

For Richer, For Poorer

Victoria Coren

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Praise for *For Richer, For Poorer*

'*For Richer, For Poorer* seizes the reader with its first sentence and never lets go. Victoria Coren writes, on several levels, with wit, honesty, and perfect freshness.' Martin Amis

'A terrific poker book and a terrific memoir...engaging, lucid, full of verve and a pleasure to read. This book is also really funny. These pages are crowded with fascinating people. There is also an unexpected resonance and depth. What more can you ask from a read?' *Observer*

'Honest, funny, highly personal and nostalgic memoir about friendship and belonging.' *Financial Times*

'A book so rich in details, so full of laughter, that you feel as if the coolest member of your family has just let you in on a secret so delicious you will savour it for ever.' *The Times*

About Victoria Coren

Victoria Coren is an author, journalist and poker player. She is the daughter of the humorist Alan Coren, sister of journalist Giles Coren and a graduate of Oxford University. Coren writes weekly columns for the *Observer* and *Guardian* newspapers and regular articles for other publications.

Coren has presented Late Night Poker and various other poker shows in the UK, and series of general interest for BBC radio and TV. She is a member of Team PokerStars Pro, with lifetime winnings of over \$1.5 million.

Vicky has been playing poker for 15 years, and won the London EPT / European Championship in 2006.

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A reader's introduction to *For Richer For Poorer*

For a great number of us gambling is limited to a lottery ticket or a flutter on the Melbourne Cup. In this sense poker is often seen as an alien and shady world. This account of Coren's rise from a little girl wanting to play with her brothers to the winner of a million dollar

tournament does not hide the dark side of gambling, but it sheds light on the enchanting lure of its seduction, the skill as well as luck that is part of its charm. And it is written with a warmth and skill, a tolerance for the quirks of human nature and a great sense of humour that charms even the most cynical anti-gambler.

Coren is an Oxford-educated journalist for the *Observer*. She is a great writer. There is a strong sense of place as she flits from London to the rainy Isle of Man to Liverpool and Las Vegas. Coren brings alive her favourite haunts by employing the readers senses. You can see the green baize tables, feel the laminated cards in your hands, smell the stale cigar smoke. She has an acute ear for dialogue and a strong sense of the ridiculous. The reader will never forget the seventy-year-old Michael who is fearful that his mother-in law will see him playing poker on an obscure TV channel. She not only laughs at the odd people she meets but she laughs, too, at herself, an endearing quality in a memoir.

There is a paradoxical attitude to poker. For her the poker crowd is a second family. And there is a sense of closeness, warmth, friendship and mutual support throughout the book. The reader can never forget the reaction to the death of Hemish.

Though it is also a world where money is lost within minutes, at times, of it being won. It is the game, not the outcome that acts as '*the kindly Valium of the deck*.' '*It is a means of forgetting. It is an escape.*' She claims again and again that poker is not about the money. It is about beating other people. It is about not wanting to die.

'*Poker is cruel*', Victoria says. '*Hotel windows don't open in Vegas. That's because too many people would jump.*'

Questions for discussion

1. Coren has to sign a form at one stage that says gambling does not present obstacles in her life. Has gambling, and poker in particular, caused obstacles in her life? Are the obstacles outweighed by the blessings?



2. Coren says that in the twenty years she has been playing poker, it has changed a great deal. How has it changed and why?
3. What is Coren's experience of being a woman in the predominantly male poker milieu? Is this a feminist book?
4. Who did you find the most endearing and most quirky of the characters who appear and disappear through the pages of the book?
5. Why is it so difficult for Coren to find lasting romantic relationships in the world of poker?
6. Why does poker carry such a load of superstition with it?
7. Poker has its own code of morality, for example the 'moody rules'. Read pp 201 - 202 and discuss the ethics which are expounded upon here.
8. How does the structure of the book enhance the excitement of the narrative?
9. How does the rhythm of the writing, which becomes poetic as it counterpoises the poker movements, add to the enjoyment of the book?
10. How effectively does Coren create a sense of place—Las Vegas, Edgware Road, Deauville, etc ?
11. Is this book likely to draw a non-gambler into the world of poker and casinos?