe, had a good deal of Contempt in it) that Worthy shou'd take the Measures he does:---Does he think to teaze me into Compliance?---and can he imagine, that any Thing he can say, or the Persons he employs, will influence so far, as to make me grant what is not consistent with my Inclinations? ---I am not dispos'd to marry,---at least, as yet; and if I never shou'd be so, he ought not to expect I should do a Violence to my own Humour, to pleasure his. These, and the like ridiculous Expressions, which my Vanity, or my Love, or both, drew from me, were sufficient to let Courtal see how little real Tenderness I had for his Rival; and, doubtless, encourag'd him to make the Declaration he presently did. Ah, Madam! (said he,) you are but little sensible what the burning Impatience of a Lover's Wishes make him suffer,---what strong Convulsions, ----what soul-rending Pangs invade the Breast, which throbs with doubtful Expectation! --- For my Part,---could I, like Worthy, hope,---as all, who know you, must, like him, adore, I shou'd be less enduring far! ---Those lovely Eyes shou'd ne'er have Leave to close, or view another Object but myself,---nor Night, nor Day would I be absent: ---I'd follow wheresoe'er you went,---and with imploring, dying Looks,---with softening [Page 85] Tears,---with Groans, and all the natural Eloquence of moving Passion, hang on your Feet, and grasp those happy Garments, till Coldness, Coyness, and Reserve, was melted down;---and your whole Soul was Tenderness and Pity. You might be mistaken, (reply'd I briskly;) for if I did not love, such a Behaviour would make me hate. True, Madam, (resum'd he, holding down his Head, and sighing,) I know from the Unlov'd all Proofs would be unwelcome; and 'tis that Knowledge has deter'd me from discovering what I feel;---else had my Eyes and Tongue, e'er now, disclos'd my Soul, and told Belinda she engros'd it all;---but hopeless,---meritless, I have in secret born the fest'ring Wound; nor durst implore my fair Physician's Aid, lest, instead of Balm, she should apply a Corrosive. ---Even this, perhaps, (continu'd he, taking one of my Hands, and eagerly kissing it,) you would think too great a Recompence for the eternal Loss of my Repose. Tho' this Declaration would have prodigiously disorder'd me before, yet being made at a Time when I had just given over either the Hopes or the Fears of hearing any such Thing, it confounded me much more: I knew not what to say, nor how to look; I could not repel, and was unwilling to encourage; but, at last, thinking it best to take the middle Course, I affected to turn his Behaviour into Merriment; and, with as much Gaiety as I could put on, I dare swear (said I) there is no Danger of your losing your Repose for any Woman in the World:---You have too much Wisdom to be much in Love; and most of your Sex have too much Wit, and too little good Nature not to despise the Effects of that Passion wherever you perceive them. ---How, Madam, (interrupted he,) such Words, coming from a Mouth like yours, carry a Severity in them more cruel than any Thing I

could apprehend from so angelick a Composition: ---While you tell me I have Wisdom, and that I know not Love, you give the greatest Proof you can, that you think me an Ideot; for to adore [Page 86] Belinda is sure the highest Wisdom; and to be insensible of her Charms, is the last Degree of Folly and Stupidity. ---Ah! wou'd to Heaven (continued he sighing) it were as much in my Power to influence you to Compassion for my Sufferings, as it is to convince you of the Reality of them. I never doubted your Gallantry, (answered I, scarce able to retain any Part of that Humour I had assum'd;) but if I had, you give me now a sufficient Testimony of it, in so artfully turning the Discourse we were upon, which indeed was too serious to be pleasing, into a Raillery much more entertaining. ---He wou'd not suffer me to proceed, but falling on his Knees before me, and looking up in my Face with a Tenderness unutterable, O hold, (cried he,) lovely Insulter! give not to the most Almighty Truth a breaking,---bleeding Heart, e'er yet sent forth, so injurious an Epiphet:---By Heaven,---by all that Man adores,---by all we are taught to hope, to fear, or wish, you are dearer to my Soul than Health, than Grandeur, Knowledge, Light, Life, or my eternal Peace;---than every Thing that Language gives a Name to:---But I may spare these Protestations (rejoin'd he, after a little Pause,) too well do those enchanting Eyes trace their own Power,---- even now they penetrate, they pierce my Breast, and read much more, oh! infinitely more, than I can say. ---He would have gone on, but the Tread of somebody coming down Stairs, oblig'd him to break off, and reliev'd me from a Perplexity I know not how I should have got through. It was my Sister who came into the Room, just as he had risen from the Posture he was in; but the Confusion that she perceiv'd in both our Faces, made her (as she since told me) guess what sort of Conversation he had entertain'd me with; and, believing it would be a little agreeable to me that he should have an Opportunity to renew it, never left us while he stay'd. He could not, indeed, after she came in, express his Sentiments any farther by Words, but Looks, which I already too well [Page 87] understood, explain'd his Meaning; and certainly, tho' at that Time I knew it not, met with a Return too kind from mine. Just as he was taking his Leave, he got the Liberty to say softly,---O divine Belinda! remember me:---Pardon, and pity me. ---Alas! 'twas I had only need of Pity; for never did any Creature pass a Night in greater Inquietudes than I did the succeeding one:---My Engagements to Worthly, and the Impossibility of breaking them, without rendring my self odious to all who knew me;---my already furious Passion for Courtal, and the little Assurance I had of the Sincerity of his;---- my Ingratitude for the one, and Weakness for the other, shock'd all that was noble and generous in me, and made me incapable of Ease: I had all to fear, nothing to hope; nor could I form an Aim, which, if obtain'd, could give me perfect Happiness. If I should marry Worthly (said I to myself, how wretched must I be? condemn'd to loath'd Embraces, and the detested Task of forc'd Civility;---by painful Duty restrain'd from even the Wish of better Fortune, yet Inclination still at War with Virtue, guilty and innocent at once, and miserable in both:---Or, should I indulge my Passion in the too-charming Courtal's dear Society, could I expect Content? Even in his Arms, my Breach of Promise, and Ingratitude to Worthly, his Despair, and the just Censures of the reproaching World, would embitter all my Pleasures, turn the dear purchas'd Blessing to a Curse, and make my fancied Heaven a real Hell. In this Manner would the different Agitations which tormented me, make me argue with my self. Honour, Reputation, and Gratitude were on Worthly's Side; but what are these when once oppos'd by Love! Courtal's bewitching Charms silenc'd, at last, all other Considerations; and Passion had entirely vanquish'd Reason, if my Doubts of his Sincerity

had not interpos'd: I could not be assur'd he lov'd me, because he told me so; or if he did, how long his Passion might continue. I had heard and read too much [Page 88] of Men's Inconstancy, their Flatteries, their thousand Arts, to lure weak Woman to Belief and Ruin, not to tremble when I thought there was a Possibility he might not be exempted from those little Basenesses of his Sex. ---These Meditations were the troublesome Companions of my Pillow; nor could my domestick Affairs, my Sister's agreeable Prattle, nor all the Amusements which the Day brought with it, have Power to drive them from my Thoughts: My Body, restless as my Mind, displeas'd at every Thing, uneasy every where, I wander'd up and down from Room to Room, till I heard Worthly was come to visit me. I was little prepar'd, and less desirous to have seen him; but in the Hurry of Temper had forgot to give Orders for my being denied: I receiv'd him in such a Manner, as let him plainly see he could not do a greater Displeasure than in staying with me. He could not forbear taking notice of the more than ordinary Coldness, and indeed Peevishness of my Behaviour; and gave me some Hints, tho' with all the Respect in the World, that a Passion so truly ardent and unblameable as his had ever been, might have expected a more favourable Return. There was too much Justice in his Complaints for me to be able to answer them, and therefore endeavour'd to quell them, by telling him, That as there was no Body, to whom I was oblig'd to be accountable for my Actions, to find fault with what I did was not the Way to engage to a Change. Madam, (said he,) I never yet have been presumptuous enough to find fault with any Thing you think fit to do; but now begin to cease the Hope of ever perswading you to any Thing in my Favour. ---I well see, that in losing your Father, I lost my only Friend;--- had he liv'd, your Obedience to him would have given me a Blessing, which I now despair of obtaining from your Love. He look'd full in my Face as he spoke these Words, and offer'd to take me by the Hand; which I drawing back with a Reserve, which came pretty near to Rudeness,---I find (resum'd he) [Page 89] my Presence is unwelcome,---I will therefore trouble you no farther at this Time: May Heaven inspire you with more grateful Sentiments, or give me a Heart able to support your Cruelty. ---He had Power to utter no more; but turning hastily away, went out of Room in such Disorder, that it a little mov'd me. But these good-natur'd Emotions lasted not long; and what entirely chas'd 'em from my Soul, was a Letter I immediately after receiv'd from Courtal. The Words of which were these;

If to adore without a Possibility of Hope be a Sin, it is a Sin only against our own Happiness; a Sin which all Mankind, who see you, must be guilty of, and which Heaven, who gave you such resistless Beauties, must inspire you to forgive. ---Yes, you are too Angelick to condemn us for Faults, which are not in our Power to avoid. ---'Tis my presuming Tongue, not Heart, that has offended: I need not entreat your Pardon for loving you, but for declaring that I do so; there is, I fear, a dreadful Cause;---I ought, indeed, to have dy'd in Silence. I know not, but your Soul, in spite of your Yesterday's Efforts to conceal it, is wholly taken up with a more deserving Object, and the Impertinence of my ill-tim'd Passion may have disturb'd those soft Idea's which mutual Tenderness affords. --- Tell me, divine Belinda! if I have been so criminal; Death shall be at once the Punisher of my Rashness, and Cure of my Misery; but if your Breast has any Room for Pity, O give me leave to try at least to inspire it: None ever had a Plea more just, none wou'd be more truly grateful than

Your eternally Devoted

Courtal.

You may judge with what Transports I read this Letter, by those yourself has felt at receiving any Thing of this kind from the charming Lysander; [Page 90] and I thought I had a prodigious Command of my Temper, that I forbore giving any greater Demonstrations of my Joy, than what the following Lines contain'd:

'Tis impossible either to read, or hear you without allowing you to be the most accomplish'd, most gallant, and witty of your Sex; but whether to be able to retain those Graces, be consistent with a Love so ardent as you wou'd perswade me yours is, can only be judg'd by those vers'd in the Town-Manner of addressing. I have often heard say, by those more skill'd than myself, that the greatest Symptoms of a true Passion is to be depriv'd of Utterance, and Incoherence in Expression; and as I have not Vanity enough to imagine there is any Thing in me capable of engaging you to the Reality, am unwilling to be made the Property of an Amusement only. However, with that Sincerity, which we in the Country prefer to all Things, I assure you that my Heart is utterly unprepossess'd with any Idea of Mr. Worthly, farther than his good Qualities inspire in all who know him; and all my softer Wishes are at Liberty to extend themselves wherever they shall find an Object deserving, by his Constancy, the Regard of
Belinda.

I pass'd the ensuing Night in infinitely more Tranquillity than I had that before: Love banish'd all the Remains of Gratitude which had so much disturb'd me: I gave a Loose to all the Tenderness it inspir'd; and in return, it flatter'd my fond Wishes with a near Prospect of inexpressible Delight. To heighten my Felicity, early in the Morning the assiduous Courtal sent me a second Billet, in which I found these Lines: [Page 91]

With what Words, O most Divine Belinda! shall I express the Rapture of my o'erjoy'd Heart, at reading your dear, obliging Letter? Even the Distrust you seem to have of my Sincerity, is capable of giving me no Pain, while you vouchsafe to assure me there is no greater Impediment to my Hopes! This my faithful Services will soon remove; but had a Person of more Merit taken up your Soul, I must for ever have despair'd! ---Permit me then to begin the pleasing Task of proving what I am this Afternoon; and by giving me an early Leave to breathe out my Soul in Vows of everlasting Truth before you, convince me (of what is indeed too vast a Blessing to be easily believ'd) that you will not be displeas'd to find the most tender, and most faithful, as well as the most passionate of all Lovers, is

Your Adoring
Courtal.

The seeming Sincerity of these few Lines subdued my easy Faith, and I resolv'd no longer to distrust my Happiness: Oh! he is all Angel, (cry'd I in a Rapture,) divinely charming in Soul as well as Body! I must,---I will,---believe him. And in this Hurry of unruly Joy, writ him an Answer in these Words.

'T Wou'd be an over-acted Modesty, and might justly be taken for Stupidity, to feign an Insensibility of your Attractions: The proudest of my Sex wou'd glory in the Conquest of a Heart like yours; and I confess, without a Blush, to find myself that happy envy'd Woman wou'd gratify an Ambition, which unknowing you there cou'd not be a Ground for. The Favour of your visits however, I know not, as yet, how to receive: Worthly, how small a Part soever he had in my Heart, has met with Encouragement from my Father, and in Obedience to his Commands, from me; [Page 92] and Prudence forbids too sudden a Turn in an Affair of so much Consequence; but, if I find you in the little Wood behind our House, about five this Evening, you shall know more of the Sentiments of

Belinda.

You will, doubtless, wonder, that a Maid so little accusom'd to Conversation shou'd not start at the very Thought of an Assignation such as this; but whether it were that the Inexperience of the World, and the Baseness of Mankind kept me from imagining the Danger, or the Violence of my Passion from regarding it, I must leave to the Charity of your Opinion: But, I confess, I felt not the least Regret for what I had writ, and had no Uneasiness but what sprung from my Impatience for the appointed Hour. At last it came, and while I told the Clock, my Soul exulted with a Pleasure, which till then I never knew. I believe I need not tell you I found Courtal in the Wood ready to receive me; you will easily imagine, that the most trifling Inclination will, before Enjoyment, wing the Assiduity of that ungovern'd and inconstant Sex; but I wish there were a Possibility of informing you in what Manner he accosted me, for there was something in it so much beyond Imagination, charming and engaging, that it in part wou'd justify my Behaviour toward him. ---All his Gestures were so humble and beseeching, yet withal so graceful;---all his Looks were accusom'd with such a piercing Softness;--- all his Words express'd so real a Tenderness, so perfect a Sincerity, and so pure a Zeal, that even you, too sadly skill'd in the vile Arts of false deceiving Man, must have believ'd and trusted him! I walk'd with him, heedless of the swift passing Hours, till Day was almost spent; and it was not till the Want of Light depriv'd me of the Pleasure of gazing on him, that I consider'd how long I had been with him; and that we were wander'd, insensibly, perhaps, to either of us, at least to me I am sure it was [Page 93] so, a great Distance from the House, and into the thickest and most obscure Part of the Wood. But it was in vain, that I reminded him how convenient it was that I shou'd return; he was too pressing, I too transported to be able to refuse him so small a Favour as my Company a few Minutes longer. Never was a Night more delectable, more aiding to a Lover's Wishes! the arching Trees form'd a Canopy over our Heads, while through the gently shaking Boughs soft Breezes play'd in lulling Murmurings, and fann'd us with delicious Gales! a thousand Nightingals sung amorous Ditties, and the billing Doves coo'd out their tender Transports! ---Every Thing was soothing,---every Thing inspiring! The very Soul of Love seem'd to inform the Place, and reign throughout the Whole. A little tir'd with walking, my too-dear Companion had prevail'd on me to rest myself on a fine grassy Bank, which was at the Foot of a great Tree: He took the licens'd Freedom to place himself by me; and, methought, we sat with all the Sweets of Nature blooming round us, like the first happy Pair while bless'd with Innocence, they knew not Shame, nor Fear. But he, alas! had other Notions, and aiming only at my Ruin, believ'd he cou'd not chuse a fitter Season, and perhaps never shou'd have so favourable an Opportunity as this: He now began to

mingle Kisses and Embraces with his Vows: My Hands were the first Victims of his fiery Pressures; then my Lips, my Neck, my Breast; and perceiving that, quite lost in Extasy, I but faintly resisted what he did, far greater Boldnesses ensued! ---My Soul dissolv'd! its Faculties o'erpower'd! ---and Reason, Pride, and Shame, and Fear, and every Foe to soft Desire, charm'd to Forgetfulness! my trembling Limbs refus'd to oppose the lovely Tyrant's Will! and, if my faltering Tongue entreated him to desist, or my weak Hands attempted to repulse the encroaching Liberty of his, it serv'd but, as he said, the more to inflame his Wishes, and raise his Passion to a higher Pitch of Fury! Oh! I [Page 94] had been inevitably lost, had not Heaven sent me a Deliverance, even in the Moment I was about to be made the most wretched of its Creatures. Worthly, born for my Preservation! Worthly, doom'd to do me all manner of good Offices, though to my own Destruction! had been to enquire for me; and not finding me at home, happen'd to come into the Wood, not mistrusting I was there, but to indulge that Melancholy my late Carriage had inspir'd. Chance had led him to that Part where we were, and hearing my Voice, he kept himself conceal'd, and was Witness to all the latter Part of our Conversation: He heard enough, Heaven knows, to make him scorn and hate me; yet, generous to the last, when I was on the very Brink of Ruin, he rush'd forth and sav'd me. Rise, Villain, (said he,) and prepare for a different Encounter:---You shall not live to wrong another in the Manner you have done me; nor shall that Woman, ungrateful as she is, fall a Sacrifice to your base Desires. The Surprise that Courtal was in at these Words, and the Knowledge who it was that spoke them, did not hinder him from putting himself in a Posture to receive him: He had his Sword out almost as soon as the other. But what was my Confusion,---my Distraction, to find myself thus expos'd! and to the Man from whom of all the World I most desir'd my Weakness shou'd be conceal'd! I had certainly run between their Swords, and receiv'd those Wounds each design'd for the other, but Shame and Horror struck me motionless; and without the Power even of endeavouring to prevent it, must have been Witness to some fatal Consequence of which myself was the Cause, if my Sister, being told by some Body that saw me, where I was, and wondring at my Stay, had not at that Instant come with some of the Servants in search of me. The enrag'd Rivals, on the first Appearance of the Lights she brought with her, sheath'd their Swords; but she saw enough in all our Faces to inform her, that something extraordinary had happen'd: But it was in vain [Page 95] for her to enquire, we all were speechless with our several Agitations; till Worthly, turning to Courtal, We are prevented now, (said he,) but I shall take a Time more proper to reward your Villany; and giving him a furious Look, flung hastily away, without staying for his Answer. Courtal was either less disturb'd, or had infinitely more Command of his Temper than any of us on this Occasion; and seeming to take no Notice of his Rival's Words, gave me his Hand, in order to conduct me home: But I cou'd not now endure he shou'd look on me, or touch me; and leaning on my Sister with one Hand, and with the other holding a Handkerchief before my Face, to hide as much as possible my Disorders, made what Haste I cou'd from that unlucky Place. He did not leave us, however, till we got quite to our Door; and as we went, made use of all his Rhetorick to perswade me to think no otherwise of what had happen'd, than as a Matter of no Consequence. It was wholly improper I shou'd answer him as I wou'd, therefore forbore answering at all: Nor was it to any Purpose; that my Sister begg'd me to make her a Relation of this Adventure, after we came home; and only telling her, that I was not in a talking Humour, and bidding her trouble me no farther, I shut myself into my Chamber, and there gave a Loose to all the distracted Emotions

of my Soul. ---Oh! what did I not endure this cruel Night? and what, indeed, must I for ever endure, in the Reflection on the dreadful Consequence? Belinda could not come to this Part of her Story without falling into Agonies, much like those which had so often interrupted the Recluse in the Course of her's; and it was now that Lady's Turn to comfort; which she did with such Success, that the other was soon able to resume her Discourse in this Manner:

The Shame and Confusion that I was in (said she) at what happen'd, was not all that tormented me; I had Fears, which were, if possible, more alarming even than my Remorse: I knew very well the [Page 96] Violence of Worthly's Passion for me:---I saw the just Rage my Behaviour had put him in, and remember'd what he said to Courtal at parting, and cou'd not hope this Adventure wou'd end without Blood. After a thousand Inventions how to prevent the Mischief I with so much Reason dreaded, I resolv'd, at last, to try my Power once more with Worthly, and compos'd my Thoughts as well as I could to form a Letter to him, in which I confess'd that I had been ungrateful to his Affection, and by my Folly and ill Conduct had now render'd myself utterly unworthy the Continuance of it; but conjur'd him by the Memory of that Tenderness he once had for me, not to publish my Weakness to the World, by making any Noise of this Affair. I writ also to Courtal, and entreated him, by all the Passion he profess'd for me, and by those Assurances my late Condescension had given him of mine, to avoid all Occasions of meeting Worthly; and if he should receive any Letter or Message like what his last Words import'd, to lay aside his Honour in favour of his Love, and the Consideration how much my Reputation must suffer in a Quarrel of that Nature. I express'd these Request: to both of them in the most moving Terms I was capable of, and what Effect I might have wrought I know not; for though I went not to Bed all Night, it was so late the next Day before I had finish'd, that just as I was sealing up the last, I was interrupted by my Sister's knocking violently at my Chamber Door, and calling to me to open it, in a Tone, and with a Disorder, which told something more than ordinary was the Cause, before I gave her Entrance: But, when I had,----O Sister! (said she) Worthly is kill'd,---murdered by Sir Thomas Courtal, and his Servants say it was on your Account they fought. --- O God! what chilling Horrors seiz'd my whole Frame when she pronounc'd these Words? If she spoke any Thing more, I was incapable of hearing it, for I fell immediately into a Swoon, in which I lay so long, that, as they since told me, neither she [Page 97] nor the Maids that she call'd to my Assistance, believed I should ever recover. But my Miseries were not to have so short a Date, and I again return'd to Sense,---to all the Racks of Thought and curss'd Remembrance. As soon as my Agonies would give me leave to speak, and to enquire, I received the Confirmation of the dismal Story. They told me that the Body of Worthly, cover'd with Wounds, and all besmeared with Blood, was just brought by our House, in order to be carried home, his Seat not being above a Bow-Shot distant from ours; and, that a Servant, who was witness to his dying Words, and seem'd acquainted with the whole Affair, waited to speak with me. As much as I dreaded to hear what the Fellow had to say to me, yet I order'd he should come up; and when he did, desir'd him to give me an Account of all he knew concerning this unhappy Accident, which he presently did in these Words: Early this Morning (said he) my Master call'd me up, and giving me a Letter, commanded me to carry it to the Inn where Sir Thomas Courtal lay. I found him in Bed; but he immediately rose, and gave me an Answer in Writing. At my Return my Master was dress'd; and as soon as he had read what I brought, prepar'd himself to go out, and seeing me about to follow him, as was my Duty, he forbid me

with a Peevishness which he was not us'd to express himself with. This Charge and the Agitations I had observ'd both in his Countenance, and that of Sir Thomas's, while he was reading the Letter, gave me some Suspicion of the Truth. I acquainted one of my Fellows with my Conjecture, and we both thought it our Duty to seek him; but in resolving what to do we had wasted so much Time, that at our Entrance into a Field, (not far from hence, and, which we thought, if any Thing of what we imagin'd were true, would be as likely a Place as any for the Scene of Action,) we met Sir Thomas who seemed to be in a prodigious Hurry. I ask'd if he seen my Master; and he answered that he had [Page 98] not. But we did not put so much Confidence in what he said, but that we went on in the Way we perceiv'd he came from, and soon found my poor Master breathing out his last. When we came near him, Harry, (said he to me, with a Voice scarce intelligible,) I am kill'd:---Tell Belinda that I die for her,---and warn her to take care of---He was able to bring forth no more; for at that Instant Death clos'd his Lips for ever. Here the poor Fellow ended his sad Account, and was just going out of the Room half-blinded with his Tears, when I call'd him back, to ask what was become of Courtal. You may besure, Madam, (answered he,) that I would leave nothing undone for the Revenge of my dear Master's Blood; and as soon as the Body was carried home, took Persons with me to search for him at the Inn: But he was too speedy for my Diligence, and, with both his Servants, had taken Horse, and, I fear, is gone beyond the Reach of those sent in Pursuit of him; for we cou'd get no Intelligence which Road he took. Though I had all the real Concern imaginable, and Grief for Worthly's Death, and the Cause of it, yet, I confess, I could not hear that Courtal was out of Danger without a secret Joy, which was but too guilty. I dissembled it, however, and dismiss'd the Fellow with a Belief that all the Sorrow I had been in, sprung only from the Loss of his Master. All our Family were of that Opinion; and I had the Opportunity of vailing my other Troubles under that Covert, which was both just and laudable. I had, indeed, so much Anxiety of Mind, with every Thing together, that I was not able to stay in a Place, where all I saw or heard would but put me more in Remembrance of my Misfortunes; and I will not tell you, but the Impossibility of ever seeing Courtal there again, was the chief Reason of making it odious to me. I therefore order'd the Coach to be got ready, and the same Day went to a Relation's House, about eight Miles farther in the Country, desiring my Sister, [Page 99] if any Letter should come, to send it to me there; for I imagin'd Courtal would write to me as soon as he thought himself out of Danger. I gave her so strict a Charge to take care of it, that, join'd to some other little Remarks she had made on my late Carriage, made her not far from guessing the Truth of my Sentiments; and she took the Liberty of reproaching me with Ingratitude and Inconstancy. I gave myself but little Concern to perswade her that I did not deserve to be tax'd with those Vices; but redoubling my Desires that she would send any Letter that should be directed to me, took my Leave. What I did soon after, will convince you that nothing, indeed, was able to abate that wild Passion that Courtal had inspir'd me with; for having waited at my Cousin's House about nine or ten Days, and hearing nothing from home, I grew so uneasy, that I resolv'd to be gone from thence. I remember'd to have heard Courtal say he had Business in London, which would oblige him to defer the Progress he intended to make through the Counties till next Year, and fancied he might be gone directly thither. I did not doubt but if he were, I should be able to find him out; and when once this Belief had settled itself in me, I delay'd not a Moment, but borrowing Horses and a Servant of my Cousin, went straight to Warwick, and from thence took the Stage for London. It was that

Kinswoman who directed me to this House, having formerly been a Boarder here herself; and assuring me that if any Packet came from our House, she should send it immediately after me, made me pretty well satisfied in my Mind, that no Mistake would prevent the Blessing of hearing from him, and knowing where to find him, in case I should miss of him in London.

The Fatigue of my Journey did not hinder me from sending, as soon as I came here, to all publick Places to enquire for him; but no such Person was to be found: And what amaz'd me most, was, that a Man of that Fashion, and so noted as I imagin'd him [Page 100] to be, should be utterly unknown to every Body. I did not in the least doubt, but that if I had not the good Fortune of meeting with him here, I should be able to get a perfect Account of his Character and Circumstances; but, alas! the Name of Courtal was as little known as the Arabian Dialect; and I might have spent my whole Life in a fruitless Inquisition, had I not believ'd my Want of Intelligence was in great Measure owing to the Carelessness of those I employ'd, and resolv'd to be my own Spy in an Affair of so much Consequence to my Peace. I had no sooner determin'd on this, than an Opportunity offer'd as lucky as I could have wish'd: One of the Boarders here happened to have a young Lady, a Relation of her's, come to visit her: There being a very good Tragedy acted that Night, they agreed to go to see it; and having talk'd of it before me, ask'd if I would accompany them thither: Though I had very little Relish for that, or any other Diversion, as my Affairs were, yet I was extremely pleas'd with the Proposal, believing no Place more probable to give me a Sight of him, whose Presence was all my Wishes aim'd at. Neither of them were dress'd for the Boxes; and I had an inexpressible Satisfaction in my Mind, to think, that if I should be so fortunate to meet Courtal there, I should have the Opportunity to observe his Manner of Behaviour, unseen by him. In short, we all went in a Dishabillee⁴³ to to the Gallery,⁴⁴ and chose to sit in the very Corner of it, where, without being taken Notice of ourselves, we might see with Ease all the Persons that came into the House. The Ladies that came with me, knowing me to be a Stranger, were so complaisant as to give me an Account what and who most of the Company of any Note were, as they came into their Places; but I had little Ears for their Discourse, my Soul was all collected in my Eyes, and busily employ'd in search of him, whom the Hope of seeing only had engaged my being there. Long I had look'd in vain, till the House being pretty [Page 101] full, and I beginning to despair of being so happy, at last I saw him enter. His Charms were too peculiar, and my Thoughts too full of them, not to make me know him the Moment he set his Foot into the Box. ---Good God! how lovely did he appear that Night! how graceful! Those Perfections which in the Country, where a Bon Mien⁴⁵ is a Prodigy, one might think shewn to Advantage, were no less distinguishable among a Crowd of Beaux! Surrounded by those, who by their very Air one might perceive made it their Study to attract, he shone with a superior Brightness, and with an unaffected manly Majesty asserted the Dignity of

⁴³ *Dishabillee*: dressed in a style intended to appear careless or informal.

⁴⁴ *Gallery*: inexpensive seats in a gallery above the boxes, which were elevated above the pit. Most theatres had several galleries, and servants and lower-class people sat in the upper gallery.

⁴⁵ *Bon Mien*: good face (colloquial, bad French).

his Charms, and seemed to scorn each trifling Emulator. As I was contemplating on his unmatch'd Beauties, I heard one of my Companions say to the other, Cousin, do you see who is yonder? Yes, (reply'd she that was spoke to,) I find that Villain, to his other Vices, has that of being asham'd of nothing. How unconcern'd he looks, (resum'd the former;) and yet, I believe, this is the first Time of his appearing since his late base Action. They had a good deal more of this kind of Discourse between themselves, which I but little regarded, not knowing of whom they were talking, nor the least imagining that any Thing of what they said was any Concern of mine; till some Ladies coming into the Box over-against us, I saw Courtal quit his own, and stepping hastily into that in which they were, seemed to entertain them with a World of Gaiety, and with a Familiarity which gave me a Taste of what (by the little I felt) I believe to be the most dreadful of all Passions, Jealousy! One of them, though I hated her for the Freedom I saw she us'd him with, I could not forbear thinking perfectly agreeable; but she that sat by her, tho' not the thousandth Part so engaging, appeared to have the greatest Share of Courtal's Admiration. I perceived he look'd on her with a beseeching Air, and a Tenderness in his Department, which made me almost mad, while the other often pull'd [Page 102] him by the Sleeve, patted his Hand, whisper'd to him, and seem'd, by a World of little Fondnesses, to endeavour to oblige him to a more peculiar Regard. Judge what my Condition was at a Sight so unexpected, so fatal to my Hopes! I felt in one Moment all that Despair, and Rage, and Jealousy, could inflict; and 'twas as much as I could do to restrain myself from giving some Proof of it, which would have made me ridiculous to the whole Assembly. Not being able to observe their Motions any longer with Patience, I turn'd to her that sat next me, and ask'd if she knew who those Ladies were. One of them (answered she) is the Wife, the other the Mistress of that Gentleman that just now plac'd himself behind them. ---The Wife! (interrupted I, in a much greater Surprise than can be easily comprehended:) The Wife did you say, Madam? Yes, (resum'd she,) that Lady in the Green and Silver Brocade⁴⁶ is his Wife; but tho' she is accounted one of the most celebrated Beauties in Town, and is certainly a Woman of a very excellent Temper, had a vast Fortune, and has not been married much above a Year, yet she possesses but a small Share in her unworthy Husband's Affection: I dare sware she has this Moment a Weight of Discontent upon her Heart, though her Prudence enables her to conceal any Marks of it in her Countenance and Behaviour: That Creature by her, in the flower'd Damask,⁴⁷ who has neither Beauty, good Shape, or any Thing to recommend her but a little flashy Wit, and a vast deal of Assurance, she is oblig'd, for her domestick Peace, to be civil to, though every Body knows her to be the most cruel Enemy she has, and that her Huband passes most of his Hours, and great Part of his Substance, with her. All the Time she was speaking, though I listen'd attentively to what she utter'd, I had my Eyes fix'd on Courtal: I lov'd with too much Passion, not to be assur'd it was he I saw before me;---I knew I could not be mistaken, but I imagin'd her to be infinitely so: What she told me [Page 103] was so inconsistent with the Idea I had form'd of his Humour, or the Character I had heard of his Circumstances, that I cou'd not believe one Tittle of what she said. Madam, you are prodigiously deceiv'd (cry'd I, in a kind of Disdain) in the Persons you are talking of: That Gentleman was my

⁴⁶ *Brocade*: expensive, heavy fabric woven with a rich, raised design.

⁴⁷ *Damask*: rich patterned fabric, often made of silk; less expensive than brocade.

particular Acquaintance in the Country, and I am confident has no Wife, or, if he had, is not of a Principle so vile to use her in the Manner you describe. I know not (said the other Lady) what he may have done to entitle him to your good Opinion, but am very certain, there are too many here who know him to be a far worse Monster than my Cousin has represented him. I shou'd be very much asham'd (rejoin'd I, more warmly than before) to take the Part of a Man, who really cou'd deserve those Severities some Reports may have exacted from you, but must ask your Pardon, if I tell you, that I cannot recede from what I have said, because I am confident, if Sir Thomas Courtal were sensible of the Accusations he lies under, he wou'd find it no difficult Matter to clear himself. ---Sir Thomas Courtal! (cry'd they both out;) for Heaven's sake, who are you talking of? The Man (answer'd I, more amaz'd at that Question than at what they had told me of him) whose Character you have been so free with. ----Bless me! (said one of them,) I know him not: Nor I, (cry'd the other:) I thought we had all this while been speaking of my Lord----

Here Belinda made a full Stop, as considering whether she shou'd name him; and after about a Moment's Reflection,----You will pardon me, (said she to the Recluse,) if I conceal the real Name of this ungrateful Man; for, I confess, in spite of the Deceit he has us'd me with, and the Crimes he has been guilty of, I have still a Tenderness for him which makes me unwilling to expose him. And the Recluse, assuring her she wou'd be far from desiring to know any more than she shou'd think fit to reveal, gave her leave to proceed in her Discourse in this Manner; [Page 104]

If before (continu'd she) I thought these Ladies were mistaken, I was now confirm'd they were so, when they nam'd a Person altogether a Stranger to me. I knew (said I) you must at last acknowledge your Error; that Gentleman to whom you give the Title of Lord is no more than a Baronet, his Name is Sir Thomas Courtal; and, I am sure, if he were sensible of it, wou'd be very sorry to have any Resemblance of a Man so base. Good God! (said one of them,) you will not go about to perswade us, that he, in the White trimm'd with Gold, is any other than the Person we have nam'd. I am very certain it is not, (answer'd I.) As we were in this Dispute, a Woman came to us to know if we wanted any Fruit: Since (said the Lady) we are not able to convince you, let this Woman be the Judge: These sort of People are acquainted with every Body, and she can have no Interest in disguising the Truth. When she had spoke these Words, she beckon'd the Woman, and making a Pretence of buying some Fruit, desir'd her to tell us who that Gentleman was; she immediately confirm'd what my Companions had said, and run on in a good deal of impertinent Chat about him. You see (resum'd the Lady that boards here) how much your Eyes, or the great Likeness there may be between two Persons, has deceiv'd you; but we have sufficient Reasons to know what he is, which when we come home I will acquaint you with. At that Instant the Curtain drew up, and the Attention I found they were willing to give to the Play, prevented any farther Discourse: But how I pass'd the Time of the Performance cannot be conceiv'd, without being possess'd with Agitations such as mine: I had no room to hope there was a Probability of so many Persons being mistaken, and his Behaviour to the Ladies that sat in the Box with him, confirm'd the Character I heard of him to be too true. But presently after I receiv'd a Demonstration which took from me all Possibility of doubting the Reality of my Misfortunes: When the Play was done, having [Page 105] no Servant there to provide us a Coach, we were oblig'd to wait at the Door for one to come to us, which it could not do immediately, being hindred by a Chariot which stood ready for its Owner's Approach. I observ'd there were two or three Footmen belonging to it; and

one of them, tho' now in a different and much richer Dress, I perfectly remember'd to be the Man that officiated in the Place of poor Worthly's Coachman, that fatal Day in which I first beheld the perjurd Courtal, and since had been the Bearer of those Billets I receiv'd from him. I pull'd my Hood as forward as I could to prevent his seeing my Face, and changing my Voice, ask'd him to whom that Chariot belong'd; and he had no sooner told me (as I fear'd he would) the Name which had given me such Confusion, than perceiv'd him coming, the Lord, or Courtal, or both, for both indeed were one. He conducted the Ladies he had been with into the Chariot; and stepping hastily into a Chair which stood there, depriv'd me of the Opportunity of speaking and upbraiding him, as else I should have done in the distracted Condition I then was, without any Regard how improper it was I should do so in such a Place, and before the Company I had with me. After this we got into a Coach; and the Lady who came to visit her that lives here, sat us down, it being in her way home. One would imagine, that to find my self thus cruelly deceiv'd, had been sufficient to have made me forego all the Tenderness which had led me into such Misfortunes; and if I could not think of him with Hatred, to endeavour not to think of him at all: But in spite of the just Rage I was in, the Impatience, the jealous Curiosity of a Lover still remain'd: I remember'd that one of the Ladies told me, they had particular Reasons to know who the Person was whom I affirm'd to be Sir Thomas Courtal, and had hardly Patience to stay till Supper was over for the Performance of the Promise she made me to acquaint me with them. I was beginning to stretch my Invention [Page 106] to form a Story to make her believe, that it was wholly on the Account of a Friend, and not of any farther Consequence to me, which had made me so inquisitive, lest by giving her Occasion to suspect the Truth, I should expose my self to the Ridicule of the whole Family. But I might have spar'd my self that Trouble: The Aversion she had to him kept her from regarding any Thing but the Pleasure it gave her to have an Opportunity of telling a Story so much to his Disadvantage; and I had little Occasion for Entreaty to engage her to satisfy my Curiosity, and make me sensible, that the Man I had consider'd as so worthy Adoration, that all I could do for him was rather a Merit than a Fault, was indeed the most vile, and most perfidious of his Sex.

She illustrated the History she gave me with many Circumstances, which aggravated the Foulness of the Fact: But so much Time has been taken up in the recounting of my own Affairs, that I will not detain your Attention in relating the Particulars of this, and shall only, by giving you the Heads of what she told me, let you see that I am not the only Woman whom his Artifices have render'd miserable. The Sister of that Lady who came to visit her that lodges here, tho' for a very different Reason, is as unhappy as my self, and suffers as much in the not loving him, as I do for loving him too well. She is, it seems, one of the most agreeable Women in Town: Her Accomplishments are such as cannot fail of attracting a great Number of Admirers; but among the rest, there was a young Man of Quality, who profess'd the highest Esteem for her, and she thought her self no less happy in his Addresses, than he did in her Acceptance of them. They long had lov'd each other with a most violent, tho' pure Affection; but either through Disparity of Birth, or some other Reason, both thought convenient to keep their Amour a Secret. That Villain (for I shall henceforth call him by no other Name) being an intimate Friend [Page 107] of the Lovers, was the only trusted Person. He convey'd Letters between them, and through his means they had frequent Opportunities of meeting. He continu'd faithful for some Time; but Miranda was, it seems, too charming, not to be capable of making an Impression on any Heart, much more

on one so amorous as his; and he is too base not to make use of any Means, which might give him the Gratification of his Wishes, and too artful to be at a Loss to find them. As by his Contrivance they had often met, so by his Contrivance they were at last entirely parted; both having a Confidence in his Sincerity, yielded an implicate Faith to what he said: And he soon form'd a Stratagem to make each appear to the other more worthy of Hate than Love, till, if they could not entertain a real Aversion, they feign'd at least so to do; and keeping their Resentments still warm, by new Inventions, prevented either from endeavouring an Eclaircissement. The Lover, tho' he imagin'd he had bestow'd his Heart on a Person altogether unworthy of the Present, was too truly touch'd with the Passion he had profess'd, to be able to withdraw it; and finding it impossible to continue in the same Climate with her, without continuing to adore her; and having too great a Spirit to avow it, after what he suppos'd he knew of her Ingratitude, resolv'd to put it out of his Power to do any thing below the Dignity of that Reason, which all People ought to make use of in an Affair of that Kind, when they find themselves ill treated, without a justifiable Cause, by the Person who once has flatter'd them with a Shew of Tenderness. In short, to the Amazement of the whole Town, and the great Grief of all his Friends and Acquaintance, (but he whose Arts had occasion'd him to do it,) he went to travel; and the Lady, tho' her very Soul went with him, believing her self injur'd by his Ingratitude, and the Insinuations of his faithless Friend, scorn'd to make any Tryal of her Power to prevent him. [Page 108]

The belov'd Rival once remov'd, this common Deceiver of them both,---nay, of the whole World, thought there was no Obstacle remaining to his Wishes, and doubted not the Influence of his too-often successful Charms. In a very few Days he declar'd himself her Lover; and made no Scruple to let her know, he hop'd she would reward his Passion. But, this once, he found his Designs frustrated: However she had disguis'd it, she still retain'd too great a Tenderness for her absent Lover, to entertain the least Thought of putting any other in his Place; and besides, was a Woman of too much Honour and Discretion, not to look on all Attempts made upon her Virtue with the utmost Contempt; and that this was so, there was no room to doubt, since she knew him to be married. The Lady, who gave me this Account, told me, that nothing could be more enrag'd than she was at the Declaration he made her; that she rejected all his Offers, and forbad him ever to visit her any more: But, as it is the Nature of that ingrateful Sex still to pursue what flies them, he redoubled his Efforts. Deny'd the Liberty of speaking, he writ to her in the most moving and seeming sincere Strain that ever Heart dictated; but after the Receipt of the first Letter, the known Character on the Superscription prevented her from reading what the next contain'd, and she immediately sent it back unopen'd. Yet still undaunted he went on; and to make her sensible how capable he was to make even Contradictions join, and, by the Effects of his too powerful Wit, dress the foulest Vice in the Beauties of the fairest Virtue, he sent long Epistles to argue down her Honour, and to perswade her, that to a Passion so sublime as his, to be cruel only was a Crime. But whether it was owing to her good Sense or the Prepossession of another Idea, which made her insensible of his (I must say) unmatch'd Perfections, I know not; but as excellent a Logician as he is, all his Sophistry here prov'd vain. And tho' she could not avoid receiving some of his Letters, [Page 109] because he either disguis'd his Hand, or got some other Person to direct them, yet they had no other Effect on her, than what was very different from his Expectations: She hated him still more; shun'd him as a Monster; and if, by chance, she saw him at any publick Place, (as he took all Opportunities of being where she was,) her very

Countenance discover'd the secret Disdainings of her Soul; and tho' where'er she turn'd he follow'd her with Eyes trembling with Tenderness, and all the Languishments of despairing Love, (Looks, Heaven knows, he is too well us'd to wear,) a stern Severity only shone in hers; and if, to avoid being taken Notice of, she was oblig'd to answer the Civilities he paid her, Scorn lighten'd in her Glances; whene'er she spoke, proud Indignation triumph'd in her Accents, and haughty Detestation sparkled in her Air. Such a Deportment, had his Passion been of that Kind which is worthy of the Name of Love, must have reduc'd him to a Condition justly meriting Compassion; but Love is a Flame too bright, too pure, to blaze in a Heart so full of Fraud and vile Hypocrisy. As Affairs were in this Posture between them, there came an Account that the Ship in which the poor, unfortunate, deluded Lover embark'd was cast away, and all on Board it lost; and at the very same Time, his equally-deceiv'd Mistress receiv'd a Letter, which he had writ to her from a Sea-port Town, where they happen'd to put in. That unhappy Gentleman, tho' he had been made to believe her infinitely undeserving of it, still retain'd the same Tenderness he had ever profess'd, and had not the Power to forbear letting her know it, tho' he had the Power to leave her. In this Testimony of his continu'd Faith, there was some little Mixture of Upbraidings, which made her no Stranger to the Cause of his Departure; and that it was not his Want of Love and Truth, but the seeming Reasons he had to doubt of hers, which had depriv'd her of her Lover. Had it been possible to have recall'd him, with what a [Page 110] Transport must she have welcom'd an Eclaircissement; but, alas! he was now irrecoverably lost. She found his Faith, his Constancy, his Tenderness but found at the same Time she was past the Possibility of receiving any Benefit of his Virtues; and, if one rightly considers her Condition, I know not if it were not less Misery to have believed him false, than know him true, and know him lost for ever. I will not go about to make any Repetition of what I was told concerning the Surprise, Despair, and Rage, which seiz'd the Heart of this unfortunate Lady at so unexpected a Catastrophe; 'tis easy for you to imagine she must be transported with an uncommon Fury: But while she was venting the Anguish of her Soul in Curses on the hated Author of her Miseries, he was contriving Means to gratify his Desires on her; and finding in vain to prosecute his lawless Suit by those Ways he had began it in, he had the unbounded Impudence to resolve on others, yet more impious, and seek by Force to obtain what he was now convinc'd Entreaties would for ever fail to give him. Opportunity was all he wanted to perpetrate his Design; and none for a long Time offering, he grew desperate enough to despise all Considerations; and knowing she very often went to Evening-Prayers, he waited at the Church-Door with a Hackney-Coach,⁴⁸ and was about to seize and drag her violently into it. The Action was so sudden, that tho' there were many People coming out at the same Time, the Surprise it gave 'em would have prevented her receiving any Assistance, if two Gentlemen, that were passing by, had not had Presence enough of Mind to draw their Swords in her Defence, just as he had so far compass'd his Intent, as to be getting into the Coach himself, after having thrust her into it. He wanted not Courage to engage with them both; but a Crowd of People immediately coming about them, put a Stop to any Mischief either to him or them. Had such a Piece of Villany been attempted by a meaner [Page 111] Man, he certainly had been secur'd; but his Quality made every Body unwilling to create to themselves so powerful an Enemy; and he had the Liberty of retreating, venting ten thousand Curses on his ill Fortune and

⁴⁸ *Hackney-Coach*: coach available for hire to anyone, the equivalent of today's taxi cabs.

the Gentlemen who had frustrated his Design; while Miranda, tho' half dead with the Fright, was safely conducted home by her Deliverers. Such an Attempt on a Lady so much distinguish'd as Miranda, and made by such a Person, must certainly occasion a great deal of Discourse in the World; and her Brother, who is a Colonel, would have been suspected to have but little Regard to the Honour of his Family, if he had not resented it in the Manner he did. The next Day he sent a Challenge to the intended Ravisher; which being answered, as he expected it would, they met in that Field behind Mountague-House,⁴⁹ so famous for Duels: But, in spite of the Justness of his Cause, the Brother had the worst of it; and the other leaving him wounded, and, as he thought, dead, made his Escape; nor durst appear in Town, till he heard, contrary to every Body's Expectation, that his Antagonist was out of Danger; and that Night which shew'd him to me at the Play-House, was the first of his being seen since the Time he fought.

Belinda had no sooner finish'd this little History, than she observ'd an excessive Paleness in the Face of the Recluse; and before she could have Time to ask if she were ill, saw her fall fainting on the Couch: But there no Occasion to call in any Body to her Assistance, her Spirits were not above a Moment absent; and, at their Return, O Madam! said she, (looking on Belinda with Eyes streaming with Tears,) how strangely has Fortune brought together two Wretches, fit only for the Society of each other? We are, indeed, too nearly ally'd in our Misfortunes, and to one fatal Source owe both our Woes! I might from the very Beginning of your Story have imagin'd it,--- might have known that such prodigious Charms, and such prodigious Villany, were no where blended [Page 112] but in my perfidious, but still dear Lysander! ---Your Courtal,----my Lysander are the same; and both are found only in the Person of the too-lovely faithless Bellamy. The Surprise that Belinda was in at these Words, took from her for some Time the Power of answering; nor could she for a long while bring out any more than---Good God! is it possible? --- Tho' lost to all the World, resum'd the Recluse, and wholly regardless of every Thing that pass'd, this last Action of the inconstant Bellamy, in spite of me, reach'd my Ear: And I suppose it was in the Time of his absconding that he went to Warwick, and took on him that borrow'd Name of Courtal, to prevent his being apprehended, if any Account of what he had done should be brought down. Yes, said Belinda, (now a little recover'd from her Amazement,) that was certainly the Motive which induc'd him both to take that Journey, and to disguise his true Quality; for, by the Account which the Lady gave me, I found it was not many Days after the Accident, that we had the ill Fortune to be overtaken by him on the Road.

These fair Companions in Affliction pass'd some Time in bewailing their several Misfortunes, sometimes exclaiming against the Vices, sometimes praising the Beauties of their common Betrayer, till the Recluse, being desirous to know if there was any Thing more to be heard of her Lysander, entreated Belinda to finish the remaining Part of her Story. Alas, Madam, reply'd that dejected Lady, I have nothing farther to relate, unless I confess I am weak enough to retain still in my Soul a secret Tenderness for this unworthy Man; and that not the Knowledge of his unexampled Perfidy and Inhumanity to you, his base Design on Miranda, nor the Miseries he has brought on myself, can bring me to consider him as I ought. Tho' I resolve never to see him more, I neither can forget nor remember him as a Woman govern'd by Reason would do. Has he

⁴⁹ *Montague-House*: lavish home of the Duke of Montagu, which became the site of the British Museum on Great Russell Street. At this time, it adjoined Lamb's Conduit Fields.

then not seen you since you came to Town? (interrupted the [Page 113] Recluse somewhat hastily.) No, on my Honour, he (answered the other,) he knows not of my being here, nor, I dare swear, thinks my Presence worth a Wish; but was I sure he did, nay, was I convinc'd that, tho' false to my Sex beside, to me he would be true, nay, did his Life depend on my granting him one Interview, I protest, by all that I adore, I never would consent, No, Madam, (continu'd she, with the most resolute Air,) I owe much more than such a Self-denial to the Memory of poor Worthy,--- to the Friendship I have already conceiv'd for you,--- and to the Justice of revenging, as far as in my Power, the little Regard he has hitherto paid our Sex. The Recluse seem'd perfectly pleas'd with this Assurance, and omitted nothing to strengthen her in this Resolution.

There grew so entire a Friendship between these Ladies, that they were scarce a Moment asunder: Belinda quitted her Chamber, being desir'd by the Recluse to take Part of her Bed. Their common Misfortunes were a Theme not to be exhausted, and they still found something for which to condole each other. In this melancholy Entertainment did they pass some Days, till Belinda receiv'd Letters from the Country, which brought an Account that Worthy's Wounds, having been search'd by an able Surgeon, were found not mortal; that his greatest Danger had been Loss of Blood; that he was now perfectly recover'd, and with new Life had entertain'd new Wishes: Belinda's Sister had express'd so tender a Concern for his Misfortunes, and so high an Esteem for his Virtues, that he found it no Difficulty to transmit to her all the Affection he had bore her Sister. The Wedding-Day was appointed; and soon after Belinda receiv'd an Account that it was solemnized, to the general Satisfaction of all Friends on both Sides, and the lasting Happiness of the married Pair. Tho' Belinda was far from envying her Sister that good Fortune, which she was incapable of possessing herself, yet the Cause which render'd her [Page 114] so, made her unwilling to behold it; and, in a short Time, both their Resolutions of abandoning the World continuing, the Recluse and she took a House about seventy Miles distant from London, where they still live in a perfect Tranquility, happy in the real Friendship of each other, despising the uncertain Pleasures, and free from all the Hurries and Disquiets which attend the Gaieties of the Town: And where a solitary Life is the Effect of Choice, it certainly yields more solid Comfort than all the publick Diversions which those who are the greatest Pursuers of them can find.