

From Monster

By Don Zolidis

CLAIRE CLAIRMONT, 18
LORD BYRON, 27

1816. Claire is confronting Lord Byron about their affair.

CLAIRE

I am carrying your child.

LORD BYRON

It is late, as is usual in your visits, and I have no taste for fiction at the moment.

CLAIRE

It's true.

LORD BYRON

It is not.

CLAIRE

I am carrying your child.

LORD BYRON

Claire –

CLAIRE

Damn it look at me!

LORD BYRON

What.

CLAIRE

We're going to have a baby together.
He chuckles

LORD BYRON

I have a number of issues with that statement. Not least of which, the likelihood that this creature is no more/ mine than –

CLAIRE

Please listen to me. The baby is yours. I had thought – when we were in London I told you that I wished to present you with a gift.

LORD BYRON

A gift?

CLAIRE

Yes. I imagined –

LORD BYRON

You imagined is correct. A gift? If you wish to present a gift to me, I accept cash, not infants.

CLAIRE

But –

LORD BYRON

Did I ever give any inclination, to the slightest degree, a mouse fart's worth, that this is something I desired? Do you recall me saying, "Claire, what I need most in life is a mewling brat following me around, and then for that mewling brat to get pregnant. Is there any possible way you could arrange it?"

CLAIRE

You are not a father – perhaps you would enjoy the process.

LORD BYRON

I have not met one happy father in my life.

CLAIRE

That's not true.

LORD BYRON

I have met men, deluded or otherwise, who have convinced themselves that fatherhood has been a boon to them, but they have the look of a corpse exhumed from the grave. No man enjoys it. Man does it because he must, because the old rules require it of him. I do not subscribe to the delusions and divagations of our forefathers, who were, at best, idiots, and at worst, the most vile, wretched beasts that ever slumped their slovenly shoulders across the face of the Earth. Because it has been done before is the epitaph of humanity. I do not wish to become a father, I have never wished to become a father, I have no desire to see little simulacrum of myself ripping their way through my apartments, befouling the place, and making my life a burden. Furthermore, knowing your character, the parentage of this particular infestation is dubious at best.

CLAIRE

I was with no one else.

LORD BYRON

At least whores have the decency to wash their sexes with vinegar to kill the offending mites.

CLAIRE

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I was with no one else, George.

LORD BYRON

You always were dull.

CLAIRE

This child is yours.

LORD BYRON

So you say.

CLAIRE

It is!

LORD BYRON

Do you imagine this produces an obligation on my part?

CLAIRE

Please –

LORD BYRON

What?

CLAIRE

Have you no feeling for me at all?

LORD BYRON

No.

CLAIRE

LORD BYRON

Is this a shock to you? Have I not made myself plain?

CLAIRE

LORD BYRON

What did you imagine? We'd marry? Have a family? You would be Lady Byron? Could you really envisage me/ in some domestic -

CLAIRE

Stop talking please.

LORD BYRON

This is your machination come to fruition, you are the one who bears the responsibility.

You won't help then?	CLAIRE
Money, is that what you want?	LORD BYRON
No!	CLAIRE
What is it then?	LORD BYRON
You. Can I speak any simpler? I want you.	CLAIRE
I am not to be had.	LORD BYRON
Ever?	CLAIRE
No.	LORD BYRON
So I am to be alone?	CLAIRE
You have Percy. Remain with him and Mary.	LORD BYRON
They don't – they don't wish for me to stay with them. They... I am – unwieldy –	CLAIRE
They are in love I suppose.	LORD BYRON
Yes.	CLAIRE
	LORD BYRON
	CLAIRE
Claire?	LORD BYRON

CLAIRE

Yes?

LORD BYRON

When you speak of the child, you are not to mention its parentage.

CLAIRE

Very well.

LORD BYRON

It has been a long day. I am tired.

CLAIRE

Might I stay here for some time?

LORD BYRON

I don't think that's wise –

CLAIRE

Just – I'd just like to be near you please. I won't speak, I'll... I'd just like to stay here for a bit –

LORD BYRON

No. I'm afraid you'd mount me in my sleep.

CLAIRE

You are making jokes now? I am ridiculous to you, I suppose. Just a stupid... girl to be ushered out of the room and down the stairs – if you could euthanize me in an alley you would, wouldn't you? But there's no need for that. I won't speak of the child – I won't embarrass you, my life won't embarrass you further. I've half a mind to slit my throat... but it wouldn't matter to you. Not in the slightest. Does the serpent regret when it poisons a mouse? No. I'd be one less nuisance to you, a momentary diversion, and then... nothing. No impression. No impact. No delicate tangling of souls – and you think you're a fucking poet. Prattling on about beauty and high-minded nonsense, worrying your miserable little life about meter and rhyme as if that had some purchase in the world – as if it mattered, as if your words matter – nothing you write matters, George. None of it. No immortality on your part, no fucking poems – I am telling you that you have made a life, the best damn thing you've ever made or will ever make, and you couldn't care in the slightest.

LORD BYRON

Are you quite through?

CLAIRE

NOT AT ALL! Do you make anything of value? Are you worth anything? You're a statue of a man, nothing more, resembling some angel but internally full of sawdust and bile and rot! You don't want me, you don't love, you aren't capable of the emotion, are you? You are capable only of self-love! And why wouldn't you be? Because there's nothing else of any value except your

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face! You rotten-hearted bastard. I am GLAD you don't pretend to love me, I can only imagine the hell a woman or man would encounter being sentenced to remain with such a loathsome narcissist. Go to hell and die.

She walks out.

LORD BYRON (*calls after her*)

I imagine one must do the latter before one can do the former.

CLAIRE

You know what I meant! Write a poem about it you fucking imp.