



# CLARISSA

Or

The History of a Young Lady

# PLOT



- Robert Lovelace courts Clarissa's sister, Arabella, and he is rejected.
- Lovelace starts to be attracted to Clarissa.
- Clarissa's siblings begrudge her because:
  1. Arabella is jealous of Lovelace's interest for her,
  2. She was left a piece of land by their grandfather.
- The family dislikes Lovelace because:
  1. He is a libertine.
  2. A duel with Clarissa's brother, James Harlowe.



# MR SOLMES



- It is proposed Clarissa to marry Mr Solmes.
- She objects because he is:
  1. Old
  2. Unpleasant
  3. Unrefined
- The family suspects she has feeling for Lovelace.
- They restrict Clarissa's social life and freedom, she can't:
  1. Leave her room.
  2. Correspond with her friend Anna Howe.
- As consequence of these restrictions she :
  1. Pretends to agree and marry Mr Solmes,
  2. Continues to communicate with Anne in secret,
  3. Begins a correspondence with Lovelace.



# PRUDENCE AND OBEDIENCE

- MISS CLARISSA HARLOWE, TO MISS HOWE [HER PRECEDING NOT AT THAT TIME RECEIVED.] FRIDAY, MARCH 3. (..)
- I had but just got into my own apartment, and began to think of sending Hannah to **beg** an audience of my mother (the more encouraged by her condescending goodness at breakfast) when Shorey, her woman, brought me her **commands** to attend me in her closet.
- My father, Hannah told me, was just gone out of it with a **positive angry** countenance. Then I as much **dreaded** the audience as I had wished for it before. I went down however; but, apprehending the subject she intended to talk to me upon, approached her **trembling**, and my heart in **visible palpitations**.
- She **saw** my **concern**. **Holding out** her kind arms, as she sat, “**Come, kiss me**, my dear”, said she, with a **smile** like a sun-beam breaking through the cloud that overshadowed her naturally benign aspect—”Why **flutters** my **jewel** so?”



- This **preparative sweetness**, with **her goodness** just before, confirmed my apprehensions. **My mother saw the bitter pill wanted gilding.**
- O my Mamma! was all I could say; and I clasped my arms round her neck, and my face sunk into her bosom. My child! my child! restrain, said she, your powers of moving! I dare not else trust myself with you.—And my tears trickled down her bosom, as hers bedewed my neck. (..)
- Lift up your sweet face, **my best** child, **my own** Clarissa Harlowe!—O **my** daughter, **best beloved** of **my heart**, lift up a face so ever **amiable** to me!—Why these sobs?—Is an **apprehended duty** so affecting a thing, that before I can speak—But I am glad, my love, you can guess at what I have to say to you. I am spared the pains of breaking to you what was a task upon me reluctantly enough undertaken to break to you.
- (...)You know, my dear, what I every day forego, and undergo, for the sake of peace. Your papa is a very good man, and means well; but **he will not be controuled; nor yet persuaded.** You have sometimes seemed to pity me, that I am obliged to give up every point. Poor man! his reputation the less for it; mine the greater.(...)You are a **dutiful**, a **prudent**, and a **wise** child, (..) so I hope, **you would not** add, I am sure, to my trouble: **you would not wilfully** break that peace which costs your mother so much to preserve. **Obedience is better than sacrifice.**

O **my Clary** Harlowe(...) **I see** your concern! **I see** your perplexity! **I see** your conflict! [loosing her arm, and rising, not willing I should see how much she herself was affected]. I will leave you a moment.—Answer me not—(.) I am not prepared for your irresistible expostulation, she was pleased to say.

I will leave you to recollection: and I **charge** you, on my blessing, that all this **my truly maternal tenderness** be **not thrown away upon you**. And then she withdrew into the next apartment; wiping her eyes as she went from me; as mine overflowed; my heart taking in the whole compass of her meaning. She soon returned, having recovered more steadiness.

Still on my knees, I had thrown my face across the chair she had sat in. Look up to me, my Clary Harlowe—No sullenness, I hope! No, indeed, my ever-to-be-revered Mamma.—And I arose. **I bent** my knee. **She raised** me. **No kneeling to me, but with knees of duty and compliance. Your heart, not your knees, must bend. It is absolutely determined.** Prepare yourself therefore **to receive your father**, when he visits you by-and-by, as he would wish to receive you. But on this one quarter of an hour depends **the peace of my future life**, the satisfaction of all the family, and your own security from a man of violence: and **I charge you** besides, **on my blessing, that you think of being Mrs. Solmes.**

There went the **dagger** to my heart, and **down I sunk**: and when I recovered, found myself in the arms of my Hannah, my sister's Betty holding open my reluctantly-opened palm, my laces cut, my linen scented with hartshorn; and my mother **gone** (...)

## HOW THE STORY CONTINUES

- Lovelace convinces Clarissa to elope (with a trick)
- She becomes his prisoner for many months.
- Clarissa tries to find a reconciliation with her family.
- He is in love with her, but he hates the idea of marriage, so his goal is to force her into “cohabitation,” rather than marriage.
- Kept in many lodges, even a brothel, where the prostitutes are disguised as high class ladies by Lovelace.
- Having been involved with (and ruined by) Lovelace in the past, these women are jealous of Clarissa and encourage Lovelace to rape her



- Lovelace repeatedly tests Clarissa's virtue as a means of testing the character of the entire sex.
- Clarissa's virtue has a powerful effect on Lovelace and sometimes sways him away from his bad intentions.
- Clarissa escapes, but Lovelace finds her and tricks her back to Mrs. Sinclair's brothel.
- Mrs. Sinclair drugs Clarissa and Lovelace rapes her while she is unconscious.
- When she awakes, Clarissa goes temporarily mad.
- Lovelace regrets his action.
- The rape has failed to put Clarissa fully in his power because she has never compromised her virtue.
- L. plans to marry her, but he is determined to rape her again, if she refuses her consent.
- Clarissa manages to escape.



- Once Clarissa has been raped, she stops eating.
- She continues to seek reconciliation with her family, but in vain.
- Lovelace accidentally discovers Clarissa's location.
- Lovelace's friend Belford becomes Clarissa's protector and keeps Lovelace away.
- Lovelace is now truly determined to marry Clarissa.
- She prefers the idea of death to that of marrying such a rascal.
- Her health steadily worsens, and she begins to prepare for death.
- Clarissa makes her will, appoints Belford her executor.
- She dies , expressing forgiveness for everybody.



# NOT OVER YET

- The Harlowes finally see the wrong of their treatment of Clarissa and die soon after.
- James and Arabella marry badly and are miserable for the rest of their lives.
- Lovelace fails to reform and is killed by Clarissa's cousin.
- All the good characters are rewarded with happy marriages.
- Belford collects Clarissa's letters in order to make her story known and prevent other women from committing similar sins.

*The end*



# THE PREFACE

- Richardson lays out the format of the novel: it will consist of letters, mostly between two virtuous young ladies and two rakish young men.
- The author assures the reader that the men's letters, although wicked, are decent and not wholly immoral.
- The events are presumed to be instructive to young readers.
- He hopes the book will act as a warning to both parents and children.
- Parents are advised not to try to force their children into marriage.
- Daughters are warned against preferring attractive libertines to honest, serious men,



# THE IMMORAL RAKE AND THE INNOCENT HEROINE

- Against the precept that “a reformed rake makes the best husband.”
- This misconception leads young women to prefer libertines to sober, respectable men.
- Clarissa thinks she could reform Lovelace, but this will lead her into disaster.
- The autocratic measures of Clarissa’s parents put Lovelace in her way.
- Parents need to shepherd their daughters away from danger.



## WOMEN AND INDEPENDENCE

- Clarissa tries to achieve her autonomy in a society that prohibits women from wielding any power whatsoever.
- Clarissa's inheritance would provide her with an opportunity for independence .
- Clarissa cares more about her family's acceptance than about the property.
- If she had accepted the estate, Clarissa would have achieved independence from her family.
- Her loyalty to them and to social mores prevents her from doing so.



# ENCLOSURE

- Clarissa's movements are increasingly limited by her family:
  1. she cannot write letters or go to church,
  2. she is confined to her room, with a maid guarding her.
- Her will escape from this confinement to end up controlled and confined by Lovelace.
- Her enclosure is her only real freedom possible.
- Clarissa finally escapes after her rape, but enclosure continues to follow her until the end.
- As she nears death, Clarissa stops taking carriages, then she stops walking, then she does not leave her room, then she is confined to a chair—and, finally, to her coffin.
- In the book's conclusion, it becomes clear that Clarissa can only escape confinement in death.
- The enclosure of Clarissa's body into her coffin paradoxically reflects the freeing of her soul.

