

My Love Letters, By Cleo de Merode

LOVE letters that bear the mark of sincerity seem to me the most beautiful act of homage ever made. I have received many hundreds, from all classes of persons—from kings, sculptors, painters and other artists; from university men, students of philosophy and theology; from doctors, lawyers, soldiers, poets and musicians; from the educated and from the illiterate. They are of all nations, written in all the languages which I have visited.

Many of these letters not only tempt me to give to the world, and name with one or two exceptions, with their writers identified. The idea which I have made for publication, with the full names of the writers removed, I think forms quite a complete survey of the whole field of love letter writing. I do not see what better examples any one could have than these outpourings from devoted souls. Of course, the voluntary occupation of the writer largely governs his style of expression. One would not expect the soldier or the student of philosophy to express himself like the poet; nor the politician like the artist. Perhaps it is because my art is the object of all his arts and appeals equally to every grade of intelligence, that the love letters I have received represent so many different kinds of minds and souls.

I find them all beautiful in their sentiment and their sincerity. My heart bleeds for the poor theological student who humbly begs to be my ruler that he may be daily in the presence of what I wear and use. When a writer refers to cut off the finger that has touched my glove without my permission—leaving me the alternative of sending him that glove—I know that he is a poet, accustomed to clothe his sentiments in original metaphor. The titled nobleman, who offers me marriage, and then explains why he realizes that I cannot accept any such relationship, I know makes his offer in good faith. As for the young violinist, who passionately declares me a vampire—he, too, is sincere. Musicians are creatures of wild fancies and impulses, and are always saved by their intense egotism. I am happy to say that my violinist has not forgotten all about me in a week.

I think I treasure the letters written to me by Swedes and Norwegians above all others. The love of these people is pure and originates in platonic admiration. The Germans are more sentimental. They want to tell you continually of their love for you, and they expect you to reciprocate immediately. The love letter writing business is now the market that some people

Imagine him to be. He forms a marked contrast with the sentimental German. He loves patently, no matter whether his love is returned or not. He will wait patiently for years in the hope of a little daily in the presence of what I wear and use. When a writer refers to cut off the finger that has touched my glove without my permission—leaving me the alternative of sending him that glove—I know that he is a poet, accustomed to clothe his sentiments in original metaphor. The titled nobleman, who offers me marriage, and then explains why he realizes that I cannot accept any such relationship, I know makes his offer in good faith. As for the young violinist, who passionately declares me a vampire—he, too, is sincere. Musicians are creatures of wild fancies and impulses, and are always saved by their intense egotism. I am happy to say that my violinist has not forgotten all about me in a week.

And an Officer of the French Navy. Mademoiselle: Seven years ago, intoxicated by the beauty of a summer evening, the joy of life and youth, and above all charmed by a portrait of yourself, a young officer dared to write you a letter. Seven years have passed, and during that time I have traveled over the world, from the cold shores of Iceland to the distant seas of China and Japan, and wherever I have gone your portrait has accompanied me. I sought you in Paris, but you were gone to America. I entered my country's service, but wherever I have gone your picture has followed me, most beautiful of women, most adorable creature of dreams. Now, all of a sudden, I see in a newspaper that you are near, in Sweden, and that you are coming here, and I am seized with a fever. Dare I put myself in the way of seeing you? To gaze upon you, and then see you vanish—how could I bear it? If once I might touch with my finger your slender white hand—to cool the fever that parches me—how could I bear it? Better that I should not tempt destiny further; better that I should go on through life worshipping your portrait, which is always serene and kindly, and which I can have day and night next my heart!

And a Medical Student. Mademoiselle: I am a medical student of Upsala. I have seen you at Copenhagen and twice at Stockholm. I cannot speak your language! Oh, it is terrible! Now I am at Upsala and I shall never see you again, but I thank you for the delicious souvenir you have given me—that one mild glance from your beautiful eyes.

Notes from Four Anonymous Students. Light of the Universe—I have seen you once, as you were leaving Göteborg. I was near your carriage, and shall never forget that night. What does it avail to tell you that you are divine? All the world knows it. I am like a drop of water in this great sea. I admire you and adore you as does no one else upon all the universe, and I shall ever treasure as my greatest prize and the most perfect happiness of my life the remembrance of having seen you!

Will you come again to Göteborg? Be thrice welcome! Can any more, for my heart is filled with love. You are the sun which sheds eternal glory. You are the moon which reflects the light of the sun. You are the star which shines brighter than daylight in our dull world!

Beautiful goddess, Cleo de Merode, pardon me if I write to you. Your glowing eyes, your beautiful eyes, are like those of an angel. If my dreams, they are upon you, and I am happy.

From an Officer in the French Army. Mademoiselle: I have but one excuse, but one explanation, for this letter. Yes, I adore you, I love you as one can adore and love only a beautiful woman created from marble by the hands of the Creator. Do you know, mademoiselle, that the first duty of a soldier, I might say the first right, is to adore beauty and youth, and if need be give his life to save them? Therefore, the soldier, Mademoiselle, I have told you, mademoiselle, that you are the most beautiful woman in the world, that you are an adorable angel, and that I am happy only to love you.

From a Noble Sculptor's Offer. Mademoiselle: I do myself the great honor to offer you my fortune, my title, my name. While you were sitting for me, and the clay image of you grew that is now marble—though less white than dazzling Cleo—I knew that I should offer you these small gifts; also I knew that you would decline them. As the truest of artists—the amateur—your acceptance of my great love would be a shock. An artist, particularly a sculptor, should be more than human. That is what saves me from despair. The most exquisite thing in nature, you must be adored as precious objects of art are adored. No hand may touch you, no human emotion may your loveliness. Radiantly beautiful Cleo, for you the individual does not exist. You are for no one because you are for all. How few there are who realize this, who know that you have resolutely denied yourself all that the hearts of all perfect women yearn for! Your reward is that now, at last, the animated marble which you are has all the serenity of marble. Mademoiselle, I offer you my fortune, my title, my name as freely as though I did not know I were doing no more than swinging the censor that hangs before your Carrara counterfeits.

And a Young Poetist. Mademoiselle: I love you and yet I hate you, for you have robbed me. Until I met you I had my art; now I have none—nothing but my unrequited passion for you, my destroyer. Do you remember how I begged you to allow me to play my violin to you, in your presence only, believing that the inspiration of such a moment would mark and make my whole career? And how you consented, and how I played as I had never played before, and how you gave me your hand to kiss and declared me a genius?

Alas! while I dreamed that I was giving my inspired soul to my beloved instrument I was giving it to you. Then I was happy—I was in Paradise. In the light of your smile I could

Impulse better than ever the masters composed. But since! Ah, you vampire! From the moment that I left you I have been a cloud, and my violin is dead. What amends will you make me, my beautiful instrument no longer inspired, and endeavor to repair the terrible injury you have wrought with your cold and perfect beauty that bids others burn while your bosom remains cool? No, I know that you will not. The fault is mine—it was the evil one prompted me and I yielded. Now, too late, I know that you are only to be gazed upon from afar. If ever again you receive such a request as mine, spare the blind supplicant—myself.

Photographs of Cleo de Merode as She is Seen on the Stage by the Men Who Deluge Her with Love Letters.

How Kings, Aristocrats, Plebeians, Poets, Sculptors, Painters, Musicians, Students of Philosophy, Medicine and Theology—Some Demanding All and Others Asking Nothing—Expressed Themselves in Amorous Epistles to the Famous Classic French Beauty.

