

From Monster

By Don Zolidis

MARY GODWIN, 18

CLAIRE CLAIRMONT, 18, her step-sister

1816. Claire has just told a ghost story and is confiding her pregnancy to her step-sister. (Claire has also had an affair with Mary's lover, Percy Shelley.)

Did you really like it? My story?

CLAIRE

I did.

MARY

Lord Byron applauded most vigorously at the end.

CLAIRE

He was your greatest champion.

MARY

He was. Percy was silent during the entire telling, you don't suppose he thought I wrote the story to him?

CLAIRE

I have no idea. I have not spoken with him. If you are concerned as to his impressions, I suggest you ask him. He is most likely more clear on his own mind than I am.

MARY

I shall ask him. I don't mean to inflict pain on him –

CLAIRE

I don't believe that's possible, Claire.

MARY

What does that mean?

CLAIRE

I believe you overestimate your impact on Percy, that's all.

MARY

Are you jealous?

CLAIRE

MARY

I have nothing to be jealous of. But simply because a man looks tenderly on you once does not mean he will feel that way forever.

CLAIRE

Are you referring to Byron or Percy?

MARY

Both. All men. You...

CLAIRE

Lord Byron has looked on me tenderly more than once.

MARY

I am sure.

CLAIRE

As has Percy. I don't mean to antagonize you as you seem to feel Percy belongs exclusively to you -

MARY

Claire – let us leave him out of it. You embarrass yourself with Lord Byron.

CLAIRE

Is that so?

MARY

The man has a well-earned reputation. This is what he does. He's plowed his way through a battalion of continental ladies, and is working on a regiment of lords as well. You might as well fall in love with a viper.

CLAIRE

He loves me.

MARY

He does not.

CLAIRE

He has said it.

MARY

My God, the man is a poet. He'll say anything and not mean a word. You are wiser than this. Do you really think he would toss his life of leisure away on an eighteen year old child? What would you have him do, marry you?

CLAIRE

From Monster by Don Zolidis

If he wishes it.

MARY

He doesn't. You will not be Lady Byron.

CLAIRE

I am pregnant with his child.

MARY

CLAIRE

Be happy for me?

MARY

No! No I will not! You idiot! Are you – you're certain?

CLAIRE

That I am pregnant, or that the child is his?

MARY

Either. Both.

CLAIRE

Yes to both.

MARY

For the life of me, I cannot figure out how you should/ be so certain on -

CLAIRE

I have been with no one/ else in months.

MARY

You have. /I know you have.

CLAIRE

Not at the/ time when –

MARY

When did this occur?

CLAIRE

I had a plan –

MARY

This was your plan? This – engorgement was your plan? You planned this?

CLAIRE

MARY

When did you ensnare him?

CLAIRE

February. In London.

MARY

Really? Was it breeding season in London then? Were there no other possible diversions for anyone's time?

CLAIRE

Mary you need –

MARY

I don't need to do a damn thing. You'd best hope you lose this one like the last one.

CLAIRE

CLAIRE

Go to hell.

MARY

You think this will bind him to you in some fashion?

CLAIRE

Go to hell, Mary.

MARY

I have taken/ you in –

CLAIRE

Taken me in? I have gone with you! Because you begged me/ to go with you!

MARY

What prattling stupidity is this? I begged you?! I never so much as desired your company on my journey – we couldn't get rid/ of you!

CLAIRE

Percy never wanted to get rid of me –

MARY

When you were with child he did. Did he turn me out? Did he send me to the country to recover from the suspicious illness that might affect you for a few months? No. He kept me at his side,

despite the wicked whispers of the drooling populace! I was not ashamed of bearing his child – you, you –

CLAIRE

I have not lain with him in months!

MARY

And now it's Byron's turn to be gifted with this abomination! If anyone has no heart, it is him –

CLAIRE

I cannot believe that a man who can write those verses cannot feel the pangs of love as deeply as any being alive.

MARY

It's artifice! He creates it! All his energy goes into the fiction in his line, not in the reality of his being! He is a beautiful devil, Claire. What does he care that your brat will grow up in poverty and be sent to the factories to labor all his days? He recognizes no other beings but himself – his regard is his own image reflected in your eyes.

CLAIRE

Will you advocate for me?

MARY

What?

CLAIRE

Speak to him.

MARY

Are you mad?

CLAIRE

I fear that he may mistrust me.

MARY

With good cause! Of course he mistrusts you – he's not an idiot.

CLAIRE

At least convince him that he should care for the child.

MARY

And how am I supposed to do that? With hypnosis?

CLAIRE

He values your opinions –

MARY

My opinion is that you are a fool who has gotten herself into an intolerable situation and ought to be whipped into sensibility.

CLAIRE

What do you wish me to do, Mary?

MARY

Forget Byron. Find a doctor who specializes in such things and remove the child.

CLAIRE

No.

MARY

Then I cannot help you.

CLAIRE

You will not help me.

MARY

That as well.