

The background of the book cover is a soft-focus photograph. In the foreground, a dark fountain pen lies horizontally across the middle. Below it, a piece of paper with cursive handwriting is visible, though the text is mostly illegible. In the upper left corner, a cluster of light purple and white flowers is in bloom. The overall tone is romantic and elegant.

**APHRA
BEHN**

***LOVE-LETTERS
BETWEEN
A NOBLEMAN
AND HIS
SISTER***

Aphra Behn

Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister

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LOVE-LETTERS

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PART I.

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To SYLVIA.

Though I parted from you resolved to obey your impossible commands, yet know, oh charming *Sylvia*! that after a thousand conflicts between love and honour, I found the god (too mighty for the idol) reign absolute monarch in my soul, and soon banished that tyrant thence. That cruel counsellor that would suggest to you a thousand fond arguments to hinder my noble pursuit; *Sylvia* came in view! her irresistible *Idea*! With all the charms of blooming youth, with all the attractions of heavenly beauty! Loose, wanton, gay, all flowing her bright hair, and languishing her lovely eyes, her dress all negligent as when I saw her last, discovering a thousand ravishing graces, round, white, small breasts, delicate neck, and rising bosom, heaved with sighs she would in vain conceal; and all besides, that nicest fancy can imagine surprising--Oh I dare not think on, lest my desires grow mad and raving; let it suffice, oh adorable *Sylvia*! I think and know enough to justify that flame in me, which our weak alliance of brother and sister has rendered so criminal; but he that adores *Sylvia*, should do it at an uncommon rate; 'tis not enough to sacrifice a single heart, to give you a simple passion, your beauty should, like itself, produce wondrous effects; it should force all obligations, all laws, all ties even of nature's self: you, my lovely maid, were not born to be obtained by the dull methods of ordinary

loving; and 'tis in vain to prescribe me measures; and oh much more in vain to urge the nearness of our relation. What kin, my charming *Sylvia*, are you to me? No ties of blood forbid my passion; and what's a ceremony imposed on man by custom? What is it to my divine *Sylvia*, that the priest took my hand and gave it to your sister? What alliance can that create? Why should a trick devised by the wary old, only to make provision for posterity, tie me to an eternal slavery? No, no, my charming maid, 'tis nonsense all; let us, (born for mightier joys) scorn the dull *beaten road*, but let us love like the first race of men, nearest allied to God, promiscuously they loved, and possessed, father and daughter, brother and sister met, and reaped the joys of love without control, and counted it religious coupling, and 'twas encouraged too by heaven itself: therefore start not (too nice and lovely maid) at shadows of things that can but frighten fools. Put me not off with these delays; rather say you but dissembled love all this while, than now 'tis born, to die again with a poor fright of nonsense. A fit of honour! a phantom imaginary, and no more; no, no, represent me to your soul more favourably, think you see me languishing at your feet, breathing out my last in sighs and kind reproaches, on the pitiless *Sylvia*; reflect when I am dead, which will be the more afflicting object, the ghost (as you are pleased to call it) of your murdered honour, or the pale and bleeding one of

The lost PHILANDER.

*I have lived a whole day,
and yet no letter from Sylvia.*

To PHILANDER.

OH why will you make me own (oh too importunate *Philander!*) with what regret I made you promise to prefer my honour before your love?

I confess with blushes, which you might then see kindling in my face, that I was not at all pleased with the vows you made me, to endeavour to obey me, and I then even wished you would obstinately have denied obedience to my just commands; have pursued your criminal flame, and have left me raving on my undoing: for when you were gone, and I had leisure to look into my heart, alas! I found, whether you obliged or not, whether love or honour were preferred, I, unhappy I, was either way inevitably lost. Oh! what pitiless god, fond of his wondrous power, made us the objects of his almighty vanity? Oh why were we two made the first precedents of his new found revenge? For sure no brother ever loved a sister with so criminal a flame before: at least my inexperienced innocence never met with so fatal a story: and it is in vain (my too charming brother) to make me insensible of our alliance; to persuade me I am a stranger to all but your eyes and soul.

Alas, your fatally kind industry is all in vain. You grew up a brother with me; the title was fixed in my heart, when I was too young to understand your subtle distinctions, and there it thrived and spread; and it is now too late to transplant it, or alter its native property: who can graft a flower on a contrary stalk? The rose will bear no tulips, nor the hyacinth the poppy, no more will the brother the name of lover. Oh! spoil not the natural sweetness and innocence we now retain, by an endeavour fruitless and destructive;

no, no, *Philander*, dress yourself in what charms you will, be powerful as love can make you in your soft argument--yet, oh yet, you are my brother still. ---- But why, oh cruel and eternal powers, was not *Philander* my lover before you destined him a brother? Or why, being a brother, did you, malicious and spiteful powers, destine him a lover? Oh, take either title from him, or from me a life, which can render me no satisfaction, since your cruel laws permit it not for *Philander*, nor his to bless the now

Unfortunate SYLVIA.

Wednesday morning.

To PHILANDER.

After I had dismissed my page this morning with my letter, I walked (filled with sad soft thoughts of my brother *Philander*) into the grove, and commanding *Melinda* to retire, who only attended me, I threw myself down on that bank of grass where we last disputed the dear, but fatal business of our souls: where our prints (that invited me) still remain on the pressed greens: there with ten thousand sighs, with remembrance of the tender minutes we passed then, I drew your last letter from my bosom, and often kissed, and often read it over; but oh! who can conceive my torment, when I came to that fatal part of it, where you say you gave your hand to my sister? I found my soul agitated with a thousand different passions, but all insupportable, all mad and raving; sometimes I threw myself with fury on the ground, and pressed my panting heart to the earth; then rise in rage, and tear my heart, and hardly spare that face that taught you first to love; then fold my wretched arms to

keep down rising sighs that almost rend my breast, I
traverse swiftly the conscious grove; with my distracted
show'ring eyes directed in vain to pitiless heaven, the lovely
silent shade favouring my complaints, I cry aloud, Oh God!
Philander's, married, the lovely charming thing for whom I
languish is married!--That fatal word's enough, I need not
add to whom. Married is enough to make me curse my birth,
my youth, my beauty, and my eyes that first betrayed me to
the undoing object: curse on the charms you have flattered,
for every fancied grace has helped my ruin on; now, like
flowers that wither unseen and unpossessed in shades, they
must die and be no more, they were to no end created,
since *Philander* is married: married! Oh fate, oh hell, oh
torture and confusion! Tell me not it is to my sister, that
addition is needless and vain: to make me eternally
wretched, there needs no more than that *Philander* is
married! Than that the priest gave your hand away from
me; to another, and not to me; tired out with life, I need no
other pass-port than this repetition, *Philander* is married!
'Tis that alone is sufficient to lay in her cold tomb

The wretched and despairing Wednesday night, Bellfont.
SYLVIA.

To SYLVIA.

Twice last night, oh unfaithful and unloving *Sylvia*! I sent
the page to the old place for letters, but he returned the
object of my rage, because without the least remembrance
from my fickle maid: in this torment, unable to hide my
disorder, I suffered myself to be laid in bed; where the
restless torments of the night exceeded those of the day,

and are not even by the languisher himself to be expressed; but the returning light brought a short slumber on its wings; which was interrupted by my atoning boy, who brought two letters from my adorable *Sylvia*: he waked me from dreams more agreeable than all my watchful hours could bring; for they are all tortured.----And even the softest mixed with a thousand despairs, difficulties and disappointments, but these were all love, which gave a loose to joys undenied by honour! And this way, my charming *Sylvia*, you shall be mine, in spite of all the tyrannies of that cruel hinderer; honour appears not, my *Sylvia*, within the close- drawn curtains; in shades and gloomy light the phantom frights not, but when one beholds its blushes, when it is attended and adorned, and the sun sees its false beauties; in silent groves and grottoes, dark alcoves, and lonely recesses, all its formalities are laid aside; it was then and there methought my *Sylvia* yielded, with a faint struggle and a soft resistance; I heard her broken sighs, her tender whispering voice, that trembling cried,--'Oh! Can you be so cruel?-- Have you the heart--Will you undo a maid, because she loves you? Oh! Will you ruin me, because you may?---- My faithless----My unkind----' then sighed and yielded, and made me happier than a triumphing god! But this was still a dream, I waked and sighed, and found it vanished all! But oh, my *Sylvia*, your letters were substantial pleasure, and pardon your adorer, if he tell you, even the disorder you express is infinitely dear to him, since he knows it all the effects of love; love, my soul! Which you in vain oppose; pursue it, dear, and call it not undoing, or else explain your fear, and tell me what your soft, your trembling heart gives

that cruel title to? Is it undoing to love? And love the man you say has youth and beauty to justify that love? A man, that adores you with so submissive and perfect a resignation; a man, that did not only love first, but is resolved to die in that agreeable flame; in my creation I was formed for love, and destined for my *Sylvia*, and she for her *Philander*: and shall we, can we disappoint our fate? No, my soft charmer, our souls were touched with the same shafts of love before they had a being in our bodies, and can we contradict divine decree?

Or is it undoing, dear, to bless *Philander* with what you must some time or other sacrifice to some hated, loathed object, (for *Sylvia* can never love again;) and are those treasures for the dull conjugal lover to rifle? Was the beauty of divine shape created for the cold matrimonial embrace? And shall the eternal joys that *Sylvia* can dispense, be returned by the clumsy husband's careless, forced, insipid duties? Oh, my *Sylvia*, shall a husband (whose insensibility will call those raptures of joy! Those heavenly blisses! The drudgery of life) shall he I say receive them? While your *Philander*, with the very thought of the excess of pleasure the least possession would afford, faints over the paper that brings here his eternal vows.

Oh! Where, my *Sylvia*, lies the undoing then? My quality and fortune are of the highest rank amongst men, my youth gay and fond, my soul all soft, all love; and all *Sylvia*'s! I adore her, I am sick of love, and sick of life, till she yields, till she is all mine!

You say, my *Sylvia*, I am married, and there my happiness is shipwrecked; but *Sylvia*, I deny it, and will not

have you think it: no, my soul was married to yours in its first creation; and only *Sylvia* is the wife of my sacred, my everlasting vows; of my solemn considerate thoughts, of my ripened judgement, my mature considerations. The rest are all repented and forgot, like the hasty follies of unsteady youth, like vows breathed in anger, and die perjured as soon as vented, and unregarded either of heaven or man. Oh! why should my soul suffer for ever, why eternal pain for the unheedy, short-lived sin of my unwilling lips? Besides, this fatal thing called wife, this unlucky sister, this *Myrtilla*, this stop to all my heaven, that breeds such fatal differences in our affairs, this *Myrtilla*, I say, first broke her marriage-vows to me; I blame her not, nor is it reasonable I should; she saw the young *Cesario*, and loved him. *Cesario*, whom the envying world in spite of prejudice must own, has irresistible charms, that godlike form, that sweetness in his face, that softness in his eyes and delicate mouth; and every beauty besides, that women dote on, and men envy: that lovely composition of man and angel! with the addition of his eternal youth and illustrious birth, was formed by heaven and nature for universal conquest! And who can love the charming hero at a cheaper rate than being undone? And she that would not venture fame, honour, and a marriage-vow for the glory of the young *Cesario*'s heart, merits not the noble victim; oh! would I could say so much for the young *Philander*, who would run a thousand times more hazards of life and fortune for the adorable *Sylvia*, than that amorous hero ever did for *Myrtilla*, though from that prince I learned some of my disguises for my thefts of love; for he, like *Jove*, courted in several shapes; I saw them all, and

suffered the delusion to pass upon me; for I had seen the lovely *Sylvia*; yes, I had seen her, and loved her too: but honour kept me yet master of my vows; but when I knew her false, when I was once confirmed,-- when by my own soul I found the dissembled passion of hers, when she could no longer hide the blushes, or the paleness that seized at the approaches of my disordered rival, when I saw love dancing in her eyes, and her false heart beat with nimble motions, and soft trembling seized every limb, at the approach or touch of the royal lover, then I thought myself no longer obliged to conceal my flame for *Sylvia*; nay, ere I broke silence, ere I discovered the hidden treasure of my heart, I made her falsehood plainer yet: even the time and place of the dear assignations I discovered; certainty, happy certainty! broke the dull heavy chain, and I with joy submitted to my shameful freedom, and caressed my generous rival; nay, and by heaven I loved him for it, pleased at the resemblance of our souls; for we were secret lovers both, but more pleased that he loved *Myrtilla*; for that made way to my passion for the adorable *Sylvia*!

Let the dull, hot-brained, jealous fool upbraid me with cold patience: let the fond coxcomb, whose honour depends on the frail marriage-vow, reproach me, or tell me that my reputation depends on the feeble constancy of a wife, persuade me it is honour to fight for an irretrievable and unvalued prize, and that because my rival has taken leave to cuckold me, I shall give him leave to kill me too; unreasonable nonsense grown to custom. No, by heaven! I had rather *Myrtilla* should be false, (as she is) than wish and languish for the happy occasion; the sin is the same, only

the act is more generous: believe me, my *Sylvia*, we have all false notions of virtue and honour, and surely this was taken up by some despairing husband in love with a fair jilting wife, and then I pardon him; I should have done as much: for only she that has my soul can engage my sword; she that I love, and myself, only commands and keeps my stock of honour: for *Sylvia*! the charming, the distracting *Sylvia*! I could fight for a glance or smile, expose my heart for her dearer fame, and wish no recompense, but breathing out my last gasp into her soft, white, delicate bosom. But for a wife! that stranger to my soul, and whom we wed for interest and necessity,--a wife, light, loose, unregarding property, who for a momentary appetite will expose her fame, without the noble end of loving on; she that will abuse my bed, and yet return again to the loathed conjugal embrace, back to the arms so hated, and even strong fancy of the absent youth beloved, cannot so much as render supportable. Curse on her, and yet she kisses, fawns and dissembles on, hangs on his neck, and makes the sot believe:--damn her, brute; I'll whistle her off, and let her down the wind, as *Othello* says. No, I adore the wife, that, when the heart is gone, boldly and nobly pursues the conqueror, and generously owns the whore;--not poorly adds the nauseous sin of jilting to it: that I could have borne, at least commended; but this can never pardon; at worst then the world had said her passion had undone her, she loved, and love at worst is worthy of pity. No, no, *Myrtilla*, I forgive your love, but never can your poor dissimulation. One drives you but from the heart you value not, but the other to my eternal contempt. One deprives me but of thee,

Myrtilla, but the other entitles me to a beauty more surprising, renders thee no part of me; and so leaves the lover free to *Sylvia*, without the brother.

Thus, my excellent maid, I have sent you the sense and truth of my soul, in an affair you have often hinted to me, and I take no pleasure to remember: I hope you will at least think my aversion reasonable; and that being thus indisputably free from all obligations to *Myrtilla* as a husband, I may be permitted to lay claim to *Sylvia*, as a lover, and marry myself more effectually by my everlasting vows, than the priest by his common method could do to any other woman less beloved; there being no other way at present left by heaven, to render me *Sylvia's*.

Eternal happy lover and I die to see you.

PHILANDER.

To SYLVIA.

When I had sealed the enclosed, *Brilliard* told me you were this morning come from *Bellfont*, and with infinite impatience have expected seeing you here; which deferred my sending this to the old place; and I am so vain (oh adorable *Sylvia*) as to believe my fancied silence has given you disquiets; but sure, my *Sylvia* could not charge me with neglect; no, she knows my soul, and lays it all on chance, or some strange accident, she knows no business could divert me. No, were the nation sinking, the great senate of the world confounded, our glorious designs betrayed and ruined, and the vast city all in flames; like *Nero*, unconcerned, I would sing my everlasting song of love to *Sylvia*; which no time or fortune shall untune. I know my

soul, and all its strength, and how it is fortified, the charming *Idea* of my young *Sylvia* will for ever remain there; the original may fade; time may render it less fair, less blooming in my arms, but never in my soul; I shall find thee there the same gay glorious creature that first surprised and enslaved me, believe me ravishing maid, I shall. Why then, oh why, my cruel *Sylvia* are my joys delayed? Why am I by your rigorous commands kept from the sight of my heaven, my eternal bliss? An age, my fair tormentor, is past; four tedious live-long days are numbered over, since I beheld the object of my lasting vows, my eternal wishes; how can you think, oh unreasonable *Sylvia*! that I could live so long without you? And yet I am alive; I find it by my pain, by torments of fears and jealousies insupportable; I languish and go downward to the earth; where you will shortly see me laid without your recalling mercy. It is true, I move about this unregarded world, appear every day in the great senate-house, at clubs, cabals, and private consultations; (for *Sylvia* knows all the business of my soul, even in politics of State as well as love) I say I appear indeed, and give my voice in public business; but oh my heart more kindly is employed; that and my thoughts are *Sylvia*'s! Ten thousand times a day I breathe that name, my busy fingers are eternally tracing out those six mystic letters; a thousand ways on every thing I touch, form words, and make them speak a thousand things, and all are *Sylvia* still; my melancholy change is evident to all that see me, which they interpret many mistaken ways; our party fancy I repent my league with them, and doubting I'll betray the cause, grow jealous of me, till by new oaths, new arguments, I confirm

them; then they smile all, and cry I am in love; and this they would believe, but that they see all women that I meet or converse with are indifferent to me, and so can fix it no where; for none can guess it *Sylvia*; thus while I dare not tell my soul, no not even to *Cesario*, the stifled flame burns inward, and torments me so, that (unlike the thing I was) I fear *Sylvia* will lose her love, and lover too; for those few charms she said I had, will fade, and this fatal distance will destroy both soul and body too; my very reason will abandon me, and I shall rave to see thee; restore me, oh restore me then to *Bellfont*, happy *Bellfont*, still blest with *Sylvia*'s presence! permit me, oh permit me into those sacred shades, where I have been so often (too innocently) blest! Let me survey again the dear character of *Sylvia* on the smooth birch; oh when shall I sit beneath those boughs, gazing on the young goddess of the grove, hearing her sigh for love, touching her glowing small white hands, beholding her killing eyes languish, and her charming bosom rise and fall with short-breath'd uncertain breath; breath as soft and sweet as the restoring breeze that glides o'er the new-blown flowers: But oh what is it? What heaven of perfumes, when it inclines to the ravish'd *Philander*, and whispers love it dares not name aloud?

What power with-holds me then from rushing on thee, from pressing thee with kisses; folding thee in my transported arms, and following all the dictates of love without respect or awe! What is it, oh my *Sylvia*, can detain a love so violent and raving, and so wild; admit me, sacred maid, admit me again to those soft delights, that I may find, if possible, what divinity (envious of my bliss) checks my

eager joys, my raging flame; while you too make an experiment (worth the trial) what 'tis makes *Sylvia* deny her
Impatient adorer,

PHILANDER.

My page is ill, and I am oblig'd to trust Brilliard with these to the dear cottage of their rendezvous; send me your opinion of his fidelity: and ah! remember I die to see you.

To PHILANDER.

Not yet?--not yet? oh ye dull tedious hours, when will you glide away? and bring that happy moment on, in which I shall at least hear from my *Philander*; eight and forty tedious ones are past, and I am here forgotten still; forlorn, impatient, restless every where; not one of all your little moments (ye undiverting hours) can afford me repose; I drag ye on, a heavy load; I count ye all, and bless ye when you are gone; but tremble at the approaching ones, and with a dread expect you; and nothing will divert me now; my couch is tiresome, my glass is vain; my books are dull, and conversation insupportable; the grove affords me no relief; nor even those birds to whom I have so often breath'd *Philander's*, name, they sing it on their perching boughs; no, nor the reviewing of his dear letters, can bring me any ease. Oh what fate is reserved for me! For thus I cannot live; nor surely thus I shall not die. Perhaps *Philander's* making a trial of virtue by this silence. Pursue it, call up all your reason, my lovely brother, to your aid, let us be wise and silent, let us try what that will do towards the cure of this too infectious flame; let us, oh let us, my brother, sit down here, and pursue the crime of loving on no farther. Call me sister--swear I am so, and nothing but your sister: and forbear, oh

forbear, my charming brother, to pursue me farther with your soft bewitching passion; let me alone, let me be ruin'd with honour, if I must be ruin'd.--For oh! 'twere much happier I were no more, than that I should be more than *Philander's* sister; or he than *Sylvia's* brother: oh let me ever call you by that cold name, 'till that of lover be forgotten:--ha!-- Methinks on the sudden, a fit of virtue informs my soul, and bids me ask you for what sin of mine, my charming brother, you still pursue a maid that cannot fly: ungenerous and unkind! Why did you take advantage of those freedoms I gave you as a brother? I smil'd on you; and sometimes kiss'd you too;--but for my sister's sake, I play'd with you, suffer'd your hands and lips to wander where I dare not now; all which I thought a sister might allow a brother, and knew not all the while the treachery of love: oh none, but under that intimate title of a brother, could have had the opportunity to have ruin'd me; that, that betray'd me; I play'd away my heart at a game I did not understand; nor knew I when 'twas lost, by degrees so subtle, and an authority so lawful, you won me out of all. Nay then too, even when all was lost, I would not think it love. I wonder'd what my sleepless nights, my waking eternal thoughts, and slumbering visions of my lovely brother meant: I wonder'd why my soul was continually fill'd with wishes and new desires; and still concluded 'twas for my sister all, 'till I discover'd the cheat by jealousy; for when my sister hung upon your neck, kiss'd, and caress'd that face that I ador'd, oh how I found my colour change, my limbs all trembled, and my blood enrag'd, and I could scarce forbear reproaching you; or crying out, 'Oh why this fondness,

brother? Sometimes you perceiv'd my concern, at which you'd smile; for you who had been before in love, (a curse upon the fatal time) could guess at my disorder; then would you turn the wanton play on me: when sullen with my jealousy and the cause, I fly your soft embrace, yet wish you would pursue and overtake me, which you ne'er fail'd to do, where after a kind quarrel all was pardon'd, and all was well again: while the poor injur'd innocent, my sister, made herself sport at our delusive wars; still I was ignorant, 'till you in a most fatal hour inform'd me I was a lover. Thus was it with my heart in those blest days of innocence; thus it was won and lost; nor can all my stars in heav'n prevent, I doubt, prevent my ruin. Now you are sure of the fatal conquest, you scorn the trifling glory, you are silent now; oh I am inevitably lost, or with you, or without you: and I find by this little silence and absence of yours, that 'tis most certain I must either die, or be *Philander's*

SYLVIA.

If Dorillus come not with a letter, or that my page, whom I have sent to this cottage for one, bring it not, I cannot support my life: for oh, Philander, I have a thousand wild distracting fears, knowing how you are involv'd in the interest you have espoused with the young Cesario: how danger surrounds you, how your life and glory depend on the frail sacrifice of villains and rebels: oh give me leave to fear eternally your fame and life, if not your love; If Sylvia could command, Philander should be loyal as he's noble; and what generous maid would not suspect his vows to a mistress, who breaks 'em with his prince and master! Heaven preserve you and your glory.

To Philander.

Another night, oh heavens, and yet no letter come! Where are you, my *Philander*? What happy place contains you? If in heaven, why does not some posting angel bid me haste after you? If on earth, why does not some little god of love bring the grateful tidings on his painted wings? If sick, why does not my own fond heart by sympathy inform me? But that is all active, vigorous, wishing, impatient of delaying, silent, and busy in imagination. If you are false, if you have forgotten your poor believing and distracted *Sylvia*, why does not that kind tyrant death, that meagre welcome vision of the despairing, old and wretched, approach in dead of night, approach my restless bed, and toll the dismal tidings in my frightened listening ears, and strike me for ever silent, lay me for ever quiet, lost to the world, lost to my faithless charmer! But if a sense of honour in you has made you resolve to prefer mine before your love, made you take up a noble fatal resolution, never to tell me more of your passion; this were a trial, I fear my fond heart wants courage to bear; or is it a trick, a cold fit, only assum'd to try how much I love you? I have no arts, heaven knows, no guile or double meaning in my soul, 'tis all plain native simplicity, fearful and timorous as children in the night, trembling as doves pursu'd; born soft by nature, and made tender by love; what, oh! what will become of me then? Yet would I were confirm'd in all my fears: for as I am, my condition is more deplorable; for I'm in doubt, and doubt is the worst torment of the mind: oh *Philander*, be merciful, and let me know the worst; do not be cruel while you kill, do it with pity to the wretched *Sylvia*; oh let me quickly know

whether you are at all, or are the most impatient and
unfortunate

SYLVIA's.

I rave, I die for some relief.

To PHILANDER.

As I was going to send away this enclos'd, *Dorillus* came with two letters; oh, you cannot think, *Philander*, with how much reason you call me fickle maid; for could you but imagine how I am tormentingly divided, how unresolved between violent love and cruel honour, you would say 'twere impossible to fix me any where; or be the same thing for a moment together: there is not a short hour pass'd through the swift hand of time, since I was all despairing, raging love, jealous, fearful, and impatient; and now, now that your fond letters have dispers'd those demons, those tormenting counsellors, and given a little respite, a little tranquillity to my soul; like states luxurious grown with ease, it ungratefully rebels against the sovereign power that made it great and happy; and now that traitor honour heads the mutineers within; honour, whom my late mighty fears had almost famish'd and brought to nothing, warm'd and reviv'd by thy new-protested flames, makes war against almighty love! and I, who but now nobly resolv'd for love, by an inconstancy natural to my sex, or rather my fears, am turn'd over to honour's side: so the despairing man stands on the river's bank, design'd to plunge into the rapid stream, 'till coward-fear seizing his timorous soul, he views around once more the flowery plains, and looks with wishing eyes back to the groves, then sighing stops, and cries, I was too rash,

forsakes the dangerous shore, and hastes away. Thus indiscreet was I, was all for love, fond and undoing love! But when I saw it with full tide flow in upon me, one glance of glorious honour makes me again retreat. I will----I am resolv'd----and must be brave! I cannot forget I am daughter to the great *Beralti*, and sister to *Myrtilla*, a yet unspotted maid, fit to produce a race of glorious heroes! And can *Philander's* love set no higher value on me than base poor prostitution? Is that the price of his heart?--Oh how I hate thee now! or would to heaven I could.--Tell me not, thou charming beguiler, that *Myrtilla* was to blame; was it a fault in her, and will it be virtue in me? And can I believe the crime that made her lose your heart, will make me mistress of it? No, if by any action of hers the noble house of the *Beralti* be dishonour'd, by all the actions of my life it shall receive additions and lustre and glory! Nor will I think *Myrtilla's* virtue lessen'd for your mistaken opinion of it, and she may be as much in vain pursu'd, perhaps, by the Prince *Cesario*, as *Sylvia* shall be by the young *Philander*: the envying world talks loud, 'tis true; but oh, if all were true that busy babbler says, what lady has her fame? What husband is not a cuckold? Nay, and a friend to him that made him so? And it is in vain, my too subtle brother, you think to build the trophies of your conquests on the ruin of both *Myrtilla's* fame and mine: oh how dear would your inglorious passion cost the great unfortunate house of the *Beralti*, while you poorly ruin the fame of *Myrtilla*, to make way to the heart of *Sylvia*! Remember, oh remember once your passion was as violent for *Myrtilla*, and all the vows, oaths, protestations, tears and prayers you make and pay at

my feet, are but the faint repetitions, the feeble echoes of what you sigh'd out at hers. Nay, like young *Paris* fled with the fair prize, your fond, your eager passion made it a rape. Oh perfidious!--Let me not call it back to my remembrance.-
-Oh let me die, rather than call to mind a time so fatal; when the lovely false *Philander* vow'd his heart, his faithless heart away to any maid but *Sylvia*:--oh let it not be possible for me to imagine his dear arms ever grasping any body with joy but *Sylvia*! And yet they did, with transports of love! Yes, yes, you lov'd! by heaven you lov'd this false, this perfidious *Myrtilla*; for false she is; you lov'd her, and I'll have it so; nor shall the sister in me plead her cause. She is false beyond all pardon; for you are beautiful as heaven itself can render you, a shape exactly form'd, not too low, nor too tall, but made to beget soft desire and everlasting wishes in all that look on you; but your face! your lovely face, inclining to round, large piercing languishing black eyes, delicate proportion'd nose, charming dimpled mouth, plump red lips, inviting and swelling, white teeth, small and even, fine complexion, and a beautiful turn! All which you had an art to order in so engaging a manner, that it charm'd all the beholders, both sexes were undone with looking on you; and I have heard a witty man of your party swear, your face gain'd more to the League and association than the cause, and has curs'd a thousand times the false *Myrtilla*, for preferring *Cesario*! (less beautiful) to the adorable *Philander*; to add to this, heaven! how you spoke, when ere you spoke of love! in that you far surpass'd the young *Cesario*! as young as he, almost as great and glorious; oh perfidious *Myrtilla*, oh false, oh foolish and ingrate!--That

you abandon'd her was just, she was not worth retaining in your heart, nor could be worth defending with your sword:-- but grant her false; oh *Philander*!-- How does her perfidy entitle you to me? False as she is, you still are married to her; inconstant as she is, she is still your wife; and no breach of the nuptial vow can untie the fatal knot; and that is a mystery to common sense: sure she was born for mischief; and fortune, when she gave her you, designed the ruin of us all; but most particularly *The unfortunate Sylvia*.

To Sylvia.

My soul's eternal joy, my *Sylvia*! what have you done, and oh how durst you, knowing my fond heart, try it with so fatal a stroke? What means this severe letter? and why so eagerly at this time? Oh the day! Is *Myrtilla's* virtue so defended? Is it a question now whether she is false or not? Oh poor, oh frivolous excuse! You love me not; by all that's good, you love me not; to try your power you have flatter'd and feign'd, oh woman! false charming woman! you have undone me, I rave and shall commit such extravagance that will ruin both: I must upbraid you, fickle and inconstant, I must, and this distance will not serve, 'tis too great; my reproaches lose their force; I burst with resentment, with injur'd love; and you are either the most faithless of your sex, or the most malicious and tormenting: oh I am past tricks, my *Sylvia*, your little arts might do well in a beginning flame, but to a settled fire that is arriv'd to the highest degree, it does but damp its fierceness, and instead of drawing me on, would lessen my esteem, if any such deceit were capable to harbour in the heart of *Sylvia*; but she is all

divine, and I am mistaken in the meaning of what she says. Oh my adorable, think no more on that dull false thing a wife; let her be banish'd thy thoughts, as she is my soul; let her never appear, though but in a dream, to fright our solid joys, or true happiness; no, let us look forward to pleasures vast and unconfin'd, to coming transports, and leave all behind us that contributes not to that heaven of bliss: remember, oh *Sylvia*, that five tedious days are past since I sigh'd at your dear feet; and five days, to a man so madly in love as your *Philander*, is a tedious age: 'tis now six o'clock in the morning, *Brilliard* will be with you by eight, and by ten I may have your permission to see you, and then I need not say how soon I will present myself before you at *Bellfont*; for heaven's sake, my eternal blessing, if you design me this happiness, contrive it so, that I may see no body that belongs to *Bellfont*, but the fair, the lovely *Sylvia*; for I must be more moments with you, than will be convenient to be taken notice of, lest they suspect our business to be love, and that discovery yet may ruin us. Oh! I will delay no longer, my soul is impatient to see you, I cannot live another night without it; I die, by heaven, I languish for the appointed hour; you will believe, when you see my languid face, and dying eyes, how much and greater a sufferer in love I am.

My soul's delight, you may perhaps deny me from your fear; but oh, do not, though I ask a mighty blessing; *Sylvia's* company alone, silent, and perhaps by dark:--oh, though I faint with the thought only of so bless'd an opportunity, yet you shall secure me, by what vows, what imprecations or ties you please; bind my busy hands, blind my ravish'd

eyes, command my tongue, do what you will; but let me hear your angel's voice, and have the transported joy of throwing my self at your feet; and if you please, give me leave (a man condemned eternally to love) to plead a little for my life and passion; let me remove your fears; and though that mighty task never make me entirely happy, at least it will be a great satisfaction to me to know, that 'tis not through my own fault that I am the

Most wretched

PHILANDER.

I have order'd Brilliard to wait your commands at Dorillus's cottage, that he may not be seen at Bellfont: resolve to see me to-night, or I shall come without order, and injure both: my dear, damn'd wife is dispos'd of at a ball Cesario makes to-night; the opportunity will be lucky, not that I fear her jealousy, but the effects of it.

To PHILANDER.

I tremble with the apprehension of what you ask: how shall I comply with your fond desires? My soul bodes some dire effect of this bold enterprise, for I must own (and blush while I do own it) that my soul yields obedience to your soft request, and even whilst I read your letter, was diverted with the contrivance of seeing you: for though, as my brother, you have all the freedoms imaginable at *Bellfont*, to entertain and walk with me, yet it would be difficult and prejudicial to my honour, to receive you alone any where without my sister, and cause a suspicion, which all about me now are very far from conceiving, except *Melinda*, my faithful confidante, and too fatal counsellor; and but for this

fear, I know, my charming brother, three little leagues should not five long days separate *Philander* from his *Sylvia*: but, my lovely brother, since you beg it so earnestly, and my heart consents so easily, I must pronounce my own doom, and say, come, my *Philander*, whether love or soft desire invites you; and take this direction in the management of this mighty affair. I would have you, as soon as this comes to your hands, to haste to *Dorillus's* cottage, without your equipage, only *Brilliard*, whom I believe you may trust, both from his own discretion, and your vast bounties to him; wait there 'till you receive my commands, and I will retire betimes to my apartment, pretending not to be well; and as soon as the evening's obscurity will permit, *Melinda* shall let you in at the *garden-gate*, that is next the *grove*, unseen and unsuspected; but oh, thou powerful charmer, have a care, I trust you with my all: my dear, dear, my precious honour, guard it well; for oh I fear my forces are too weak to stand your shock of beauties; you have charms enough to justify my yielding; but yet, by heaven I would not for an empire: but what is dull empire to almighty love? The god subdues the monarch; 'tis to your strength I trust, for I am a feeble woman, a virgin quite disarm'd by two fair eyes, an angel's voice and form; but yet I'll die before I'll yield my honour; no, though our unhappy family have met reproach from the imagined levity of my sister, 'tis I'll redeem the bleeding honour of our family, and my great parents' virtues shall shine in me; I know it, for if it passes this test, if I can stand this temptation, I am proof against all the world; but I conjure you aid me if I need it: if I incline but in a languishing look, if but a wish appear in my eyes, or I

betray consent but in a sigh; take not, oh take not the opportunity, lest when you have done I grow raging mad, and discover all in the wild fit. Oh who would venture on an enemy with such unequal force? What hardy fool would hazard all at sea, that sees the rising storm come rolling on? Who but fond woman, giddy heedless woman, would thus expose her virtue to temptation? I see, I know my danger, yet I must permit it: love, soft bewitching love will have it so, that cannot deny what my feebleness forbids; and though I tremble with fear, yet love suggests, it will be an age to night: I long for my undoing; for oh I cannot stand the batteries of your eyes and tongue; these fears, these conflicts I have a thousand times a-day; it is pitiful sometimes to see me; on one hand a thousand *Cupids* all gay and smiling present *Philander* with all the beauties of his sex, with all the softness in his looks and language those gods of love can inspire, with all the charms of youth adorn'd, bewitching all, and all transporting; on the other hand, a poor lost virgin languishing and undone, sighing her willing rape to the deaf shades and fountains, filling the woods with cries, swelling the murmuring rivulets with tears, her noble parents with a generous rage reviling her, and her betray'd sister loading her bow'd head with curses and reproaches, and all about her looking forlorn and sad. Judge, oh judge, my adorable brother, of the vastness of my courage and passion, when even this deplorable prospect cannot defend me from the resolution of giving you admittance into my apartment this night, nor shall ever drive you from the soul of your

SYLVIA.

To SYLVIA.

I have obey'd my *Sylvia*'s dear commands, and the dictates of my own impatient soul; as soon as I receiv'd them, I immediately took horse for *Bellfont*, though I knew I should not see my adorable *Sylvia* 'till eight or nine at night; but oh 'tis wondrous pleasure to be so much more near my eternal joy; I wait at *Dorillus*'s cottage the tedious approaching night that must shelter me in its kind shades, and conduct me to a pleasure I faint but with imagining; 'tis now, my lovely charmer, three o'clock, and oh how many tedious hours I am to languish here before the blessed one arrive! I know you love, my *Sylvia*, and therefore must guess at some part of my torment, which yet is mix'd with a certain trembling joy, not to be imagin'd by any but *Sylvia*, who surely loves *Philander*; if there be truth in beauty, faith in youth, she surely loves him much; and much more above her sex she is capable of love, by how much more her soul is form'd of a softer and more delicate composition; by how much more her wit's refin'd and elevated above her duller sex, and by how much more she is oblig'd; if passion can claim passion in return, sure no beauty was ever so much indebted to a slave, as *Sylvia* to *Philander*; none ever lov'd like me: judge then my pains of love, my joys, my fears, my impatience and desires; and call me to your sacred presence with all the speed of love, and as soon as it is duskish, imagine me in the meadow behind the grove, 'till when think me employed in eternal thoughts of *Sylvia*, restless, and talking to the trees of *Sylvia*, sighing her charming name, circling with folded arms my panting heart, (that beats and trembles the more, the nearer it approaches