

## Thomas Barlow courts Frances (Fanny) Burney and is rejected.

*From Burney's journal, May 20, 1775. She was then 23.*

This month is called a *tender* one. It has proved so *to* me but not *in* me. I have not breathed one sigh, — felt one sensation, — or uttered one folly the more for the softness of the season. However, I have met with a youth whose heart, if he is to be credited, has been less guarded — indeed it has yielded itself so suddenly, that had it been in any other month — I should not have known how to have accounted for so easy a conquest.

The first day of this month I drank tea and spent the evening at Mr. Burney's, at the request of my sister, to meet a very stupid family, which she told me it would be charity to herself to give my time to. This family consisted of Mrs. O'Connor and her daughter, by a first marriage, Miss Dickenson, who, poor creature, has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. They are very old acquaintances of my grandmother Burney, to oblige whom my sister invited them. My grandmother and two aunts therefore were of the party: — as also Mr. Barlow, a young man who has lived and boarded with Mrs. O'Connor for about two years.

Mr. Barlow is rather short, but handsome. He is very well bred, ... good-tempered and sensible young man. ... He bears an excellent character both for disposition and morals. He has read more than he has conversed, and seems to know but little of the world; his language therefore is stiff and uncommon, and seems laboured if not affected — he has a great desire to please, but no elegance of manners; neither, though he may be very worthy, is he at all agreeable.

Unfortunately, however, he happened to be prodigiously civil to me, and though I have met with much more gallantry occasionally, yet I could not but observe a *seriousness* of attention much more expressive than complimenting.

As my sister knew not how to *wile away the time*, I proposed, after supper, a round of cross questions. This was agreed to. Mr. Barlow, who sat next to me, took near half an hour to settle upon what he should ask me, and at last his question was — What I thought most necessary in Love? I answered — *Constancy*. I hope for his own sake he will not remember this answer long, though he readily subscribed to it at the time.

The coach came for me about eleven. I rose to go. He earnestly entreated me to stay one or two minutes. I did not, however, think such compliance at all requisite, and therefore only offered to set my grandmother down in my way. The party then broke up. Mrs. O'Connor began an urgent invitation to all present to return the visit th next week. Mr Barlow, who followed me, repeated it very pressingly to *me*, hoping I would make one. I promised that I would.

When we had all taken leave of our host and hostess, my grandmother, according to custom, gave me a kiss and her blessing. I would fain have eluded my aunts, as nothing can be so disagreeable as kissing before young men; however, they chose it should go round; and after them Mrs. O'Connor also saluted me, as did her daughter, desiring to be better acquainted with me. This disagreeable ceremony over, Mr. Barlow came up to me, and making an apology, which, not suspecting his intention, I did not understand, — he gave me a most ardent salute! I have seldom been more surprised. I had no idea of his taking such a freedom. However, I have told my good friends that for the future I will not chuse to lead, or have led, so contagious an example. [I wonder *so modest a man* could dare be so bold.]

He came down stairs with us and waited at the door, I believe, till the coach was out of sight.

Four days after this meeting, my mother and Mrs. Young happened to be in the parlour when I received a letter which, from the strong resemblance of the handwriting in the direction to that of Mr. Crisp, I immediately opened and thought came from Chesington; but what was my surprise to see “Madam” at the beginning and at the conclusion — “Your sincere admirer and very humble

servant, Thos. Barlow.”

I read it three or four times before I could credit my eyes. An acquaintance so short, and a procedure so hasty astonished me. It is a most tender epistle and contains a passionate declaration of attachment, hinting at hopes of a *return*, and so forth.

[Letter from Mr. Barlow to Miss Burney]

Madam — Uninterrupted happiness we are told is of short duration, and is quickly succeeded by Anxiety, which moral Axiom I really experienc'd on the Conclusion of May-day at Mr. Charles Burney's, as the singular Pleasure of your Company was so soon Eclips'd by the rapidity of ever-flying Time; but the felicity, tho' short, was too great to keep within the limits of one Breast; I must therefore intreat your Pardon for the Liberty I take in attempting to reiterate the satisfaction I then felt, and paying a Tythe of Justice to the amiable Lady from whom it proceeded, permit me then Madam, with the greatest sincerity, to assure you, that the feelings of that Evening were among the most refined I ever enjoy'd, and discovered such a latent Spring of Happiness from the Company of the Fair, which I had positively before then been a Stranger to; I had 'til then thought, all Ladys might be flatter'd, but I now experience the contrary, and am assur'd, Language cannot possibly depict the soft Emotions of a mind captivated by so much Merit; and have now a Contest between my arduous Pen, stimulated by so pleasing and so just a subject, on the one side, and a dread of being accused of Adulation on the othe; however, endeavouring at Justice, and taking Truth (in her plainest Attire) for my Guide, I will venture to declare that the Affability, Sweetness, and Sensibility, which shone in your every Action, lead me irresistably to Love and Admire the Mistress of them, and I account it the road to the highest Felicity, if my *sincerity* might in any degree meet your Approbation; as I am persuaded *that is the first Principle*, which can be offer'd as a foundation for the least hope of a Lady's regard; and I must beg leave to observe, I greatly admire that Quality which yourself so justly declar'd, was most necessary in Love, I mean CONSTANCY, from which I would presume to infer, that we are naturally led from Admiration, to Imitation and Practice; All which in being permitted to declare to you—would constitute my particular happiness as far as Expression could be prevail'd on to figure the Ideas of the Mind; meanwhile I would particularly Request, you would condescend to favour me with a Line, in which I hope to hear you are well, and that you will honour us with your Company with good Mrs. Burney and Family some day next week, which that Lady is to fix; in which I trust we shall not be deny'd as 'twill not be possible to admit separating so particularly desirable a part of the Company, and as I am persuaded we are honored with your Assent to the Engagement:

I am dear Miss Fanny's

Most sincere Admirer and very hble servant

THOS. BARLOW

*Fanny didn't answer, but immediately decided against it. She told some friends about it. An older friend, Samuel Crisp, wrote her a long letter, urging her to marry Barlow: "You may live to the age of your grandmother and not meet with so valuable an offer."*

*Burney and Barlow met again, very awkwardly, at a house call a few days later.*

*Barlow then sent her a second letter:*

Madam — I have somewhere seen that powerful Deity, Cupid, and the invincible Mars, habited in a similar manner; and each have in their train several of the same disposition'd Attendants; the propriety of which Thought I own pleas'd me, for when drawn from the allegory, it is acknowledg'd, both Love and War are comparative in several particulars: they each require CONSTANCY, and the hope of Success stimulate each to Perserverance; and as the one is warm'd and encourag'd by the desire of Glory; so the other is much more profoundly fix'd and transported by the Charms of the Fair Sex: I have been told that Artifice and Deception are connected to both, but those Qualitys I shou'd determine to discard and substitute in the Place an open Frankness and undisguised Truth and Honour; and for Diligence, Assiduity, Care, and Attention, which are essential to both, and which some place in the Catalogue of the Labours of Love, I should have them happily converted to Pleasures in the honour of devoting them to Miss Fanny Burney; if the bravest General may miscarry; so the most sincere Lover may lose the wish'd-for Prize; to prevent which I shou'd continue to invoke my guardian Genius that she may ever inspire me with such Principles and Actions as may enable me to reach the summit of my Ambition, in approving myself not unworthy the Esteem of your amiable self, and not unworthy — but stop, oh, *ardurous Pen and presume not* ('til in the front you can place PERMISSIONS to hope) ascending such sublime heights.

It has given me great Uneasiness that the excessive hurry of Business has so long prevented me the honour of waiting on you, and enquiring after your Welfare, which I earnestly wish to hear, but I determine, with your leave, e'er long to do myself that Pleasure, as methinks Time moves very slowly in granting me an Opportunity to declare, in some small degree (for I could not reach what I should call otherwise) how much I am, with the greatest Respect imaginable,

Dear Miss Fanny

Your most devoted and most obedient servant,

THOS. BARLOW

*The next day, Barlow came to her house (she lived with her father).*

From her diary:

About 2 o'clock, while I was dawdling in the study, and waiting for an opportunity to speak, we heard a rap at the door and soon after John came in and said — "A gentleman is below who asks for Miss Burney: Mr. Barlow." I think I was never more distressed in my life — to have taken pains to avoid a private conversation so highly disagreeable to me, and at last to be forced into it at so unfavorable a juncture, for I had now *two* letters from him, both unanswered. and consequently open to his conjectures. I exclaimed — "Lord! How provoking! What shall I do?"

My father looked uneasy and perplexed; he said something about not being hasty, which I did not desire him to explain. [Terrified lest he should hit at the advantage of an early establishment — like Mr. Crisp — quick from the study — but slow enough afterward — I went down stairs. I was my mother pass [from the front[ into the back parlour, which did not add to the *graciousness* of my reception of poor Mr. Barlow, who I found alone in the [front] parlour. I was not sorry that none of the family were there, as I now began to seriously dread any protraction of this affair.

He came up to me with an air of *tenderness*, and satisfaction, began some anxious enquiries about my health; but I interrupted him with saying, — "I fancy, Sir, you have not received a letter I — I —"

[I stopt, for I could not say which I had *sent!*]

"A letter? — No, Ma'am!"

"You will have it, then, to-morrow, Sir."

We were both silent for a minute or two, when he said — “In consequence I presume, Ma’am, of the one I—”

“Yes, Sir,” cried I.

“And pray — Ma’am — Miss Burney! — may I — beg to know the contents? — that is — the — the —” He could not go on.

“Sir — I — it was only — it was merely — in short, you will see it tomorrow.”

“But if you would favour me with the contents now, I could perhaps answer it at once?”

“Sir, it requires no answer.”

A second silence ensued. I was really distressed myself to see *his* distress, which was very apparent. After some time he stammered out something of *hoping* and *beseeching* — which, gathering more firmness, I answered — “I am much obliged to you, Sir, for the too good opinion you are pleased to have of me — but I should be very sorry you should lose any more time upon my account — as I have no thoughts of changing my situation and abode.”

He seemed to be quite overset: having, therefore so freely explained myself, I then asked him to sit down, and began to talk of the weather. When he had a little recovered himself, he drew a chair close to me, and began making most ardent professions of respect and regard and so forth. I interrupted him as soon as I could, and begged him to rest satisfied with my answer.

“*Satisfied!* repeated he, “my dear Madam — is that possible?”

“Perhaps, Sir, said I, “I ought to make some apologies for not answering your first letter — but really I was so much surprised — on so short an acquaintance.”

He then began making excuses for having written, but as to *short acquaintance* he owned it was a reason for *me*, but for *him* — fifty years could not have more convinced him of my etc. etc.

“You have taken a sudden, and far too partial idea of my character,” answered I. “If you look round among your older acquaintance, I doubt not but you will very soon be able to make a better choice.”

He shook his head. “I have seen, Madam, a great many ladies, it is true — but never —”

“You do me much honor,” cried I, “but I must desire you take no further trouble about me — for I have not at present the slightest thought of ever leaving this house.”

“*At present?*” repeated he, eagerly. “No, I would not expect it — I would not wish to precipitate — but in the future —”

“Neither now or ever, Sir,” returned I, “have I any view of changing my condition.”

“But surely, surely this can never be! so sever a resolution — you cannot mean it — it would be wronging all the world!”

“I am extremely sorry, Sir, that you did not receive my letter, because it might have saved you this trouble.”

He looked very much mortified, and said in a dejected voice — “If there is anything in me — in my connexions — or in my situation in life, which you wholly think unworthy of you — and beneath you — or if my character or disposition meet with your disapprobation — I will immediately forgo all — I will not — I would not —”

“No, indeed, Sir,” cried I, “I have neither seen or heard of anything of you that was to your disadvantage — and I have no doubts of your worthiness.”

He thanked me, and seemed reassured; but renewed his solicitations in the most urgent manner. He

repeatedly begged my permission to acquaint my family of the state of his affairs, and to abide by their decision; but I would not let him say two words following upon that subject. I told him that my answer was a final one, and begged him to take it as such.

He remonstrated very earnestly: "This is the severest decision! ... Surely you must allow that the *social state* is what we were all meant for? — that we were created for one another? — that to form such a resolution is contrary to the design of our being?"

"All this may be true," said I, "I have nothing to say in contradiction to it — but you know there are many odd characters in the world — and I am one of them."

"O, no, no, no — that can never be! but is it possible that you have so bad an opinion of the Married State? It seems to me the *only* state for happiness!"

"Well, Sir, you are attracted to the married life — I am to the single — therefore *every man in his humour* — *do you follow your opinion* — and let *me follow mine*."

"But, surely, — is not this *singular*?"

"I give you leave, Sir," cried I, laughing, "to think me singular — odd — queer — nay, even whimsical, if you please."

"But my *dear* Miss Burney, only —"

"I entreat you, Sir, to take my answer — you really pain me by being so urgent."

"That would not I do for the world! I only bet you to suffer me — perhaps in future —"

"No, I shall never change — I do assure you you will find me very obstinate."

He began to lament his own destiny. I grew extremely tired of so often saying the same thing; but I could not absolutely turn him out of the house; and, indeed, he seemed so dejected and unhappy, that I made it my study to soften my refusal as much as I could without leaving room for further expectations.

About this time my mother came in. We both rose. I was horridly provoked at my situation.

"I am only come in for a letter," cried she, "pray don't let me disturb you." And away she went ...

This could not but be encouraging to him, for she was no sooner gone than he began again the same story, and seemed determined not to give up his cause. He hoped at least that I would allow him to enquire after my health?

"I must beg you, Sir, to send me no more letters."

He seemed much hurt, and looked down in silence.

"You had better, Sir, think of me no more, if you study your own happiness —"

"I *do* study my own happiness — more than I have ever had any probability of doing before!"

"You have made an unfortunate choice, Sir, but you will find it easier to forget it than you imagine. You have only to suppose that I was not at Mr. Burney's on May Day — and it was a mere chance my being there — and then you will be —"

"But if I *could* — could I also forget seeing you at Miss Burney's? — and if I did — can I forget that I see you now?"

"O yes! In three months' time you may forget you ever saw me. You will not find it so difficult as you suppose."

"You have heard, Ma'am, of an old man being ground young? Perhaps you believe *that*? But you

will not deny me leave to sometimes see you?"

"My father, Sir, is seldom, hardly ever, indeed, at home."

"I have never seen the Doctor — but I hope he would not refuse me the permission to enquire after your health? I have no wish without his consent."

"Though I acknowledge myself to be *singular* I would not have you think me either affected or *trifling*, — and therefore I must assure you I am *fixed* in the answer I have given you — *unalterably* fixed."

His entreaties grew now extremely distressing to me. He besought me to take more time and said it should be the study of his life to make me happy. "Allow me, my *dear* Miss Burney, only to hope that my future conduct —"

"I shall always think myself obliged, nay honoured by your good opinion — and you are entitled to my best wishes for your health and happiness — but, indeed, the less we meet the better."

"What — what can I do?" cried he, very sorrowfully.

"Why — go and *ponder* upon this affair for about half an hour. Then say — what an odd, queer, strange creature she is — and then — think of something else."

"O no, no! — you cannot suppose all that? I shall think of nothing else — *your* refusal is more pleasing than any other lady's acceptance."

He said this very simply, but too seriously for me to laugh at. ...

I rose and walked to the window thinking it was high time to end a conversation already much too long; and then he again began to entreat me not to be so *very severe*. I told him that was *sure* I should never alter the answer I made at first; that I was very happy at home; and not at all inclined to try my fate elsewhere. I then desired my compliments to Mrs. O'Connor and Miss Dickenson and made a *reverence* by way of leave taking.

"I am extremely sorry to detain you so long, Ma'am" said he, in a melancholy voice. I made no answer. He then walked about the room; and then again besought my leave to ask me how I did some other time. I absolutely, though civilly refused it, and told him frankly that, fixed as I was, it was better that we should not meet.

He then took his leave — returned back — took leave — and returned again. I now made a more formal reverence of the head at the same time expressing my good wishes for his welfare, in a sort of way that implied that I expected never to see him again. He would fain have taken a more *tender* leave of me — but I repulsed him with great surprise and displeasure. I did not, however, as he was so terribly sorrowful refuse him my hand, which he had made sundry attempts to take in the course of conversation. When I withdrew it, as I did presently, I rang the bell to prevent his again returning from the door.

*Fanny wrote a letter to him that night:*

Sir,

I am much concerned to find that my silence to the first letter with which you honoured me has not had the effect it was meant to produce, of preventing your giving yourself any further trouble on my account.

The good opinion you are pleased to express of me, however extraordinary upon so short an acquaintance, certainly claims my acknowledgements; but as I have no intention of changing my present situation, I can only assure you of my good wishes for your health and happiness, and request and desire that you will bestow no further thoughts, time, or trouble upon,

Sir,

Your most humble servant,

F. BURNEY

*In 1793, at age 41, Fanny Burney married General Alexandre D'Arblay, a refugee in England from the French Revolution. She lived to the age of 88.*