

Wollstonecraft Mary

**The Love Letters of Mary
Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay**



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to Gilbert Imlay

LETTER I

Two o'Clock [Paris, June 1793].

My dear love, after making my arrangements for our snug dinner to-day, I have been taken by storm, and obliged to promise to dine, at an early hour, with the Miss – s, the *only* day they intend to pass here. I shall however leave the key in the door, and hope to find you at my fire-side when I return, about eight o'clock. Will you not wait for poor Joan? – whom you will find better, and till then think very affectionately of her.

Yours, truly,

MARY.

I am sitting down to dinner; so do not send an answer.

LETTER II

Past Twelve o'Clock, Monday Night

[Paris, Aug. 1793].

I obey an emotion of my heart, which made me think of wishing thee, my love, good-night! before I go to rest, with more tenderness than I can to-morrow, when writing a hasty line or two under Colonel – 's eye. You can scarcely imagine with what pleasure I anticipate the day, when we are to begin almost to live together; and you would smile to hear how many plans of employment I have in my head, now that I am confident my heart has found peace in your bosom. – Cherish me with that dignified tenderness, which I have only found in you; and your own dear girl will try to keep under a quickness of feeling, that has sometimes given you pain. – Yes, I will be *good*, that I may deserve to be happy; and whilst you love me, I cannot again fall into the miserable state, which rendered life a burthen almost too heavy to be borne.

But, good-night! – God bless you! Sterne says, that is equal to a kiss – yet I would rather give you the kiss into the bargain, glowing with gratitude to Heaven, and affection to you. I like the word affection, because it signifies something habitual; and we are soon to meet, to try whether we have mind enough to keep our hearts warm.

MARY.

I will be at the barrier a little after ten o'clock to-morrow.¹— Yours —

¹ The child is in a subsequent letter called the “barrier girl,” probably from a supposition that she owed her existence to this interview. — W. G.

LETTER III

Wednesday Morning [Paris, Aug. 1793].

You have often called me, dear girl, but you would now say good, did you know how very attentive I have been to the – ever since I came to Paris. I am not however going to trouble you with the account, because I like to see your eyes praise me; and Milton insinuates, that, during such recitals, there are interruptions, not ungrateful to the heart, when the honey that drops from the lips is not merely words.

Yet, I shall not (let me tell you before these people enter, to force me to huddle away my letter) be content with only a kiss of DUTY – you *must* be glad to see me – because you are glad – or I will make love to the *shade* of Mirabeau, to whom my heart continually turned, whilst I was talking with Madame – , forcibly telling me, that it will ever have sufficient warmth to love, whether I will or not, sentiment, though I so highly respect principle. —

Not that I think Mirabeau utterly devoid of principles – Far from it – and, if I had not begun to form a new theory respecting men, I should, in the vanity of my heart, have *imagined* that I could have made something of his – it was composed of such materials – Hush! here they come – and love flies away in the twinkling of an eye, leaving a little brush of his wing on my pale

cheeks.

I hope to see Dr. – this morning; I am going to Mr. – 's to meet him. –, and some others, are invited to dine with us to-day; and to-morrow I am to spend the day with – .

I shall probably not be able to return to – to-morrow; but it is no matter, because I must take a carriage, I have so many books, that I immediately want, to take with me. – On Friday then I shall expect you to dine with me – and, if you come a little before dinner, it is so long since I have seen you, you will not be scolded by yours affectionately,

MARY.

LETTER IV²

Friday Morning [Paris, Sept. 1793].

A man, whom a letter from Mr. – previously announced, called here yesterday for the payment of a draft; and, as he seemed disappointed at not finding you at home, I sent him to Mr. – . I have since seen him, and he tells me that he has settled the business.

So much for business! – May I venture to talk a little longer about less weighty affairs? – How are you? – I have been following you all along the road this comfortless weather; for, when I am absent from those I love, my imagination is as lively, as if my senses had never been gratified by their presence – I was going to say caresses – and why should I not? I have found out that I have more mind than you, in one respect; because I can, without any violent effort of reason, find food for love in the same object, much longer than you can. – The way to my senses is through my heart; but, forgive me! I think there is sometimes a shorter cut to yours.

With ninety-nine men out of a hundred, a very sufficient dash of folly is necessary to render a woman *piquante*, a soft word for desirable; and, beyond these casual ebullitions of sympathy,

² This and the thirteen following letters appear to have been written during a separation of several months; the date, Paris. – W. G.

few look for enjoyment by fostering a passion in their hearts. One reason, in short, why I wish my whole sex to become wiser, is, that the foolish ones may not, by their pretty folly, rob those whose sensibility keeps down their vanity, of the few roses that afford them some solace in the thorny road of life.

I do not know how I fell into these reflections, excepting one thought produced it – that these continual separations were necessary to warm your affection. – Of late, we are always separating. – Crack! – crack! – and away you go. – This joke wears the sallow cast of thought; for, though I began to write cheerfully, some melancholy tears have found their way into my eyes, that linger there, whilst a glow of tenderness at my heart whispers that you are one of the best creatures in the world. – Pardon then the vagaries of a mind, that has been almost “crazed by care,” as well as “crossed in hapless love,” and bear with me a *little* longer! – When we are settled in the country together, more duties will open before me, and my heart, which now, trembling into peace, is agitated by every emotion that awakens the remembrance of old griefs, will learn to rest on yours, with that dignity your character, not to talk of my own, demands.

Take care of yourself – and write soon to your own girl (you may add dear, if you please) who sincerely loves you, and will try to convince you of it, by becoming happier.

MARY.

LETTER V

Sunday Night [Paris, 1793].

I have just received your letter, and feel as if I could not go to bed tranquilly without saying a few words in reply – merely to tell you, that my mind is serene and my heart affectionate.

Ever since you last saw me inclined to faint, I have felt some gentle twitches, which make me begin to think, that I am nourishing a creature who will soon be sensible of my care. – This thought has not only produced an overflowing of tenderness to you, but made me very attentive to calm my mind and take exercise, lest I should destroy an object, in whom we are to have a mutual interest, you know. Yesterday – do not smile! – finding that I had hurt myself by lifting precipitately a large log of wood, I sat down in an agony, till I felt those said twitches again.

Are you very busy?

So you may reckon on its being finished soon, though not before you come home, unless you are detained longer than I now allow myself to believe you will. —

Be that as it may, write to me, my best love, and bid me be patient – kindly – and the expressions of kindness will again

beguile the time, as sweetly as they have done to-night. – Tell me also over and over again, that your happiness (and you deserve to be happy!) is closely connected with mine, and I will try to dissipate, as they rise, the fumes of former discontent, that have too often clouded the sunshine, which you have endeavoured to diffuse through my mind. God bless you! Take care of yourself, and remember with tenderness your affectionate

MARY.

I am going to rest very happy, and you have made me so. – This is the kindest good-night I can utter.

LETTER VI

Friday Morning [Paris, Dec. 1793].

I am glad to find that other people can be unreasonable, as well as myself – for be it known to thee, that I answered thy *first* letter, the very night it reached me (Sunday), though thou couldst not receive it before Wednesday, because it was not sent off till the next day. – There is a full, true, and particular account. —

Yet I am not angry with thee, my love, for I think that it is a proof of stupidity, and likewise of a milk-and-water affection, which comes to the same thing, when the temper is governed by a square and compass. – There is nothing picturesque in this straight-lined equality, and the passions always give grace to the actions.

Recollection now makes my heart bound to thee; but, it is not to thy money-getting face, though I cannot be seriously displeased with the exertion which increases my esteem, or rather is what I should have expected from thy character. – No; I have thy honest countenance before me – Pop – relaxed by tenderness; a little – little wounded by my whims; and thy eyes glistening with sympathy. – Thy lips then feel softer than soft – and I rest my cheek on thine, forgetting all the world. – I have not left the hue of love out of the picture – the rosy glow; and fancy has spread it over my own cheeks, I believe, for I feel them burning, whilst

a delicious tear trembles in my eye, that would be all your own, if a grateful emotion directed to the Father of nature, who has made me thus alive to happiness, did not give more warmth to the sentiment it divides – I must pause a moment.

Need I tell you that I am tranquil after writing thus? – I do not know why, but I have more confidence in your affection, when absent, than present; nay, I think that you must love me, for, in the sincerity of my heart let me say it, I believe I deserve your tenderness, because I am true, and have a degree of sensibility that you can see and relish.

Yours sincerely,

MARY.

LETTER VII

Sunday Morning [Paris, Dec. 29, 1793].

You seem to have taken up your abode at Havre. Pray sir! when do you think of coming home? or, to write very considerably, when will business permit you? I shall expect (as the country people say in England) that you will make a *power* of money to indemnify me for your absence.

Well! but, my love, to the old story – am I to see you this week, or this month? – I do not know what you are about – for, as you did not tell me, I would not ask Mr. – , who is generally pretty communicative.

I long to see Mrs. – ; not to hear from you, so do not give yourself airs, but to get a letter from Mr. – . And I am half angry with you for not informing me whether she had brought one with her or not. – On this score I will cork up some of the kind things that were ready to drop from my pen, which has never been dipt in gall when addressing you; or, will only suffer an exclamation – “The creature!” or a kind look to escape me, when I pass the slippers – which I could not remove from my *falle* door, though they are not the handsomest of their kind.

Be not too anxious to get money! – for nothing worth having is to be purchased. God bless you.

Yours affectionately,

MARY.

LETTER VIII

Monday Night [Paris, Dec. 30, 1793].

My best love, your letter to-night was particularly grateful to my heart, depressed by the letters I received by – , for he brought me several, and the parcel of books directed to Mr. – was for me. Mr. – 's letter was long and very affectionate; but the account he gives me of his own affairs, though he obviously makes the best of them, has vexed me.

A melancholy letter from my sister – has also harrassed my mind – that from my brother would have given me sincere pleasure; but for

There is a spirit of independence in his letter, that will please you; and you shall see it, when we are once more over the fire together. – I think that you would hail him as a brother, with one of your tender looks, when your heart not only gives a lustre to your eye, but a dance of playfulness, that he would meet with a glow half made up of bashfulness, and a desire to please the – where shall I find a word to express the relationship which subsists between us? – Shall I ask the little twitcher? – But I have dropt half the sentence that was to tell you how much he would be

inclined to love the man loved by his sister. I have been fancying myself sitting between you, ever since I began to write, and my heart has leaped at the thought! You see how I chat to you.

I did not receive your letter till I came home; and I did not expect it, for the post came in much later than usual. It was a cordial to me – and I wanted one.

Mr. – tells me that he has written again and again. – Love him a little! – It would be a kind of separation, if you did not love those I love.

There was so much considerate tenderness in your epistle to-night, that, if it has not made you dearer to me, it has made me forcibly feel how very dear you are to me, by charming away half my cares.

Yours affectionately.

MARY.

LETTER IX

Tuesday Morning [Paris, Dec. 31, 1793].

Though I have just sent a letter off, yet, as captain – offers to take one, I am not willing to let him go without a kind greeting, because trifles of this sort, without having any effect on my mind, damp my spirits: – and you, with all your struggles to be manly, have some of his same sensibility. – Do not bid it begone, for I love to see it striving to master your features; besides, these kind of sympathies are the life of affection: and why, in cultivating our understandings, should we try to dry up these springs of pleasure, which gush out to give a freshness to days browned by care!

The books sent to me are such as we may read together; so I shall not look into them till you return; when you shall read, whilst I mend my stockings.

Yours truly,

MARY.

LETTER X

Wednesday Night [Paris, Jan. 1, 1794].

As I have been, you tell me, three days without writing, I ought not to complain of two: yet, as I expected to receive a letter this afternoon, I am hurt; and why should I, by concealing it, affect the heroism I do not feel?

I hate commerce. How differently must – 's head and heart be organized from mine! You will tell me, that exertions are necessary: I am weary of them! The face of things, public and private, vexes me. The “peace” and clemency which seemed to be dawning a few days ago, disappear again. “I am fallen,” as Milton said, “on evil days;” for I really believe that Europe will be in a state of convulsion, during half a century at least. Life is but a labour of patience: it is always rolling a great stone up a hill; for, before a person can find a resting-place, imagining it is lodged, down it comes again, and all the work is to be done over anew!

Should I attempt to write any more, I could not change the strain. My head aches, and my heart is heavy. The world appears an “unweeded garden,” where “things rank and vile” flourish best.

If you do not return soon – or, which is no such mighty matter, talk of it – I will throw your slippers out at window, and be off

– nobody knows where.

MARY.

Finding that I was observed, I told the good women, the two Mrs. – s, simply that I was with child: and let them stare! and – , and – , nay, all the world, may know it for aught I care! – Yet I wish to avoid – 's coarse jokes.

Considering the care and anxiety a woman must have about a child before it comes into the world, it seems to me, by a *natural right*, to belong to her. When men get immersed in the world, they seem to lose all sensations, excepting those necessary to continue or produce life! – Are these the privileges of reason? Amongst the feathered race, whilst the hen keeps the young warm, her mate stays by to cheer her; but it is sufficient for man to condescend to get a child, in order to claim it. – A man is a tyrant!

You may now tell me, that, if it were not for me, you would be laughing away with some honest fellows in London. The casual exercise of social sympathy would not be sufficient for me – I should not think such an heartless life worth preserving. – It is necessary to be in good-humour with you, to be pleased with the world.

Thursday Morning [Paris, Jan. 2, 1794].

I was very low-spirited last night, ready to quarrel with your cheerful temper, which makes absence easy to you. – And, why should I mince the matter? I was offended at your not even

mentioning it – I do not want to be loved like a goddess but I wish to be necessary to you. God bless you!³

³ Some further letters, written during the remainder of the week, in a similar strain to the preceding, appear to have been destroyed by the person to whom they were addressed. – W. G.

LETTER XI

Monday Night [Paris, Jan. 1794].

I have just received your kind and rational letter, and would fain hide my face, glowing with shame for my folly. – I would hide it in your bosom, if you would again open it to me, and nestle closely till you bade my fluttering heart be still, by saying that you forgave me. With eyes overflowing with tears, and in the humblest attitude, I entreat you. – Do not turn from me, for indeed I love you fondly, and have been very wretched, since the night I was so cruelly hurt by thinking that you had no confidence in me —

It is time for me to grow more reasonable, a few more of these caprices of sensibility would destroy me. I have, in fact, been very much indisposed for a few days past, and the notion that I was tormenting, or perhaps killing, a poor little animal, about whom I am grown anxious and tender, now I feel it alive, made me worse. My bowels have been dreadfully disordered, and every thing I ate or drank disagreed with my stomach; still I feel intimations of its existence, though they have been fainter.

Do you think that the creature goes regularly to sleep? I am ready to ask as many questions as Voltaire's Man of Forty Crowns. Ah! do not continue to be angry with me! You perceive that I am already smiling through my tears – You have lightened

my heart, and my frozen spirits are melting into playfulness.

Write the moment you receive this. I shall count the minutes. But drop not an angry word – I cannot now bear it. Yet, if you think I deserve a scolding (it does not admit of a question, I grant), wait till you come back – and then, if you are angry one day, I shall be sure of seeing you the next.

– did not write to you, I suppose, because he talked of going to Havre. Hearing that I was ill, he called very kindly on me, not dreaming that it was some words that he incautiously let fall, which rendered me so.

God bless you, my love; do not shut your heart against a return of tenderness; and, as I now in fancy cling to you, be more than ever my support. – Feel but as affectionate when you read this letter, as I did writing it, and you will make happy your

MARY.

LETTER XII

Wednesday Morning [Paris, Jan. 1794].

I will never, if I am not entirely cured of quarrelling, begin to encourage “quick-coming fancies,” when we are separated. Yesterday, my love, I could not open your letter for some time; and, though it was not half as severe as I merited, it threw me into such a fit of trembling, as seriously alarmed me. I did not, as you may suppose, care for a little pain on my own account; but all the fears which I have had for a few days past, returned with fresh force. This morning I am better; will you not be glad to hear it? You perceive that sorrow has almost made a child of me, and that I want to be soothed to peace.

One thing you mistake in my character, and imagine that to be coldness which is just the contrary. For, when I am hurt by the person most dear to me, I must let out a whole torrent of emotions, in which tenderness would be uppermost, or stifle them altogether; and it appears to me almost a duty to stifle them, when I imagine *that I am treated with coldness*.

I am afraid that I have vexed you, my own [Imlay]. I know the quickness of your feelings – and let me, in the sincerity of my heart, assure you, there is nothing I would not suffer to make you happy. My own happiness wholly depends on you – and, knowing you, when my reason is not clouded, I look forward to a rational

prospect of as much felicity as the earth affords – with a little dash of rapture into the bargain, if you will look at me, when we work again, as you have sometimes greeted, your humbled, yet most affectionate

MARY.

LETTER XIII

Thursday Night [Paris, Jan. 1794].

I have been wishing the time away, my kind love, unable to rest till I knew that my penitential letter had reached your hand – and this afternoon, when your tender epistle of Tuesday gave such exquisite pleasure to your poor sick girl, her heart smote her to think that you were still to receive another cold one. – Burn it also, my [Imlay]; yet do not forget that even those letters were full of love; and I shall ever recollect, that you did not wait to be mollified by my penitence, before you took me again to your heart.

I have been unwell, and would not, now I am recovering, take a journey, because I have been seriously alarmed and angry with myself, dreading continually the fatal consequence of my folly. – But, should you think it right to remain at Havre, I shall find some opportunity, in the course of a fortnight, or less perhaps, to come to you, and before then I shall be strong again. – Yet do not be uneasy! I am really better, and never took such care of myself, as I have done since you restored my peace of mind. The girl is come to warm my bed – so I will tenderly say, good-night! and write a line or two in the morning.

Morning.

I wish you were here to walk with me this fine morning! yet

your absence shall not prevent me. I have stayed at home too much; though, when I was so dreadfully out of spirits, I was careless of every thing.

I will now sally forth (you will go with me in my heart) and try whether this fine bracing air will not give the vigour to the poor babe, it had, before I so inconsiderately gave way to the grief that deranged my bowels, and gave a turn to my whole system.

Yours truly

MARY IMLAY.

LETTER XIV

Saturday Morning [Paris, Feb. 1794].

The two or three letters, which I have written to you lately, my love, will serve as an answer to your explanatory one. I cannot but respect your motives and conduct. I always respected them; and was only hurt, by what seemed to me a want of confidence, and consequently affection. – I thought also, that if you were obliged to stay three months at Havre, I might as well have been with you. – Well! well, what signifies what I brooded over – Let us now be friends!

I shall probably receive a letter from you to-day, sealing my pardon – and I will be careful not to torment you with my querulous humours, at least, till I see you again. Act as circumstances direct, and I will not enquire when they will permit you to return, convinced that you will hasten to your MARY, when you have attained (or lost sight of) the object of your journey.

What a picture have you sketched of our fire-side! Yes, my love, my fancy was instantly at work, and I found my head on your shoulder, whilst my eyes were fixed on the little creatures that were clinging about your knees. I did not absolutely determine that there should be six – if you have not set your heart on this round number.

I am going to dine with Mrs. — . I have not been to visit her since the first day she came to Paris. I wish indeed to be out in the air as much as I can; for the exercise I have taken these two or three days past, has been of such service to me, that I hope shortly to tell you, that I am quite well. I have scarcely slept before last night, and then not much. — The two Mrs. — s have been very anxious and tender.

Yours truly

MARY.

I need not desire you to give the colonel a good bottle of wine.

LETTER XV

Sunday Morning [Paris, Feb. 1794].

I wrote to you yesterday, my [Imlay]; but, finding that the colonel is still detained (for his passport was forgotten at the office yesterday) I am not willing to let so many days elapse without your hearing from me, after having talked of illness and apprehensions.

I cannot boast of being quite recovered, yet I am (I must use my Yorkshire phrase; for, when my heart is warm, pop come the expressions of childhood into my head) so *lightsome*, that I think it will not *go badly with me*. – And nothing shall be wanting on my part, I assure you; for I am urged on, not only by an enlivened affection for you, but by a new-born tenderness that plays cheerly round my dilating heart.

I was therefore, in defiance of cold and dirt, out in the air the greater part of yesterday; and, if I get over this evening without a return of the fever that has tormented me, I shall talk no more of illness. I have promised the little creature, that its mother, who ought to cherish it, will not again plague it, and begged it to pardon me; and, since I could not hug either it or you to my breast, I have to my heart. – I am afraid to read over this prattle – but it is only for your eye.

I have been seriously vexed, to find that, whilst you were

harrassed by impediments in your undertakings, I was giving you additional uneasiness. – If you can make any of your plans answer – it is well, I do not think a *little* money inconvenient; but, should they fail, we will struggle cheerfully together – drawn closer by the pinching blasts of poverty.

Adieu, my love! Write often to your poor girl, and write long letters; for I not only like them for being longer, but because more heart steals into them; and I am happy to catch your heart whenever I can.

Yours sincerely

MARY.

LETTER XVI

Tuesday Morning [Paris, Feb. 1794].

I seize this opportunity to inform you, that I am to set out on Thursday with Mr. —, and hope to tell you soon (on your lips) how glad I shall be to see you. I have just got my passport, for I do not foresee any impediment to my reaching Havre, to bid you good-night next Friday in my new apartment — where I am to meet you and love, in spite of care, to smile me to sleep — for I have not caught much rest since we parted.

You have, by your tenderness and worth, twisted yourself more artfully round my heart, than I supposed possible. — Let me indulge the thought, that I have thrown out some tendrils to cling to the elm by which I wish to be supported. — This is talking a new language for me! — But, knowing that I am not a parasite-plant, I am willing to receive the proofs of affection, that every pulse replies to, when I think of being once more in the same house with you. God bless you!

Yours truly

MARY.

LETTER XVII

Wednesday Morning [Paris, Feb. 1794].

I only send this as an *avant-coureur*, without jack-boots, to tell you, that I am again on the wing, and hope to be with you a few hours after you receive it. I shall find you well, and composed, I am sure; or, more properly speaking, cheerful. – What is the reason that my spirits are not as manageable as yours? Yet, now I think of it, I will not allow that your temper is even, though I have promised myself, in order to obtain my own forgiveness, that I will not ruffle it for a long, long time – I am afraid to say never.

Farewell for a moment! – Do not forget that I am driving towards you in person! My mind, unfettered, has flown to you long since, or rather has never left you.

I am well, and have no apprehension that I shall find the journey too fatiguing, when I follow the lead of my heart. – With my face turned to Havre my spirits will not sink – and my mind has always hitherto enabled my body to do whatever I wished.

Yours affectionately,

MARY.

LETTER XVIII

Thursday Morning, Havre, March 12 [1794].

We are such creatures of habit, my love, that, though I cannot say I was sorry, childishly so, for your going,⁴ when I knew that you were to stay such a short time, and I had a plan of employment; yet I could not sleep. – I turned to your side of the bed, and tried to make the most of the comfort of the pillow, which you used to tell me I was churlish about; but all would not do. – I took nevertheless my walk before breakfast, though the weather was not very inviting – and here I am, wishing you a finer day, and seeing you peep over my shoulder, as I write, with one of your kindest looks – when your eyes glisten, and a suffusion creeps over your relaxing features.

But I do not mean to dally with you this morning – So God bless you! Take care of yourself – and sometimes fold to your heart your affectionate

MARY.

⁴ Imlay went to Paris on March 11, after spending a fortnight at Havre, but he returned to MARY soon after the date of Letter XIX. In August he went to Paris, where he was followed by MARY. In September Imlay visited London on business.

LETTER XIX

[Havre, March, 1794].

Do not call me stupid, for leaving on the table the little bit of paper I was to inclose. – This comes of being in love at the fag-end of a letter of business. – You know, you say, they will not chime together. – I had got you by the fire-side, with the *gigot* smoking on the board, to lard your poor bare ribs – and behold, I closed my letter without taking the paper up, that was directly under my eyes! What had I got in them to render me so blind? – I give you leave to answer the question, if you will not scold; for I am,

Yours most affectionately,

MARY.

LETTER XX

[Havre] Sunday, August 17 [1794].

I have promised – to go with him to his country-house, where he is now permitted to dine – I, and the little darling, to be sure⁵– whom I cannot help kissing with more fondness, since you left us. I think I shall enjoy the fine prospect, and that it will rather enliven, than satiate my imagination.

I have called on Mrs. – . She has the manners of a gentlewoman, with a dash of the easy French coquetry, which renders her *piquante*. – But *Monsieur* her husband, whom nature never dreamed of casting in either the mould of a gentleman or lover, makes but an awkward figure in the foreground of the picture.

The H – s are very ugly, without doubt – and the house smelt of commerce from top to toe – so that his abortive attempt to display taste, only proved it to be one of the things not to be bought with gold. I was in a room a moment alone, and my attention was attracted by the *pendule*– A nymph was offering up her vows

⁵ The child spoken of in some preceding letters, had now been born a considerable time. She was born, May 14, 1794, and was named Fanny. – W. G.

before a smoking altar, to a fat-bottomed Cupid (saving your presence), who was kicking his heels in the air. – Ah! kick on, thought I; for the demon of traffic will ever fright away the loves and graces, that streak with the rosy beams of infant fancy the *sombre* day of life – whilst the imagination, not allowing us to see things as they are, enables us to catch a hasty draught of the running stream of delight, the thirst for which seems to be given only to tantalize us.

But I am philosophizing; nay, perhaps you will call me severe, and bid me let the square-headed money-getters alone. – Peace to them! though none of the social sprites (and there are not a few of different descriptions, who sport about the various inlets to my heart) gave me a twitch to restrain my pen.

I have been writing on, expecting poor – to come; for, when I began, I merely thought of business; and, as this is the idea that most naturally associates with your image, I wonder I stumbled on any other.

Yet, as common life, in my opinion, is scarcely worth having, even with a *gigot* every day, and a pudding added thereunto, I will allow you to cultivate my judgment, if you will permit me to keep alive the sentiments in your heart, which may be termed romantic, because, the offspring of the senses and the imagination, they resemble the mother more than the father,⁶ when they produce the suffusion I admire. – In spite of icy age, I hope still to see it, if you have not determined only to eat and

⁶ She means, “the latter more than the former.” – W. G.

drink, and be stupidly useful to the stupid —

Yours,

MARY.

LETTER XXI

Havre, August 19 [1794] Tuesday.

I received both your letters to-day – I had reckoned on hearing from you yesterday, therefore was disappointed, though I imputed your silence to the right cause. I intended answering your kind letter immediately, that you might have felt the pleasure it gave me; but – came in, and some other things interrupted me; so that the fine vapour has evaporated – yet, leaving a sweet scent behind, I have only to tell you, what is sufficiently obvious, that the earnest desire I have shown to keep my place, or gain more ground in your heart, is a sure proof how necessary your affection is to my happiness. – Still I do not think it false delicacy, or foolish pride, to wish that your attention to my happiness should arise *as much* from love, which is always rather a selfish passion, as reason – that is, I want you to promote my felicity, by seeking your own. – For, whatever pleasure it may give me to discover your generosity of soul, I would not be dependent for your affection on the very quality I most admire. No; there are qualities in your heart, which demand my affection; but, unless the attachment appears to me clearly mutual, I shall labour only to esteem your character, instead of cherishing a tenderness for your person.

I write in a hurry, because the little one, who has been sleeping

a long time, begins to call for me. Poor thing! when I am sad, I lament that all my affections grow on me, till they become too strong for my peace, though they all afford me snatches of exquisite enjoyment – This for our little girl was at first very reasonable – more the effect of reason, a sense of duty, than feeling – now, she has got into my heart and imagination, and when I walk out without her, her little figure is ever dancing before me.

You too have somehow clung round my heart – I found I could not eat my dinner in the great room – and, when I took up the large knife to carve for myself, tears rushed into my eyes. – Do not however suppose that I am melancholy – for, when you are from me, I not only wonder how I can find fault with you – but how I can doubt your affection.

I will not mix any comments on the inclosed (it roused my indignation) with the effusion of tenderness, with which I assure you, that you are the friend of my bosom, and the prop of my heart.

MARY.

LETTER XXII

Havre, August 20 [1794].

I want to know what steps you have taken respecting – . Knavery always rouses my indignation – I should be gratified to hear that the law had chastised – severely; but I do not wish you to see him, because the business does not now admit of peaceful discussion, and I do not exactly know how you would express your contempt.

Pray ask some questions about Tallien – I am still pleased with the dignity of his conduct. – The other day, in the cause of humanity, he made use of a degree of address, which I admire – and mean to point out to you, as one of the few instances of address which do credit to the abilities of the man, without taking away from that confidence in his openness of heart, which is the true basis of both public and private friendship.

Do not suppose that I mean to allude to a little reserve of temper in you, of which I have sometimes complained! You have been used to a cunning woman, and you almost look for cunning – Nay, in *managing* my happiness, you now and then wounded my sensibility, concealing yourself, till honest sympathy, giving you to me without disguise, lets me look into a heart, which my half-broken one wishes to creep into, to be revived and cherished. – You have frankness of heart, but not often exactly

that overflowing (*épanchement de cœur*), which becoming almost childish, appears a weakness only to the weak.

But I have left poor Tallien. I wanted you to enquire likewise whether, as a member declared in the convention, Robespierre really maintained a *number*

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