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**The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling**

In Four Volumes

**Fielding, Henry**

**London, 1750**

Chap. I. Containing a Portion of introductory Writing.

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THE  
HISTORY  
OF A  
FOUNDLING.

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## BOOK XVII.

*Containing three Days.*

## CHAP. I.

*Containing a Portion of introductory Writing.*

**W**HEN a Comic Writer hath made his principal Characters as happy as he can; or when a Tragic Writer hath brought them to the highest Pitch of human Misery, they both conclude their Business to be done, and that their Work is come to a Period.

Had we been of the Tragic Complexion, the Reader must now allow we were very nearly arrived at this Period, since it would be difficult for the Devil, or any of his Representatives on Earth, to have contrived much greater Torments for poor *Jones*, than those in which we left him in

the last Chapter; and as for *Sophia*, a good-natured Woman would hardly wish more Uneasiness to a Rival, than what she must at present be supposed to feel. What then remains to complete the Tragedy but a Murder or two, and a few moral Sentences.

But to bring our Favourites out of their present Anguish and Distress, and to land them at last on the Shore of Happiness, seems a much harder Task; a Task indeed so hard that we do not undertake to execute it. In Regard to *Sophia*, it is more than probable, that we shall somewhere or other provide a good Husband for her in the End, either *Bliss*, or my Lord, or Somebody else; but as to poor *Jones*, such are the Calamities in which he is at present involved, owing to his Imprudence, by which if a Man doth not become Felon to the Word, he is at least a *Felo de se*; so destitute is he now of Friends, and so persecuted by Enemies, that we almost despair of bringing him to any Good; and if our Reader delights in seeing Executions, I think he ought not to lose any Time in taking a first Row at *Tyburn*.

This I faithfully promise, that notwithstanding any Affection, which we may be supposed to have for this Rogue, whom we have unfortunately made our Heroe, we will lend him none of that supernatural Assistance with which we are entrusted, upon Condition that we use it only on very important Occasions. If he doth not therefore find some natural Means of fairly extricating himself from all his Distresses, we will do no Violence to the Truth and Dignity of History for his Sake; for we had rather relate that he was hanged at *Tyburn* (which may very probably be the Case) than



than forfeit our Integrity, or shock the Faith of our Reader.

In this the Antients had a great Advantage over the Moderns. Their Mythology, which was at that Time more firmly believed by the Vulgar than any Religion is at present, gave them always an Opportunity of delivering a favourite Heroe. Their Deities were always ready at the Writer's Elbow, to execute any of his Purposes; and the more extraordinary the Invention was, the greater was the Surprize and Delight of the credulous Reader. Those Writers could with greater Ease have convey'd a Heroe from one Country to another, nay from one World to another, and have brought him back again, than a poor circumscrib'd Modern can deliver him from a Goal.

The *Arabians* and *Persians* had an equal Advantage in writing their Tales from the *Genii* and *Fairies*, which they believe in as an Article of their Faith, upon the Authority of the *Koran* itself. But we have none of these Helps. To natural Means alone are we confin'd; let us try therefore what by these Means may be done for poor *Jones*; though, to confess the Truth, something whispers me in the Ear, that he doth not yet know the worst of his Fortune; and that a more shocking Piece of News than any he hath yet heard, remains for him in the unopened Leaves of Fate.