

Emma Orczy

His Majesty's Well-Beloved



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Baroness Orczy

His Majesty's Well-Beloved An Episode in the Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton as told by His Friend John Honeywood

CHAPTER I

How it all Began

1

From Mr. John Honeywood, clerk to Mr. Theophilus Baggs, attorney-at-law, to Mistress Mary Saunderson, of the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

1662. October the 10th at 85, Chancery Lane in the City of London. Honoured Mistress, —
May it please you that I, an humble Clerk and Scrivener, do venture to address so talented a Lady; but there is that upon my Conscience which compels me to write these lines. The Goodness and Charity of Mistress Saunderson are well known, and 'tis not as a Suppliant that I crave pardon for my Presumption, but rather as one whose fidelity and loyalty have oft been tried and never been found wanting. 'Tis said, most gracious Mistress, that your fancy hath been touched by the tenderness and devotion of a Man who is as dear to me as if he were mine own Brother, but that You hesitate to bestow upon him that for which he craves more than for anything in the world, your Hand and Heart. And this because of many Rumours which have sullied his fair Name. Mr. Betterton, Madam, hath many enemies. How could this be otherwise seeing that so vast a measure of Success hath attended his career, and that the King's most gracious Majesty doth honour him with Friendship and Regard to the exclusion of others who are envious of so great a fame? Those Enemies now, Madam, seeing that your Heart hath been touched with the man's grace and bearing, rather than with his undying Renown, have set themselves the task of blackening Mr. Betterton's character before your eyes, thus causing you mayhap grievous Sorrow and Disappointment. But this I do swear by all that I hold most sacred, that Mr. Betterton hath never committed a mean Act in his life nor done aught to forfeit your Regard. Caustic of wit he is, but neither a Braggart nor a Bully; he hath been credited with many good Fortunes, but so hath every Gentleman in the Kingdom, and there is no discredit attached to a man for subjugating the Hearts of those that are both frail and fair. My Lady Castlemaine hath bestowed many favours on Mr. Betterton, so hath the Countess of Shrewsbury, and there are others, at least the Gossips do aver it. But on my Soul and Honour, he hath never ceased to love You, until the day when a certain great Lady came across his path for his misfortune and his undying Regret. And even so, Madam, though appearances are against him, I own, let me assure You that the swerving of his Allegiance to You was not only transitory but it was never one of the Heart — it was a mere aberration of the senses. He may never forget the Lady — he certainly will never forget her Cruelty — but he no longer loves Her, never did love Her as he loves You, with his Heart and Mind, with Tenderness and Devotion. The other was only a Dream — a fitful fancy: his Love for You is as immortal as his Fame. Therefore, gracious Mistress, I, the humble Friend of so great a Man, have ventured to set forth for your perusal that which he himself would be too proud to put before you — namely, his Justification. As for the rest, what I am about to relate is the true Historie of Mr. Betterton's Romance, the only one which might give you cause for sorrow, yet none for uneasiness, because that Romance is now

a thing of the past, like unto a Flower that is faded and without fragrance, even though it still lies pressed between the pages of a great man's Book of Life. Everything else is mere Episode. But this which I have here set down will show you how much nobility of heart and grandeur of Character lies hidden beneath the flippant and at times grim exterior of the Man whom you have honoured with your regard.

The writing of the Historie hath caused me much anxiety and deep thought. I desired to present the Truth before you, and not the highly-coloured effusions of a Partisan. I have slurred over nothing, concealed nothing. An you, gracious Mistress, have the patience to read unto the End, I am confident that any Hesitation as to your Future which may still linger in your Heart will vanish with the more intimate Knowledge of the true Facts of the case, as well as of the Man whose faults are of his own Time and of his Entourage, but whose Merits are for the whole World to know and to cherish, for as many Cycles of years as there will be Englishmen to speak the Words of English Poets.

2

Dare I take you back, honoured Mistress, to those humble days, five years ago, when first I entered the Household of your worthy Uncle, Mr. Theophilus Baggs, and of his still more worthy Spouse, Mistress Euphrosine, where for a small – very small – stipend, and free board and lodging, I copied legal documents, Leases, Wills and Indentures for my Employer?

You, fair Lady, were then the only ray of Sunshine which illumined the darkness of my dreary Life. Yours was a Gaiety which nothing could damp, a Courage and Vitality which not even the nagging disposition of Mistress Euphrosine succeeded in crushing. And when, smarting under her many Chidings, my stomach craving for a small Measure of satisfaction, my Bones aching from the hardness of my bed, I saw your slim Figure flitting, elf-like, from kitchen to living-room, your full young Throat bursting with song like that of a Bird at the first scent of Spring, I would find my lot less hard, the bread less sour, even Mistress Euphrosine's tongue less acrimonious. My poor, atrophied Heart felt the warmth of your Smile.

Then sometimes, when my Work was done and my Employers occupied with their own affairs, You used to allow me to be of service to you, to help you wash the dishes which your dainty Hands should never have been allowed to touch.

Oh! how I writhed when I heard Mistress Euphrosine ordering You about as if You were a kitchen-wench, rather than her husband's Niece, who was honouring his House with your presence! You, so exquisite, so perfect, so cultured, to be the Handmaid of a pair of sour, ill-conditioned Reprobates who were not worthy to tie the lacets of your dainty shoes. With what Joy I performed the menial tasks which never should have been allotted to You, I never until now have dared to tell. I did not think that any Man could find dish-washing and floor-scrubbing quite so enchanting. But then no other Man hath ever to my knowledge performed such tasks under such happy circumstances; with You standing before me, smiling and laughing at my clumsiness, your shapely arms akimbo, your Voice now rippling into Song, now chaffing me with Words full of kindness and good-humour.

I have known many happy Hours since that Day, Mistress, and many Hours full of Sorrow, but none so full of pulsating Life as those which outwardly had seemed so miserable.

And then that wonderful afternoon when Mr. Theophilus Baggs and his Spouse being safely out of the way, we stole out together and spent a few hours at the Play! Do you remember the day on which we ventured on the Escapade? Mr. Baggs and Mistress Euphrosine had gone to Hampton Court: he to see a noble Client and she to accompany him. The day being fine and the Client being a Lady possessed of well-known charms, Mistress Euphrosine would not have trusted her Lord alone in the company of such a forward Minx – at least, those were her Words, which she uttered in my hearing two Days before the memorable Expedition.

Memorable, indeed, it was to me!

Mr. Baggs left a sheaf of Documents for me to copy, which would – he thought – keep me occupied during the whole course of a long Day. You too, fair Mistress, were to be kept busy during the worthy couple's absence, by scrubbing and polishing and sewing – Mistress Euphrosine holding all idleness in abhorrence.

I marvel if you remember it all!

I do, as if it had occurred yesterday! We sat up half the Night previous to our Taskmasters' departure; you polishing and sewing, and I copying away for very life. You remember? Our joint Savings for the past six Months we had counted up together. They amounted to three shillings. One shilling we spent in oil for our lamps, so that we might complete our Tasks during the Night. This left us free for the great and glorious Purpose which we had in our Minds and which we had planned and brooded over for Days and Weeks.

We meant to go to the Play!

It seems strange now, in view of your Renown, fair Mistress, and of mine own intimacy with Mr. Betterton, that You and I had both reached an age of Man and Womanhood without ever having been to the Play. Yet You belonged from childhood to the household of Mistress Euphrosine Baggs, who is own sister to Mr. Betterton. But that worthy Woman abhorred the Stage and all that pertained to it, and she blushed – aye, blushed! – at thought of the marvellous Fame attained by her illustrious Brother.

Do you remember confiding to me, less than a month after I first entered the household of Mr. Baggs, that You were pining to go to the Play? You had seen Mr. Betterton once or twice when he came to visit his Sister – which he did not do very often – but you had never actually been made acquainted with him, nor had you ever seen him act. And You told me how handsome he was, and how distinguished; and your dark Eyes would flash with enthusiasm at thought of the Actor's Art and of the Actor's Power.

I had never seen him at all in those Days, but I loved to hear about him. Strange what a fascination the Stage exercised over so insignificant and so mean a creature as I!

3

Will you ever forget the dawn of that glorious Day, fair Mistress?

Mr. Baggs and his Spouse went off quite early, to catch the chaise at La Belle Sauvage which would take them to Hampton Court. But however early they went, we thought them mighty slow in making a start. An hundred Recommendations, Orderings, Scoldings, had to be gone through ere the respectable Couple, carrying provisions for the day in a Bandana Handkerchief, finally got on the way.

It was a perfect Morning early in March, with the first scent and feel of Spring in the air. Not a Cloud in the Sky. By Midday our tasks were entirely accomplished and we were free! Free as the Birds in the air, free as two 'prentices out for a holiday! But little did we eat, I remember. We were too excited for hunger; nor had Mistress Euphrosine left much in the larder for us. What did we care? Our Enthusiasm, our Eagerness, were Cook and Scullion for us, that day!

We were going to the Play!

Oh! how we tripped to Cockpit Lane, asking our way from passers-by, for we knew so little of London – fashionable London, that is; the London of Gaiety and Laughter, of careless Thoughts and wayward Moods. Holding hands, we hurried through the Streets. You wore a dark Cape with a Hood to hide your pretty Face and your soft brown Hair, lest some Acquaintance of your Uncle's should chance to see You and betray our guilty secret.

Do you remember how we met Mr. Rhodes, the bookseller, and friend of Mr. Baggs? – he to whom young Mr. Betterton was even then apprenticed. At the corner of Princes Street we came nose to nose with him, and but for great presence of mind on my part when, without an instant's hesitation, I ran straight at him and butted him in the Stomach so that he lost his Balance for the moment and

only recovered complete Consciousness after we had disappeared round the corner of the Street, he no doubt would have recognised us and betrayed our naughty Secret.

Oh, what a fright we had! I can see You now, leaning, breathless and panting, against the street corner, your Hand pressed to your Bosom, your Eyes shining like Stars!

As for the rest, it is all confusion in my mind. The Crowd, the Bustle, the Noise, this great Assembly, the like of which I had never seen before. I do not know how we came to our seats. All I know is that we were there, looking down upon the moving throng. I remember that some Worthy of obvious note was sitting next to me, and was perpetually treading upon my toes. But this I did not mind, for he was good enough to point out to me the various Notabilities amongst the Audience or upon the Stage; and I was greatly marvelled and awed by the wonderful familiarity with which he spoke of all these distinguished People.

"There sits General Monk. Brave old George! By gad! 'twere interesting to know what goes on inside that square Head of his! King or Protector, which is it to be? Or Protector *and* King! George knows; and you mark my words, young Sir, George will be the one to decide. Old Noll is sick; he can't last long. And Master Richard hath not much affection for his Father's Friends – calls them Reprobates and ungodly. Well! can you see George being rebuked by Master Richard for going to the Play?"

And I, not being on such intimate terms with the Lord Protector's Son or with General Monk, could offer no opinion on the subject. And after a while my Neighbour went on glibly:

"Ah! here comes my Lady Viner, flaunting silks and satins. Aye, the fair Alice – his third Wife, mark you! – knows how to spend the money which her Lord hath been at such pains to scrape together. By gad! who'd have thought to see red-haired Polly Ann so soon after the demise of His Grace! See, not an inch of widows' Weeds doth she wear in honour of the old Dotard who did her the infinite favour of dying just in the nick of time..."

And so on, the Man would babble in a continuous stream of talk. You, Mistress, listened to him open-mouthed, your great brown Eyes aglow with curiosity and with excitement. You and I knew but little of those great Folk, and seeing them all around us, prepared for the same enjoyment which we had paid to obtain, made us quite intoxicated with eagerness.

Our Neighbour, who of a truth seemed to know everything, expressed great surprise at the fact that Old Noll – as he so unceremoniously named the Lord Protector – had tolerated the opening of the Cockpit. "But," he added sententiously, "Bill Davenant could wheedle a block of ice out of the devil, if he chose."

4

Of the Play I remember but little. I was in truth much too excited to take it all in. And sitting so near You, Mistress – for the Place was overcrowded – my Knee touching yours, your dear little hand darting out from time to time to grip mine convulsively during the more palpitating moments of the Entertainment, was quite as much as an humble Clerk's brain could hold.

There was a great deal of Music – that I do remember. Also that the entertainment was termed an opera and that the name of the piece was "The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru." My omniscient Neighbour told me presently that no doubt the Performance was an artful piece of Flattery on the part of Bill (meaning, I suppose, Sir William Davenant) who, by blackening the Spaniards, made Old Noll's tyranny appear like bountiful Mercies.

But I did not like to hear our Lord Protector spoken of with such levity. Moreover, my Neighbour's incessant Chatter distracted me from the Stage.

What I do remember more vividly than anything else on that memorable Day was your cry of delight when Mr. Betterton appeared upon the Stage. I do not know if you had actually spoken with him before; I certainly had never even seen him. Mr. Betterton was then apprenticed to Mr. Rhodes,

the Bookseller, and it was entirely against the Judgment and Wishes of Mistress Euphrosine Baggs, his Sister, that he adopted the Stage as an additional calling. I know that there were many high Words on that subject between Mr. Betterton and Mistress Euphrosine, Mr. Rhodes greatly supporting the young Man in his Desire, he having already formulated schemes of his own for the management of a Theatre, and extolling the virtues of the Actor's Art and the vastly lucrative State thereof.

But Mistress Euphrosine would have none of it. Actors were Rogues and Vagabonds, she said, ungodly Reprobates who were unfit, when dead, to be buried in consecrated ground. She would never consent to seeing a Brother of hers follow so disreputable a Calling. From high words it came to an open Quarrel, and though I had been over a year in the House of Mr. Theophilus Baggs, I had never until this day set eyes on young Mr. Betterton.

He was not taking a very important part in the Opera, but there was no denying the fact that as soon as he appeared upon the Stage his very Presence did throw every other Actor into the shade. The Ladies in the Boxes gave a deep sigh of content, gazing on him with admiring eyes and bestowing loud Applause upon his every Word. And when Mr. Betterton threw out his Arms with a gesture expressive of a noble Passion and spoke the ringing lines: "And tell me then, ye Sons of England..." – his beautiful Voice rising and falling with the perfect cadence of an exquisite Harmony – the uproar of Enthusiasm became wellnigh deafening. The Ladies clapped their Hands and waved their Handkerchiefs, the Gentlemen stamped their feet upon the floor; and some, lifting their Hats, threw them with a flourish upon the Stage, so that anon Mr. Betterton stood with a score or more Hats all round his feet, and was greatly perturbed as to how he should sort them out and restore them to their rightful Owners.

Ah, it was a glorious Day! Nothing could mar the perfection of its Course. No! not even the Rain which presently began to patter over the Spectators, and anon fell in torrents, so that those who were in the Pit had to beat a precipitate retreat, scrambling helter-skelter over the Benches in a wild endeavour to get under cover.

This incident somewhat marred the Harmony of the Ending, because to see Ladies and Gentlemen struggling and scrambling to climb from bench to bench under a Deluge of Rain, was in truth a very droll Spectacle; and the attention of those in the Boxes was divided between the Happenings on the Stage and the antics of the rest of the Audience.

You and I, fair Mistress, up aloft in our humble place, were far better sheltered than the more grand Folk in the Pit. I put your Cloak around your Shoulders to protect You against the Cold, and thus sitting close together, my knee still resting against yours, we watched the Performance until the end.

5

How we went home that afternoon I do not remember. I know that it was raining heavily and that we got very wet. But this caused me no Inconvenience, because it gave me the privilege of placing my Arm round your Shoulders so as to keep your Cloak from falling. Also my Mind was too full of what I had seen to heed the paltry discomfort of a Wetting. My thoughts were of the Play, the Music, the brilliant Assembly; yours, Mistress, were of Mr. Betterton. Of him you prattled all the way home, to the exclusion of every other Topic. And if your enthusiastic Eulogy of that talented Person did at times send a pang of Sorrow through my Heart, You at least were unaware of my Trouble. Not that I took no share in your Enthusiasm. I did it whole-heartedly. Never had I admired a Man before as I did Mr. Betterton on that Day. His Presence was commanding, his Face striking, his Voice at times masterful and full of Power, at others infinitely sweet. My officious and talkative Neighbour, just before the Rain came down and rendered him dumb, had remarked to me with a great air of Knowledge and of Finality: "Mark my word, young Sir, England will hear something presently of Tommy Betterton."

It was not until we reached the corner of Chancery Lane that we were forced to descend to the Realities of Life. We had had a glorious Day, and for many Hours had wholly forgotten the many Annoyances and Discomforts with which our lives were beset. Now we were a little tired and exceedingly wet. Mistress Euphrosine's Scoldings, our oft empty stomachs, hard Beds and cheerless Lives loomed once more largely upon the Horizon of our mental vision.

Our Pace began to slacken; your glib Tongue was stilled. Holding Hands now, we hurried home in silence, our Minds stirred by a still vague Sense of Fear.

Nor was that Fear unjustified, alas! as subsequent Events proved. No sooner had We entered the House than We knew that We were discovered. Mr. Baggs' cloak, hung up in the Hall, revealed the terrifying Fact that he and his indomitable Spouse had unaccountably returned at this hour. No doubt that the Weather was the primary cause of this untoward Event: its immediate result was a Volley of abuse poured upon our Heads by Mistress Euphrosine's eloquent Tongue. We were Reprobates, Spawns and Children of the Devil! We were Liars and Cheats and Thieves! We had deserved God's wrath and eternal punishment! Heavens above! how she did talk! And we, alas! could not escape that vituperative Torrent.

We had fled into the Kitchen as soon as We had realised that we were fairly caught; but Mistress Euphrosine had followed us thither and had closed the door behind her. And now, standing facing Us, her large, gaunt Body barring every egress, she talked and talked until You, fair Mistress, gave way to a passionate Flood of tears.

All our Pleasure, our Joy, had vanished; driven hence by the vixenish Tongue of a soured Harridan. I was beside myself with Rage. But for your restraining influence, I could have struck that shrieking Virago, and for ever after have destroyed what was the very Essence of my Life. For she would have turned me out of Doors then and there, and I should have been driven forth from your Presence, perhaps never to return.

The sight of your Patience and of your Goodness helped to deaden my Wrath. I hung my Head and bit my Tongue lest it should betray me into saying things which I should have regretted to the end of my Days.

And thus that memorable Day came to a close. Somehow, it stands before my mind as would the first legible Page in the Book of my Life. Before it, everything was blurred; but that Page is clear. I can read it now, even after four years. For the first time, destiny had writ on it two Names in bold, indelible Characters – yours, Mistress, and that of Mr. Betterton. Henceforth, not a Day in my Life would pass without one of You looming largely in its Scheme.

Mary Saunderson! Tom Betterton! My very pulses seem to beat to the tune of those two Names! I knew then, by one of those subtle intuitions which no Man has ever succeeded in comprehending, that Heaven itself had intended You for one another. How then could I stand by and see the Wickedness of Man striving to interfere with the decrees of God?

CHAPTER II

THE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE

1

After that memorable Day, Mistress, we were like naughty Children who were being punished for playing truant out of School. For Weeks and Months our Lives went on with dreary monotony, with never a chance of seeing Something of that outside World of which we had caught a glimpse. You continued to sew and to scrub and to be at the beck and call of a Scold. I went on copying legal Documents till my very Brain appeared atrophied, incapable of a single happy Thought or of a joyous Hope.

Out there in the great World, many things were happening. The Lord Protector died; his Son succeeded. And then England woke to the fact that she had never cared for these Regicides, Republicans and Puritans; that in her Heart she had always loved the martyred King and longed to set his Son once more upon his Throne.

I often thought of my loquacious Neighbour at the Play, with his talk of Old Noll and Master Richard and of George. For George Monk in truth had become the Man of the hour; for he it was who was bringing King Charles back into his Kingdom again.

Two years had gone by since our memorable Day at the Play, and as that same Neighbour had also foretold, England was hearing a great deal about Tom Betterton. His Name was on every one's lips. Mr. Rhodes, the Bookseller, had obtained a licence from General Monk to get a Company of Actors together, and the palmy Days of the Cockpit had begun. Then it was that some faint Echo of the Life of our great City penetrated as far as the dull Purlieu of Mr. Baggs' Household; then it was that the ring of the Fame of Mr. Betterton even caused Mistress Euphrosine to recall her former arbitrary Judgments.

Every one now was talking of her illustrious Brother. General Monk himself had made a Friend of him, so had Sir John Grenville, who was the King's own Envoy; and those who were in the know prophesied that His Majesty Himself would presently honour the eminent Player with his regard. My Lord Rochester was his intimate Friend; Sir George Etherege was scarce ever seen in public without him. Lord Broghill had vowed that the English Stage was made famous throughout the Continent of Europe by the superlative excellence of Mr. Betterton.

To such Eulogies, coming from the most exalted Personages in the Land, Mistress Euphrosine could not turn an altogether deaf Ear; and being a Woman of character and ambition, she soon realised that her Antagonism to her illustrious Brother not only rendered her ridiculous, but might even prove a bar to Mr. Theophilus Baggs' Advancement.

The first Step towards a Reconciliation was taken when Mr. Baggs and his Spouse went together to the Play to see Mr. Betterton act *Solyman* in a play called "The Siege of Rhodes." You and I, Mistress, were by great favour allowed to go too, and to take our places in that same Gallery where two Years previously You and I had spent such happy hours. We spoke little to one another, I remember. Our hearts were full of Memories; but I could see your brown Eyes lighten as soon as the eminent Actor walked upon the Stage. The same Glamour which his personality had thrown over You two years ago was still there. Nay! it was enhanced an hundredfold, for to the magnetic presence of the Man was now added the supreme Magic of the Artist. I am too humble a Scrivener, fair Lady, to attempt to describe Mr. Betterton's acting, nor do I think that such Art as his could be adequately discussed. Your enjoyment of it I did fully share. You devoured him with your Eyes while he was on the Stage, and the Charm of his Voice filled the crowded Theatre and silenced every other sound.

I knew that the World had ceased to exist for You and that the mysterious and elusive god of Love had hit your Heart with his wayward dart.

I thank God that neither then nor later did any feeling of Bitterness enter into my Soul. Sad I was, but of a gentle Sadness which made me feel mine own Unworthiness, even whilst I prayed that You might realise your Heart's desire.

Strangely enough, it was at the very moment when I first understood the state of your Feelings that mine eyes, a little dimmed with tears, were arrested by the Sight of a young and beautiful Lady, who sat in one of the Boxes, not very far from our point of vantage. I wondered then what it was about her that thus enchained mine Attention. Of a truth, she was singularly fair, of that dainty and translucent Fairness which I for one have never been able to admire, but which is wont to set Men's pulses beating with an added quickness – at least, so I've heard it said. The Lady had blue Eyes, an exquisitely white Skin, her golden Hair was dressed in the new modish Fashion, with quaint little Ringlets all around her low, square Brow. The face was that of a Child, yet there was something about the firm Chin, something about the Forehead and the set of the Lips which spoke of Character and of Strength not often found in one so young.

Immediately behind her sat a young Cavalier of prepossessing Appearance, who obviously was whispering pleasing Words in the Lady's shell-like ear. I confess that for the moment I longed for the presence of our loquacious Neighbour of two years ago. He, without doubt, would have known who the noble young Lady was and who was her attentive Cavalier. Soon, however, the progress of the Play once more riveted mine Attention upon the Stage, and I forgot all about the beautiful Lady until it was time to go. Then I sought her with mine Eyes; but she had already gone. And I, whilst privileged to arrange your Cloak around your shoulders, realised how much more attractive brown Hair was than fair, and how brilliant could be the sparkle of dark Eyes as against the more languorous expression of those that are blue.

2

I was not present at the time that You, Mistress, first made the acquaintance of Mr. Betterton. He came to the House originally for the sole purpose of consulting with his Brother-in-law on a point of Law, he having an idea of joining Sir William Davenant in the Management of the new Theatre which that Gentleman was about to open in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The season in London promised to be very brilliant. His Majesty the King was coming into his own once more. Within a Month or two at the latest, he would land at Dover, and as even through his misfortunes and exile he had always been a great Patron of the Arts of Drama and Literature, there was no doubt that he would give his gracious Patronage to such enterprises as Sir William Davenant and Mr. Killigrew, not to mention others, had already in view.

No doubt that Sir William Davenant felt that no Company of Actors could be really complete without the leadership of Mr. Betterton; and we all knew that both he and Mr. Killigrew were literally fighting one another to obtain the great Actor's services.

In the end, of course, it was Sir William who won, and thus Mr. Betterton came to visit Mr. Theophilus Baggs to arrange for an Indenture whereby he was to have a Share of the Profits derived from the Performances at the new Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

You, Mistress, will remember that Day even better than I do, for to me it only marked one more Stage on the dreary road of my uneventful Life, whilst for You it meant the first Pearl in that jewelled Crown of Happiness which Destiny hath fashioned for You. Mr. Baggs had sent me on that day to Richmond, to see a Client of his there. Whether he did this purposely, at the instance of Mistress Euphrosine, in order to get me out of the way, I know not. In her Estimation I was supposed to have leanings for the Actor's profession in those days – surely a foolish Supposition, seeing how unprepossessing was my Appearance and how mediocre my Intellect.

Without doubt, however, could she have read the Secrets of your Soul, dear Mistress, she would have sent You on an errand too, to a remote corner of England, or had locked You up in your Room, ere you came face to face with the great Man whose Personality and Visage were already deeply graven upon your Heart.

But her futile, unamiable Mind was even then torn between the desire to make a brave show of Prosperity before her illustrious Brother and to welcome him as the Friend and Companion of great Gentlemen, and the old puritanical Spirit within her which still looked upon Actors as Rogues and Vagabonds, Men upon whom God would shower some very special, altogether terrible Curses because of their loose and immoral Lives.

Thus Mistress Euphrosine's treatment of the distinguished Actor was ever contradictory. She did her best to make him feel that she despised him for his Calling, yet nevertheless she fawned upon him because of his connection with the Aristocracy. Even subsequently, when Mr. Betterton enjoyed not only the Patronage but the actual Friendship of His Majesty the King, Mistress Euphrosine's attitude towards him was always one of pious scorn. He might be enjoying the protection of an earthly King, but what was that in comparison with his Sister's intimacy with God? He might consort with Dukes, but she would anon make one in a company of Angels, amongst whom such Reprobates as Actors would never find a place.

That, I think, was her chief Attitude of Mind, one that caused me much Indignation at the time; for I felt that I could have knelt down and worshipped the heaven-born Genius who was delighting the whole Kingdom with his Art. But Mr. Betterton, with his habitual kindness and good humour, paid no heed to Mistress Euphrosine's sour Disposition towards him, and when she tried to wither him with lofty Speeches, he would quickly make her ridiculous with witty Repartee.

He came more and more frequently to the House, and mine Eyes being unusually sharp in such matters, I soon saw that You had wholly won his regard. Those then became happy times. Happy ones for You, Mistress, whose Love for a great and good Man was finding full Reciprocity. Happy ones for him, who in You had found not only a loving Heart, but rare understanding, and that great Talent which he then and there set himself to develop. They were happy times also for me, the poor, obscure Scrivener with the starved Heart and the dreary Life, who now was allowed to warm his Soul in the Sunshine of your joint Happiness.

It was not long before Mr. Betterton noticed the profound Admiration which I had for him, not long before he admitted me to his Friendship and Intimacy. I say it with utmost pride, that I was the first one with whom he discussed the question of your Career and to whom he confided the fact that You had a conspicuous talent for the Stage, and that he intended to teach and to train You until You could appear with him on the Boards. You may imagine how this Idea staggered me at first – aye! and horrified me a little. I suppose that something of the old puritanical middle-class Prejudice had eaten so deeply into my Soul that I could not be reconciled to the idea of seeing any Woman – least of all you, Mistress – acting a part upon the Stage. Hitherto, young Mr. Kynaston and other boy-actors had represented with perfect grace and charm all the parts which have been written for Women; and I could not picture to myself any respectable Female allowing herself to be kissed or embraced in full view of a large Audience, or speaking some of those Lines which our great Dramatists have thought proper to write.

But Mr. Betterton's Influence and his unanswerable Arguments soon got the better of those old-fashioned Ideas, and anon I found myself looking eagerly forward to the happy time when You would be freed from the trammels of Mistress Euphrosine's Tyranny and, as the Wife and Helpmate of the greatest Actor of our times, take your place beside him among the Immortals.

3

It was not until the spring of the following Year that I first noticed the cloud which was gathering over your happiness. Never shall I forget the day when first I saw Tears in your Eyes.

You had finally decided by then to adopt the Stage as your Profession, and at the instance of Mr. Betterton, Sir William Davenant had promised You a small part in the new Play, wherewith he was about to open his new Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The piece chosen was called "Othello," written by one William Shakespeare, and Sir William had finally decided that the parts written in this Play by the Author for Women should be enacted by Women; an arrangement which was even then being worked quite successfully by Mr. Killigrew at his Theatre in Clare Market.

I knew that a brilliant Future lay before You; but Mistress Euphrosine, who had constituted herself your Guardian and Mentor, tried in vain to turn You from your Career. The day when You made your Decision was yet another of those momentous ones which will never fade from my Memory. You had hitherto been clever enough to evade Mistress Euphrosine's Vigilance whilst you studied the Art of speaking and acting under the guidance of Mr. Betterton. She thought that his frequent Visits to the House were due to his Regard for her, whereas he came only to see You and to be of service to You in the pursuit of your Studies.

But the time came when You had to avow openly what were your Intentions with regard to the Future. Sir William Davenant's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields was to be opened in June, and You, Mistress, were, together with his principal Actresses, to be boarded after that by him at his own House, in accordance with one of the Provisions of the Agreement. The Question arose as to where You should lodge, your poor Mother having no home to offer You. Mistress Euphrosine made a great Show of her Abhorrence of the Stage and all the Immorality which such a Career implied. My cheeks blush with shame even now at the recollection of the abominable language which she used when first You told her what You meant to do, and my Heart is still filled with admiration at your Patience and Forbearance with her under such trying circumstances.

Fortunately for us all, Mr. Betterton arrived in the midst of all this wrangle. He soon succeeded in silencing Mistress Euphrosine's exacerbating tongue, and this not so much by the magic of his Persuasion as by the aid of the golden Key which is known to open every door – even that which leads to a scolding Harridan's heart. Mr. Betterton offered his Sister a substantial Sum of Money if she in return would undertake to give You a comfortable lodging until such time as he himself would claim You as his Wife. He stipulated that You should be made comfortable and that no kind of menial work should ever be put upon You.

"Mistress Saunderson," he said impressively, "must be left absolutely free to pursue her Art, unhampered by any other consideration."

Even so, Mistress Euphrosine could not restrain her malicious tongue, and the whole equitable arrangement might even then have fallen through but for your gentleness and quiet determination. Finally, Mistress Euphrosine gave in. She accepted the liberal terms which her illustrious Brother was offering her for your Maintenance, but she reserved unto herself the right of terminating the Arrangement at her will and pleasure. Obviously, she meant to be as disagreeable as she chose; but You had to have a respectable roof over your head until such time as You found a Haven under the ægis of your future Husband's Name.

After that, it seemed as if no cloud could ever come to obscure the Heavens of your happiness. Nevertheless, it was very soon after that Episode that I chanced upon You one evening, sitting in the parlour with the Book of a Play before You, yet apparently not intent upon reading. When I spoke your name You started as if out of a Dream and quickly You put your handkerchief up to your eyes.

I made no remark then; it would have been insolence on my part to intrude upon your private Affairs. But I felt like some faithful cur on the watch.

For awhile dust was thrown in my eyes from the fact that Mr. Betterton announced to us his projected trip abroad, at the instance of Sir William Davenant, who desired him to study the Scenery and Decorations which it seems were noted Adjuncts to the Stage over in Paris. If Mr. Betterton approved of what he saw there, he was to bring back with him a scheme for such Scenery to be introduced at the new Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, which would be a great triumph over Mr. Killigrew's Management, where no such innovations had ever been thought of.

Naturally, Mr. Betterton, being a Man and an Artist, was eager and excited over this journey, which showed what great confidence Sir William Davenant reposed in his Judgment. This, methought, accounted for the fact that You, Mistress, seemed so much more dejected at the prospect of his Absence than he was. I also was satisfied that this Absence accounted for your tears.

Fool that I was! I should have guessed!

Mr. Betterton was absent two months, during which time I oft chanced upon You, dear Mistress, with a book lying unheeded on your lap and your dark eyes glistening with unnatural brilliancy. But I still believed that it was only Mr. Betterton's Absence that caused this sadness which had of late fallen over your Spirits. I know that he did not write often, and I saw – oh! quite involuntarily – that when his Letters came they were unaccountably short.

Then, one day – it was in May – seeing You more than usually depressed, I suggested that as the weather was so fine we should repair to the Theatre in Clare Market, and there see Mr. Killigrew's company enact "The Beggar's Bush," a play in which Major Mohun was acting the part of *Bellamentewith* with considerable success.

Had I but known what we were destined to see in that Theatre, I swear to God that I would sooner have hacked off my right leg than to have taken You thither. Yet We both started on our way, oblivious of what lay before Us. Time had long since gone by when such expeditions had to be done in secret. You, Mistress, were independent of Mistress Euphrosine's threats and tantrums, and I had come to realise that my Employer could nowhere else in the whole City find a Clerk who would do so much for such very scanty pay, and that he would never dismiss me, for fear that he would never again meet with such a willing Drudge.

So, the day being one on which Mr. Baggs and Mistress Euphrosine were absenting themselves from home, I persuaded You easily enough to come with me to the Play.

Your spirits had risen of late because you were expecting Mr. Betterton's home-coming. In fact, You had received authentic news that he would probably be back in England within the week.

4

At once, when I took my seat in the Gallery beside you, I noticed the beautiful fair Lady in the Box, whom I had not seen since that marvellous day a year ago, when you and I sat together at the Play. She was more radiantly beautiful than ever before.

Discreet enquiries from my Neighbour elicited the information that she was the Lady Barbara Wychwoode, daughter of the Marquis of Sidbury, and the acknowledged Belle among the Debutantes of the season. I understood that nothing had been seen of the Lady for the past year or more, owing to the grave and lingering illness of her Mother, during the whole course of which the young Girl had given up her entire life to the tending of the Invalid.

Now that his Lordship was a Widower, he had insisted on bringing his Daughter to London so that she might be brought to the notice of His Majesty and take her place at Court and in Society, as it beseemed her rank. That place the Lady Barbara conquered quickly enough, by her Beauty, her Charm and her Wit, so much so that I was told that all the young Gallants in the City were more or less over head and ears in love with her, but that her affections had remained steadfastly true to the friend and companion of her girlhood, the young Earl of Stour who, in his turn had never swerved

in his Allegiance and had patiently waited for the day when her duty to her Mother would cease and her love for him be allowed to have full sway.

All this, of course, sounded very pretty and very romantic; and you, Mistress, gave ungrudging admiration to the beautiful girl who was the cynosure of all eyes. She sat in the Box, in the company of an elderly and distinguished Gentleman, who was obviously her Father, and of another Man, who appeared to be a year or two older than herself and whose likeness of features to her own proclaimed him to be her Brother. At the rear of the box a number of brilliant Cavaliers had congregated, who had obviously come in order to pay court to this acknowledged Queen of Beauty. Foremost among these we noticed a tall, handsome young Man whose noble features looked to me to suggest a somewhat weak yet obstinate disposition. He was undeniably handsome: the huge, fair periwig which he wore lent a certain manly dignity to his countenance. We quickly came to the conclusion that this must be the Earl of Stour, for it was obvious that the Lady Barbara reserved her most welcoming smile and her kindest glances for him.

The company in the Box kept us vastly amused for a time, in the intervals of watching the Actors on the Stage; and I remember that during the second Act the dialogue in the Play being somewhat dull, both You and I fell to watching the Lady Barbara and her throng of Admirers. Suddenly we noticed that all these Gentlemen gave way as if to a New-comer who had just entered at the rear of the Box and was apparently desirous of coming forward in order to pay his respects. At first we could not see who the New-comer was, nor did we greatly care. The next moment, however, he was behind the Lady Barbara's chair. Anon he stooped forward in order to whisper something in her ear.

And I saw who it was.

It was Mr. Betterton.

For the moment, I remember that I felt as if I were paralysed; either that or crazed. I could not trust mine eyes.

Then I turned my head and looked at You.

You too had seen and recognised. For the moment You did not move, but sat rigid and silent. Your face had become a shade or two paler and there was a scarce perceptible tremor of your lips.

But that was all. I alone knew that You had just received a stab in your loving and trusting Heart, that something had occurred which would for ever mar the perfect trustfulness of your early love ... something which you would never forget.

5

You sat out the rest of the Play, dear Mistress, outwardly quite serene. Never, I think, has my admiration for your Character and for your Worth been more profound. I believe that I suffered almost as much as You. I suffered because many things were made clear to me then that I had ignored before. Your tears, your many Silences, that look of trustful happiness now gone from your eyes. I understood that the Incident was only the confirmation of what you had suspected long since.

But you would not let any one see your heart. No! not even me, your devoted Bondsman, who would gladly die to save You from pain. Yet I could not bring my heart to condemn Mr. Betterton utterly. I did not believe even then that he had been unfaithful – led away no doubt by the glamour of the society Beauty, by the talk and the swagger of all the idle Gentlemen about town – but not unfaithful. His was not a Nature to love more than the once, and he loved You, Mistress – loved You from the moment that he set eyes on You, from the moment that he knew your Worth. His fancy had perhaps been captured by the beautiful Lady Barbara, his Heart wherein your image was eternally enshrined, had been momentarily bewitched by her wiles; but he was not responsible for these Actions – that I could have sworn even then.

Mr. Betterton is above all an Artist, and in my humble judgment Artists are not to be measured by ordinary standards. Their mind is more fanciful, their fancy more roving; they are the Butterflies of this World, gay to look at and light on the wing.

You never told me, Mistress, what course You adopted after that eventful afternoon; nor would I have ventured to pry into your secrets. That You and Mr. Betterton talked the whole matter over, I make no doubt. I could even tell You, methinks, on which day the heart to heart talk between You took place. That there were no Recriminations on your part I dare aver; also that Mr. Betterton received his final dismissal on that day with a greater respect than ever for You in his Heart, and with deep sorrow weighing upon his Soul.

After that, his visits to the house became more and more infrequent; and at first You would contrive to be absent when he came. But, as I have always maintained, his love for You still filled his innermost Being, even though the Lady Barbara ruled over his fancy for the time. He longed for your Presence and for your Friendship, even though at that time he believed that You had totally erased his image from your Heart.

And so, when he came, and I had perforce to tell him that You were absent, he would linger on in the hope that You would return, and he would go away with a bitter sigh of regret whenever he had failed to catch a glimpse of You.

You never told me in so many Words that you had definitely broken off your Engagement to Mr. Betterton, nor do I believe that such was your intention even then. Mistress Euphrosine certainly never realised that You were smarting under so terrible a blow, and she still spoke glibly of your forthcoming marriage.

It was indeed fortunate for You, fortunate for us all, that both she and Mr. Baggs were too self-absorbed – he in his Business and she in her Piety – and too selfish, to be aware of what went on around them. Their self-absorption left You free to indulge in the luxury of suffering in silence; and I was made almost happy at times by an occasional surreptitious pressure of your Hand, a glance from your Eyes, telling me that my Understanding and Sympathy were not wholly unwelcome.

CHAPTER III

A CRIMINAL FOLLY

1

In June, you made your debut upon the stage, dear Mistress. Though You only played a small Part, your Grace and Charm soon won universal approval. I have so often told You of my feelings, my hopes, my tremors and my joy on the occasion when first I saw You upon the boards, that I will not weary You with the re-telling of them once again. Securely hidden behind a pillar, I only lived through the super-acuteness of my Senses, which drank in your Presence from the moment when You stepped out from behind the Curtain and revealed your gracious personality to an admiring Audience.

As long as I live, every word which You spoke on that day will continue to ring in mine ear, and ere mine eyes close for ever in their last long Sleep, I shall see your exquisite Image floating dreamlike before their gaze.

2

From that day onward, I saw you more seldom than I had been wont to do before. Your Success at the new Theatre had been so pronounced that Sir William Davenant soon entrusted You with more important parts. Thus your time was greatly taken up both with Performances and with Rehearsals and with the choosing and trying on of dresses. Of necessity, your work threw you often in the company of Mr. Betterton, he being the leading Actor in Sir William's Company, and the most popular as he was the most eminent of His Majesty's Well-Beloved Servants. In fact, his Fame at this time was reaching its Apogee. He was reckoned one of the Intimates of His Majesty himself; Gentlemen and Noblemen sought his company; great Ladies were zealous to win his favours.

Needless to say that concurrently with his rise to pre-eminence, an army of Enemies sprung up around him. Hungry curs will ever bay at the moon. Set a cat upon a high post and in a moment others will congregate down below and spit and yowl at their more fortunate kind. Scandal and spite, which had never been so rife as in these days, fastened themselves like evil tentacles on Mr. Betterton's fair Name.

He was too proud to combat these, and You too proud to lend an ear to them. You met him now upon an easy footing of Friendship, of gentle gratitude as of a successful Pupil towards a kindly Teacher. To any one who did not know You as I do, You must at that time have seemed completely happy. You were independent now, earning a good salary, paying Mistress Euphrosine liberally for the lodgings which she placed at your disposal; free to come and go as You pleased, to receive the visits of Gentlemen who were desirous of paying their respects to You. You were, in fact, Mistress Saunderson, the well-known Actress, who was busy climbing – and swiftly, too – the Ladder of Fame.

Of your proposed Marriage with Mr. Betterton there was of course no longer any talk. For some reason best known to herself, and which I myself never tried to fathom, even Mistress Euphrosine had ceased to speak of it.

Did she, within the depths of her ambitious and avaricious Heart, harbour the belief that her Brother would one day wed one of those great Ladies, who were wont to hang entranced upon his lips, when he spoke the immortal words of the late Mr. William Shakespeare or of Mr. John Dryden? I know not; nor what benefit she would have derived from it if such an unlikely Event had indeed taken place.

Towards me, she was still frigidly contemptuous. But as to that, I did not care. I was determined to endure her worst gibes for the sake of dwelling under the same roof which still had the privilege of sheltering You.

3

It was one day early in September – just something over a year ago, in fact – that my Lord Stour called at the house of Mr. Theophilus Baggs. I knew him at once for the Cavalier who was ever in attendance upon the Lady Barbara Wychwoode and whom rumour had assigned to her as her future Husband.

Frankly, I had never liked him from the first. I thought him overbearing and arrogant. His manner towards those who were inferior to him in station was always one of contempt. And I often wondered how Mr. Theophilus Baggs, who was an Attorney of some standing in the City of London, could endure the cool insolence wherewith young Gentlemen like my Lord Stour and others were wont to treat him. Not only that, but he seemed to derive a sort of gratification from it, and was wont to repeat – I was almost going to say that he would boast of – these acts of overbearance to which he was so often subjected.

"Another of the stiff-necked sort," he would say after he had bowed one of these fine Gentlemen obsequiously out of his office. "An honest, God-fearing Man is as dirt beneath the feet of these Gallants."

My Lord Stour, of a truth, was no exception to the rule. I have since been assured that he was quite kindly and gracious in himself, and that his faults were those of the Milieu in which he had been brought up, rather than of himself.

Of course, You, dear Mistress, were out of the house during the whole of that never-to-be-forgotten day of which I am about to speak, and therefore knew nothing of the terrible Event which then occurred and which, in my humble judgment, completely revolutionized Mr. Betterton's character for the time being. But Fate had decreed that I should see it all. Every moment of that awful afternoon is indelibly graven upon my Memory. I had, however, neither the Chance nor the Opportunity to speak to You of it all. At first I did not think that it would be expedient. The humiliation which Mr. Betterton was made to endure on that day was such that I could not bear to speak of it, least of all to You, who still held him in such high esteem. And later on, I still thought it best to be silent. Mr. Betterton and You seemed to have drifted apart so completely, that I did not feel that it would do any good to rake up old hurts, and to submit them to the cruel light of day.

But now everything is changed. The Lady Barbara's influence over Mr. Betterton has gone, never to return; whilst his Heart once more yearns for the only true Love which has ever gladdened it.

4

My Lord Stour came to call upon Mr. Theophilus Baggs at three o'clock of the afternoon. Kathleen, the maid of all work, opened the door to him, and Mistress Euphrosine received him in the Parlour, where I was also sitting at my desk, engaged in copying out a lengthy Indenture.

"Master Baggs awaits me, I think," my Lord said as he entered the room.

Mistress Euphrosine made a deep curtsy, for she was ever fond of the Aristocracy.

"Will you deign to enter, my Lord?" she said. "My husband will wait upon your pleasure."

"Tell him to be quick, then," said my Lord; "for I have not a great deal of time to spare."

He seated himself beside the table and drew off his gloves. He had taken absolutely no notice of my respectful salutation.

Mistress Euphrosine sailed out of the room and a moment or two later Mr. Baggs came in, carrying a sheaf of papers and looking very fussy and obsequious.

My Lord did not rise to greet him, only turned his head in his direction and said curtly:

"You are Mr. Theophilus Baggs, Attorney-at-law?"

"At your Lordship's service," replied my employer.

"Brother-in-law of Tom Betterton, the Actor, so I am told," my Lord went on with quiet condescension.

This innocent remark, however, appeared to upset Mr. Baggs. He stammered and grew as red as a turkey-cock, not realizing that his connection with the great Actor was truly an honour upon his Name. He hemmed and hawed and looked unutterably foolish, as he mumbled confusedly:

"Er ... that is ... only occasionally, my Lord ... very occasionally, I may say ... that is ... I..."

"Pray calm yourself," broke in my Lord haughtily. "I admire the fellow's acting ... the Man himself does not exist for me."

"You are most gracious, my Lord," murmured Mr. Baggs promptly, whilst I could have struck him for his obsequiousness and his Lordship for his arrogance.

It seems that the matter which had brought Lord Stour to Mr. Baggs' office was one of monies connected with the winding-up of the affairs of the late Earl, uncle of the present Peer. I was busy with my work during the time that these affairs were being discussed and did not pay much heed to the conversation. Only two fragments thereof struck mine ear. I remember, chiefly because they were so characteristic of the two men – the Aristocrat and the Plebeian – and of the times in which we live.

At one time Mr. Baggs ventured to enquire after the health of the Honourable Mrs. Stourcliffe, his Lordship's mother; and you should have heard the tone of frigid pride wherewith my Lord seemed to repel any such presumptuous enquiries.

The other fragment which I overheard was towards the end of the interview, when Mr. Theophilus Baggs, having counted over the Money before his Lordship, placed a Paper before him and bade me bring him a pen.

"What's this?" queried my Lord, astonished.

"Oh!" Mr. Baggs stammered, with his habitual humility of demeanour, "a mere formality, my Lord ... er ... h'm ... only a ... er ... receipt."

"A receipt?" my Lord asked, with an elevation of his aristocratic brows. "What for?"

"Er ... er..." Mr. Baggs stammered. "For the monies, my Lord. That is ... er ... if you will deign to count it over yourself ... and see that it is correct."

At this, my Lord rose from his seat, waved me aside, took and pocketed the money. Then he said coolly to Mr. Baggs:

"No, Sir; I do not care to count. My Uncle knew You to be honest, or he would not have placed his affairs in your hands. That is sufficient for me. I, on the other hand, have received the money... That is sufficient for You."

"But – !" ejaculated Mr. Baggs, driven out of his timidity by such summary procedure.

"Egad, Sir!" broke in my Lord, more haughtily than before. "Are you perchance supposing that I might claim money which I have already had?"

"No ... no!" protested Mr. Baggs hastily. "I assure you, my Lord ... er ... that it is ... h'm ... a mere formality ... and..."

"My word," retorted my Lord coolly, "is sufficient formality."

Whereupon he turned to the door, taking no more notice of me than if I were the doormat. He nodded to Mr. Baggs, who was of a truth too deeply shaken to speak, and with a curt "I wish you good-day, Mr. Notary!" strode out of the room.

I doubt not, Mistress, that You and many others of gentle Manners if not of gentle Birth, would think that in recounting this brief interview between my employer and the young Earl of Stour, I have been guilty of exaggeration in depicting my Lord's arrogance. Yet, on my word, it all occurred just as I have told it. No doubt that Mr. Baggs' obsequiousness must have been irritating, and that it literally called forth the haughty Retort which otherwise might have remained unspoken. I myself,

humble and insignificant as I am, have oft felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to kick my worthy Employer into some measure of manliness.

For let me assure You that, though subsequently I became more closely acquainted with my Lord Stour, I never heard him use such haughty language to any of his Dependents, nor do I think that so gentle a Lady as Lady Barbara Wychwoode would have bestowed her fondness and regard upon him had his Nature been as supercilious and as insolent as his Words.

5

That afternoon was indeed destined to be fuller of events than I ever could have anticipated. No sooner had I closed the door upon my Lord Stour, when I heard footsteps ascending the stairs, and then my Lord's voice raised once more, this time with a tone of pleasure mingled with astonishment.

"Wychwoode, by gad!" he exclaimed. "And what in Heaven's name have you come to do in the old fox's lair?"

I did not hear the immediate reply. More fussy than ever, Mr. Baggs had already signed to me to reopen the door.

"Lord Douglas Wychwoode," he murmured hurriedly in my ear. "One of the younger sons of the Marquis of Sidbury. I am indeed fortunate to-day. The scions of our great Nobility do seek my help and counsel..." and more such senseless words did he utter, whilst the two young Gentlemen paused for a moment upon the landing, talking with one another.

"I thought you still in France," Lord Douglas said to his friend. "What hath brought you home so unexpectedly?"

"I only arrived this morning," the other replied; "and hoped to present my respects this evening, if your Father and the Lady Barbara will receive me."

"Indeed, they'll be delighted. *Cela va sans dire*, my friend. My sister has been rather pensive of late. Your prolonged absence may have had something to do with her mood."

"May you speak the truth there!" my Lord Stour remarked with a sigh.

"But now you have not told me," rejoined Lord Douglas, as he and his friend finally went into the room and curtly acknowledged Mr. Baggs' reiterated salutations, "what hath brought you to the house of this bobbing old Thief yonder."

"Private business," replied Lord Stour. "And you?"

"The affairs of England," said the other, and tossed his head proudly like some young Lion scenting battle.

Before his friend could utter another remark, Lord Douglas strode rapidly across the room, took some papers out of the inner pocket of his coat, and called to Mr. Baggs to come up closer to him.

"I want," he said in a quick and peremptory whisper, "a dozen copies of this Deed done at once and by a sure hand. Can you do it?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Mr. Baggs. "May I see what the paper is?"

I was watching the pair of them; so was my Lord Stour. On his face there came a sudden frown as of disapproval and anxiety.

"Wychwoode – !" he began.

But the other did not heed him. His eyes – which were so like those of his Sister – were fixed with an eager, questioning gaze upon my Employer. The latter's face was absolutely expressionless and inscrutable whilst he scanned the paper which Lord Douglas, after a scarce perceptible moment of hesitation, had handed to him for perusal.

"Yes," he said quietly, when he had finished reading. "It can be done."

"At once?" asked Lord Douglas.

"At once. Yes, my Lord."

"By a sure hand?"

"Discretion, my Lord," replied Mr. Baggs, with the first show of dignity I have ever seen him display, "is a virtue in my profession, the failing in which would be a lasting disgrace."

"I rely even more upon your convictions, Mr. Baggs," Lord Douglas rejoined earnestly, "than upon your virtues."

"You and your friends, my Lord, have deigned to talk those matters over with me many a time before. You and they know that You can count on me."

Mr. Baggs spoke with more Quietude and Simplicity than was his wont when dealing with some of these noble Lords. You may be sure, dear Mistress, that I was vastly astonished at what I heard, still more at what I guessed. That Mr. Baggs and his Spouse belonged to the old Puritan Party which had deplored the Restoration of the Kingship, I knew well enough. I knew that both he and Mistress Euphresine looked with feelings akin to horror upon a system of Government which had for its supreme head a King, more than half addicted to Popery and wholly to fast living, with women, gambling and drinking all the day. But what I had never even remotely guessed until now was that he had already lent a helping hand to those numerous Organisations, which had for their object the overthrow of the present loose form of Government, if not that of the Monarchy itself.

I did not know, in fact, that beneath a weak and obsequious exterior, my Employer hid the stuff of which dangerous Conspirators are often made.

For the nonce, however, I imagine that he contented himself with writing out Deeds and Proclamations for the more important Malcontents, of whom apparently my Lord Douglas Wychwoode was one. He had never taken me into his confidence, even though he must have known that he could always rely upon my Discretion. What caused him to trust me now more than he had done before, I do not know. Perhaps he had come to a final decision to throw in his lot with the ultra-Protestant party, who viewed with such marked disfavour the projects of the King's marriage with the Popish Princess of Portugal. Certain it is that he came to me without any hesitation with the Papers which Lord Douglas had just entrusted to him, and that he at once ordered me to make the twelve copies which his Lordship desired.

I retired within the window-recess which You know so well, and wherein I am wont to sit at my copying work. Mr. Baggs then set me to my task, after which he drew the screen across the recess, so that I remained hidden from the view of those who were still in the room. I set to with a Will, for my task was a heavy one. Twelve copies of a Manifesto, which in itself covered two long pages.

A Manifesto, in truth!

I could scarce believe mine eyes as I read the whole rambling, foolish, hot-headed Rigmarole. Did I not have the Paper actually in my hand, had I not seen Lord Douglas Wychwoode handing it himself over to Mr. Baggs, I could not have believed that any Men in their sober senses could have lent a hand to such criminal Folly.

Folly it was; and criminal to boot!

The whole matter is past History now, and there can be no harm in my relating it when so much of it hath long ago been made public.

That Manifesto was nothing more or less than an Appeal to certain Sympathizers to join in one of the maddest enterprises any man could conceive. It seems that my Lady Castlemaine's house was to be kept watched by Parties of these same Conspirators, until one night when the King paid her one of his customary evening Visits. Then the signal was to be given, the House surrounded, my Lady Castlemaine kidnapped, His Majesty seized and forced to abdicate in favour of the young Duke of Monmouth, who would then be proclaimed King of England, with the Prince of Orange as Regent.

Now, have you ever heard of anything more mad? I assure You that I was literally staggered, and as my Pen went wearily scratching over the Paper I felt as if I were in a dream, seeing before me visions of what the end of such a foolish Scheme would be: the Hangman busy, the Prisons filled, sorrow and desolation in many homes that had hoped to find peace at last after the turmoil of the past twenty years. For the appeals were directed to well accredited people outside London, some of

whom were connected with the best known Families in the Country. I must, of course, refrain from mentioning names that have been allowed to fall into oblivion in connection with the affair; but You, dear Mistress, would indeed be astonished if You heard them now.

And what caused me so much worry, whilst I wrote on till my hand felt cramped and stiff, was mine own Helplessness in the matter. What could I do, short of betraying the trust which was reposed in me? – and this, of course, was unthinkable.

I wrote on, feeling ever more dazed and dumb. From the other side of the screen the Voices of the two young Gentlemen came at times to mine ear with unusual clearness, at others only like an intermittent hum. Mr. Baggs had apparently left the room, and the others had no doubt become wholly oblivious of my Presence. Lord Douglas Wychwoode had told his Friend something of his madcap Schemes; his voice sounded both eager and enthusiastic. But my Lord Stour demurred.

"I am a Soldier," he said at one time; "not a Politician."

"That's just it!" the other argued with earnestness. "It is Men like you that we want. We must crush that spendthrift Wanton who holds the King in her thrall, and we must force a dishonoured Monarch to give up the Crown of England to one who is worthier to wear it, since he himself, even in these few brief months, has already covered it with infamy."

"You have set yourself a difficult task, my friend," my Lord Stour urged more soberly; "and a dangerous one, too."

"Only difficult and dangerous," retorted Lord Douglas, "whilst such Men as you still hold aloof."

"I tell you, I am no Politician," his Friend rejoined somewhat impatiently.

"But You are a Man, and not a senseless profligate – an earnest Protestant, who must loathe that cobweb of Popery which overlies the King's every Action, and blurs his vision of duty and of dignity."

"Yes – but –"

Then it was that Lord Douglas, with great patience and earnestness, gave to his Friend a detailed account of his criminal Scheme – for criminal it was, however much it might be disguised under the cloak of patriotism and religious fervour. How Lord Stour received the communication, I could not say. I had ceased to listen and was concentrating my mind on my uncongenial task. Moreover, I fancy that Lord Stour did not say much. He must have disapproved of it, as any right-minded Man would, and no doubt tried his best to bring Lord Douglas to a more rational state of mind. But this is mere conjecture on my part, and, of course, I could not see his face, which would have been a clear index to his thoughts. At one time I heard him exclaim indignantly:

"But surely You will not entrust the distribution of those Manifestos, which may cost you your head, to that obsequious and mealy-mouthed notary?"

Mr. Baggs should have heard the contempt wherewith my Lord uttered those words! It would have taught him how little regard his servile ways had won for him, and how much more thoroughly would he have been respected had he adopted a more manly bearing towards his Clients, however highly these may have been placed.

After this, Lord Douglas Wychwoode became even more persuasive and eager. Perhaps he had noted the first signs of yielding in the Attitude of his Friend.

"No, no!" he said. "And that is our serious trouble. I and those who are at one with me feel that we are surrounded with spies. We do want a sure Hand – a Hand that will not err and that we can trust – to distribute the Manifestos, and, if possible, to bring us back decisive Answers. Some of the Men with whom we wish to communicate live at some considerable distance from town. We only wish to approach influential people; but some of these seldom come to London; in fact, with the exception of the Members of a venal Government and of a few effete Peers as profligate as the King himself, but few Men, worthy of the name, do elect to live in this degenerate City."

His talk was somewhat rambling; perhaps I did not catch all that he said. After awhile Lord Stour remarked casually:

"And so You thought of me as your possible Emissary?"

"Was I wrong?" retorted Lord Douglas hotly.

"Nay, my friend," rejoined the other coldly. "I am honoured by this trust which You would place in me; but –"

"But You refuse?" broke in Lord Douglas with bitter reproach.

I imagine that my Lord Stour's reply must have been an unsatisfactory one to his Friend, for the latter uttered an exclamation of supreme impatience. I heard but little more of their conversation just then, for the noise in the Street below, which had been attracting my Attention on and off for some time, now grew in intensity, and, curious to know what it portended, I rose from my chair and leaned out of the window to see what was happening.

From the window, as You know, one gets a view of the corner of our Street as it debouches into Fleet Street by the *Spread Eagle* tavern, and even the restricted View which I thus had showed me at once that some kind of rioting was going on. Not rioting of an ordinary kind, for of a truth we who live in the heart of the City of London are used to its many cries; to the "Make way there!" of the Sedan Chairman and the "Make room there!" of the Drivers of wheel-barrows, all mingling with the "Stand up there, you blind dog!" bawled by every Carman as he tries to squeeze his way through the throngs in the streets.

No! this time it seemed more than that, and I, who had seen the crowds which filled the Streets of London from end to end on the occasion of the death of the Lord Protector, and had seen the merry-makers who had made those same streets impassable when King Charles entered London a little more than a year ago, I soon realized that the Crowd which I saw flocking both up and down Fleet Street was in an ugly mood.

At first I thought that some of those abominable vagabonds from Whitefriars – those whom we call the Alsatians, and who are in perpetual conflict with the law – had come out in a body from their sink of iniquity close by and had started one of their periodical combats with the Sheriffs' Officers; but soon I recognized some faces familiar to me among the crowd as they ran past the corner – Men, Women and Boys who, though of a rough and turbulent Character, could in no way be confounded with the law-breaking Alsatians.

There was, for instance, the Tinker, whom I knew well by sight. He was running along, knocking his skillets and frying-pans against one another as he passed, shouting lustily the while. Then there was a sooty chimney-sweep, whom I knew to be an honest Man, and the broom Men with their Boys, and many law-abiding Pedestrians who, fearful of the crowd, were walking in the traffic way, meekly giving the wall to the more roisterous throng. They all seemed to be a part of that same Crowd which was scampering and hurrying up and down Fleet Street, shouting and causing a disturbance such as I do not remember ever having seen before.

I should have liked to have gazed out of the Window until I had ascertained positively what the noise was about; but I remembered that my task was only half-accomplished and that I had at the least another half-dozen Manifestos to write out. I was on the point of sitting down once more to my Work when I heard Lord Douglas Wychwoode's voice quite close to the screen, saying anxiously, as if in answer to some remark made by his friend:

"I trust not. My Sister is out in her chair somewhere in this neighbourhood, and only with her two Bearers."

Apparently the two Gentlemen's attention had also been arrested by the tumult. The next moment Mr. Theophilus Baggs came in, and immediately they both plied him simultaneously with questions. "What were those strange cries in the street? Was there likely to be a riot? What was the cause of the tumult?" All of which Mr. Baggs felt himself unable to answer. In the end, he said that he would walk down to the corner of the Street and ascertain what was happening.

Enconced within the window recess and hidden from view by the screen, I soon gave up all attempt at continuing my work. Somehow, the two Gentlemen's anxiety about the Lady Barbara had

communicated itself to me. But my thoughts, of course, were of You. Fortunately for my peace of mind, I knew that You were safe; at some distance, in fact, from the scene of the present tumult. Nevertheless, I had already made up my mind that if the rioting spread to the neighbouring streets, I would slip out presently and go as far as Dorset Gardens, where you were busy at rehearsal, and there wait for you until you came out of the Theatre, when, if you were unattended, I could escort you home.

I could not myself have explained why the Noise outside and the obvious rough temper of the People should have agitated me as they undoubtedly did.

Anon, Mr. Baggs returned with a veritable sackful of news.

"There is a great tumult all down the neighbourhood," said he, "because Lady Castlemaine is even now at the India House drinking tea, and a lot of rowdy folk have made up their minds to give her a rough welcome when she comes out. She is not popular just now, my Lady Castlemaine," Mr. Baggs continued complacently, as he gave a look of understanding to Lord Douglas Wychwoode, "And I fancy that she will experience an unpleasant quarter of an hour presently."

"But, surely," protested my Lord Stour, "a whole mob will not be allowed to attack a defenceless woman, however unpopular she may be!"

"Oh, as to that," rejoined Mr. Baggs with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders, "a London mob is not like to be squeamish when its temper is aroused; and just now, when work is scarce and food very dear, the sight of her Ladyship's gorgeous liveries are apt to exasperate those who have an empty stomach."

"But what will they do to her?" urged my Lord, whose manly feelings were evidently outraged at the prospect of seeing any Woman a prey to an angry rabble.

"That I cannot tell you, my Lord," replied Mr. Baggs. "The crowd hath several ways of showing its displeasure. You know, when a Frenchman or some other Foreigner shows his face in the Streets of London, how soon he becomes the butt of passing missiles. The sweep will leave a sooty imprint upon his coat; a baker's basket will cover him with dust; at every hackney-coach stand, some facetious coachman will puff the froth of his beer into his face. Well! you may draw your own conclusions, my Lord, as to what will happen anon, when my Lady Castlemaine hath finished drinking her dish of tea!"

"But surely no one would treat a Lady so?" once more ejaculated my Lord Stour hotly.

"Perhaps not," retorted Mr. Baggs drily. "But then you, see, my Lord, Lady Castlemaine is ... Well; she is Lady Castlemaine ... and at the corner of our street just now I heard murmurs of the Pillory or even worse for her –"

"But this is monstrous – infamous –!"

"And will be well deserved," here broke in Lord Douglas decisively. "Fie on You, Friend, to worry over that baggage, whilst we are still in doubt if my Sister be safe."

"Yes!" murmured Lord Stour, with a sudden note of deep solicitude in his voice. "My God! I was forgetting!"

He ran to the window – the one next to the recess where I still remained ensconced – threw open the casement and gazed out even more anxiously than I had been doing all along. Mr. Baggs in the meanwhile endeavoured to reassure Lord Douglas.

"If," he said, "her Ladyship knows that your Lordship hath come here to visit me, she may seek shelter under my humble roof."

"God grant that she may!" rejoined the young Man fervently.

We all were on tenterhooks, I as much as the others; and we all gazed out agitatedly in the direction of Fleet Street. Then, all at once, my Lord Stour gave a cry of relief.

"There's the chaise!" he exclaimed. "It has just turned the corner of this street... No! not that way, Douglas ... on your right... That is Lady Barbara's chaise, is it not?"

"Yes, it is!" ejaculated the other. "Thank Heaven, her man Pyncheon has had the good sense to bring her here. Quick, Mr. Notary!" he added. "The door!"

The next moment a Sedan chair borne by two men in handsome liveries of blue and silver came to a halt just below. Already Mr. Baggs had hurried down the stairs. He would, I know, yield to no one in the privilege of being the first to make the Lady Barbara welcome in his House. The Excitement and Anxiety were momentarily over, and I could view quite composedly from above the beautiful Lady Barbara as she stepped out of her Chair, a little flurried obviously, for she clasped and unclasped her cloak with a nervy, trembling hand.

A second or two later, I heard her high-heeled shoes pattering up the stairs, whilst her Men with the Chair sought refuge in a quiet tavern higher up in Chancery Lane.

CHAPTER IV

MORE THAN A PASSING FANCY

1

I would that You, fair Mistress, had seen the Lady Barbara Wychwoode as I beheld her on that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon, her Cheeks of a delicate pallor, her golden Hair slightly disarranged, her Lips trembling with excitement. You, who are so inexpressibly beautiful, would have been generous enough to give ungrudging Admiration to what was so passing fair.

She was panting a little, for obviously she had been scared, and clung to her Brother as if for protection. But I noticed that directly she entered the room her Eyes encountered those of my Lord Stour, and that at sight of him a happy smile at once over-spread and illumined her Face.

"I am so thankful, Douglas, dear," she said, "that Pyncheon happened to know you were here. He also knew the way to Mr. Baggs' house, and as soon as he realized that the crowd in Fleet Street was no ordinary one, he literally took to his heels and brought me along here in amazingly quick time. But, oh!" she added lightly, "I can tell You that I was scared. My heart went thumping and I have not yet recovered my breath."

Her cheeks now had become suffused with a blush and her blue eyes sparkled, more with excitement than fear, I imagined. Certain it is that her Beauty was enhanced thereby. But Lord Douglas, with a Brother's privilege, shrugged his shoulders and said with a show of banter:

"Methinks, Babs, dear, that your heart hath chiefly gone a-thumping because you are surprised at finding Stour here."

She gave a gay little laugh – the laugh of one who is sure of Love and of Happiness; the same laugh, dear Mistress, for which I have hearkened of late in vain from You.

"I only arrived in London this morning," my Lord Stour explained.

"And hastened to pay your respects to the law rather than to me," Lady Barbara taunted him lightly.

"I would not have ventured to present myself at this hour," he rejoined. "And, apparently, would have found the Lady Barbara from home."

"So a beneficent Fairy whispered to You to go and see Mr. Notary, and thus arranged everything for the best."

"The beneficent Fairy had her work cut out, then," Lord Douglas remarked, somewhat impatiently, I thought.

"How do you mean?" she retorted.

"Why," said he, "in order to secure this tryst, the beneficent Fairy had first to bring me hither as well as Stour, and Lady Castlemaine to the India House. Then she had to inflame the temper of a whole Crowd of Roisterers sufficiently to cause the worthy Pyncheon to take to his heels, with you in the chair. In fact, the good Fairy must have been to endless trouble to arrange this meeting 'twixt Lady Barbara and her Lover, when but a few hours later that same meeting would have come about quite naturally."

"Nay, then!" she riposted with perfect good humour, "let us call it a happy Coincidence, and say no more about it."

Even then her Brother uttered an angry exclamation. He appeared irritated by the placidity and good humour of the others. His nerves were evidently on edge, and while my Lord Stour, with the egoism peculiar to Lovers, became absorbed in whispering sweet nothings in Lady Barbara's ears, Lord Douglas took to pacing up and down the Room like some impatient Animal.

I watched the three of them with ever-growing interest. Being very sensitive to outward influences, I was suddenly obsessed with the feeling that through some means or other these three Persons, so far above me in station, would somehow become intermixed with my Life, and that it had suddenly become my Duty to watch them and to listen to what they were saying.

I had no desire to pry upon them, of course; so I pray You do not misunderstand nor condemn me for thus remaining hidden behind the screen and for not betraying my Presence to them all. Certainly my Lord Stour and Lord Douglas Wychwoode had known at one time that I was in the Room. They had seen me installed in the window-recess, with the treasonable Manifestos which I had been set to copy. But since then the two Gentlemen had obviously become wholly oblivious of my Presence, and the Lady Barbara did not of course even know of my Existence, whilst I did not feel disposed to reveal myself to any of them just yet.

2

Lord Douglas, thereafter, was for braving the Rioters and for returning home. But Lady Barbara and Lord Stour, feeling happy in one another's Company, were quite content to bide for a time under Mr. Baggs' sheltering roof.

"You must have patience, Douglas," she said to her Brother. "I assure you that the Streets are not safe. Some rowdy Folk have set themselves to attacking every chair they see and tearing the gold and silver lace from the Chairmen's liveries. Even the side-streets are thronged. Pyncheon will tell you of the difficulty he had in bringing me here."

"But we cannot wait until night!" Lord Douglas urged impatiently.

"No!" said she. "Only an hour or two. As soon as the people have seen Lady Castlemaine and have vented their wrath on her, they will begin to disperse, chiefly into the neighbouring Taverns, and then we can slip quietly away."

"Or else," broke in Lord Stour hotly, "surely the watchmen will come anon and disperse that rabble ere it vents its spite upon a defenceless Woman!"

"A defenceless Woman, you call her, my Lord?" Lady Barbara retorted reproachfully. "She is the most dangerous Enemy England hath at this moment!"

"You are severe, Lady Barbara –"

"Severe!" she exclaimed, with a vehement tone of resentment. "Ah! you have been absent, my Lord. You do not know – You do not understand! Over abroad You did not realise the Misery, the Famine, that is stalking our land. Money that should be spent on reclaiming our Industries, which have suffered through twenty years of civil strife, or in helping the poor to tide over these years of lean Harvests, is being lavished by an irresponsible Monarch upon a greedy Wanton, who –"

"Barbara!"

She paused, recalled to herself by the stern voice of her Brother. She had allowed her Indignation to master her maidenly reserve. Her cheeks were aflame now, her lips quivering with Passion. Of a truth, she was a Woman to be admired, for, unlike most of her sex, she had profound feelings of Patriotism and of Charity; she had valour, enthusiasm, temperament, and was not ashamed to speak what was in her mind. I watched my Lord Stour while she spoke, and saw how deeply he worshipped her. Now she encountered his Gaze, and heavy tears came into her Eyes.

"Ah, my Lord," she said gently, "you will see sadder sights in the Streets of London to-day than ever you did in the Wars after the fiercest Battles."

"'Tis no use appealing to him, Babs," Lord Douglas interposed with obvious exacerbation. "A moment ago I told him of our Plans. I begged him to lend us his sword and his hand to strike a blow at the Profligacy and Wantonness which is sending England to perdition worse than ever before –"

Lady Barbara turned great, reproachful eyes on my Lord.

"And you refused?" she whispered.

My Lord looked confused. All at once, I knew that he was already wavering. A weak Man, perhaps; he was deeply, desperately enamoured. I gathered that he had not seen the Lady Barbara for some months. No doubt his Soul hungered for her Smiles. He was the sort of Man, methinks, who would barter everything – even Honour – for the Woman he loved. And I do not think that he cared for much beyond that. His Father, an you remember, fought on the Parliament side. I do not say that he was one of the Regicides, but he did not raise a finger to help or to serve his King. And he had been a rigid Protestant. All the Stourcliffes of Stour were that; and the present Earl's allegiance to King Charles could only have been very perfunctory. Besides which, this is the age of Conspiracies and of political Factions. I doubt not but it will be another twenty years before the Country is really satisfied with its form of Government. I myself – though God knows I am but a humble Clerk – could wish that this Popish marriage for the King had not been decided on. We do not want religious factions warring with one another again.

But all this is beside the mark, nor would I dwell on it save for my desire to be, above all, just to these three People who were destined to do the Man I love best in the world an irreparable injury.

As I said before, I could see that my Lord Stour was hesitating. Now Lady Barbara invited him to sit beside her upon the Sofa, and she began talking to him quietly and earnestly, Lord Douglas only putting in a word or so now and again. What they said hath little to do with the portent of my Narrative, nor will I plague You with the telling of it. Those people are nothing to You; they have nothing to do with humble Plebeians like ourselves; they are a class apart, and we should never mix ourselves up with them or their affairs, as Mr. Betterton hath since learned to his hurt.

3

While they were talking together, the three of them, I tried once more to concentrate my mind upon my work, and finished off another two or three copies of the treasonable Manifesto.

All this while, you must remember that the noise and rowdiness in the streets had in no way diminished. Rather had it grown in intensity. The people whom I watched from time to time and saw darting down Chancery Lane or across the corner of Fleet Street, looked more excited, more bent on mischief, than before. I had seen a few stones flying about, and once or twice heard the ominous crash of broken glass.

Then suddenly there came an immense Cry, which was not unlike the snarling of hundreds of angry Beasts. I knew what that meant. My Lady Castlemaine was either on the point of quitting the India House or had been otherwise spied by the Populace. I could no longer restrain my Curiosity. Once more I cast my papers aside and leaned out of the window. The shouting and booing had become more and more ominous. Apparently, too, a company of the City Watchmen had arrived. They were trying to force through the throng, and their calls of "Make way there!" sounded more and more peremptory. But what was a handful of Watchmen beside an excited crowd of Rioters determined to wreak their temper upon an unpopular bit of baggage? I doubt not but that His Majesty's Body-guard could alone restore order now and compass the safety of the Lady.

As I leaned out of the Window I could see stones and miscellaneous missiles flying in every direction; and then suddenly I had a clear vision of a gorgeous Sedan Chair escorted by a dozen or more City Watchmen, who were trying to forge a way for it through the Crowd. They were trying to reach the corner of our Street, hoping no doubt to turn up this way and thus effect an escape by way of the Lower Lincoln's Inn Fields and Drury Lane, while the Crowd would of necessity be kept back through the narrowness of the Streets and the intricacies of the Alleys.

The whole point now was whether the Chairmen could reach our corner before the Roisterers had succeeded in beating back the Watchmen, when of course they meant to tear Lady Castlemaine out of her chair. Poor, wretched Woman! She must have been terribly frightened. I know that I myself felt woefully agitated. Leaning out toward the street, I could see Lady Barbara's pretty head at the

next window and my Lord Stour and Lord Douglas close beside her. They too had forgotten all about their talk and their plans and Conspiracies, and were gazing out on the exciting Spectacle with mixed feelings, I make no doubt. As for me, I feel quite sure that but for my sense of utter helplessness, I should have rushed out even then and tried to lend a hand in helping an unfortunate Woman out of so terrible a Predicament, and I marvelled how deep must have been the hatred for her, felt by Gentlemen like my Lord Stour and Lord Douglas Wychwoode, that their Sense of Chivalry forsook them so completely at this Hour, that neither of them attempted to run to her aid or even suggested that she should find shelter in this House.

As for Mr. Baggs, he was not merely idly curious; he was delighted at the idea that my Lady Castlemaine should be maltreated by the mob; whilst Mistress Euphrosine's one idea was the hope that if the Rioters meant to murder the Baggage, they would not do so outside this door. She and Mr. Baggs had come running into the Parlour the moment the rioting reached its height, and of a truth, dear Mistress, you would have been amused to see us all at the three front windows of the house – three groups watching the distant and wildly exciting happenings in Fleet Street. There was I at one window; Mr. and Mrs. Baggs at the other; Lady Barbara and the two Gallants at the third. And the ejaculations which came from one set of Watchers or the other would fill several pages of my narrative.

Mistress Euphrosine was in abject fear. "Oh! I hope," cried she now and again, "that they won't come this way. There'll be murder upon our doorstep!"

My Lord Stour had just one revulsion of feeling in favour of the unfortunate Castlemaine. "Come, Douglas!" he called at one time. "Let's to her aid. Remember she is a Woman, after all!"

But Lady Barbara placed a restraining hand upon his arm, and Lord Douglas said with a rough laugh: "I would not lift a finger to defend her. Let the Devil befriend her, an he list."

And all the while the mob hissed and hooted, and stones flew like hail all around the Chaise.

"Oh! they'll murder her! They'll murder her!" called Mistress Euphrosine piously.

"And save honest men a vast deal of trouble thereby," Mr. Baggs concluded sententiously.

The Watchmen were now forging ahead. With their sticks and staves they fought their way through bravely, heading the chair towards our street. But even so, methought that they stood but little Chance of saving my Lady Castlemaine in the end. The Crowd had guessed their purpose already, and were quite ready to give Chase. The Chairmen with their heavy burden could be no match against them in a Race, and the final capture of the unfortunate Woman was only now a question of time.

Then suddenly I gave a gasp. Of a truth I could scarce believe in what I saw. Let me try and put the picture clearly before you, dear Mistress; for in truth You would have loved to see it as I did then. About half a dozen Watchmen had by great exertion succeeded in turning the corner of our Street. They were heading towards us with only a comparatively small knot of roisterers to contend against, and the panting, struggling Chairmen with the Sedan Chair were immediately behind them.

As far as I could see, the Crowd had not expected this Manoeuvre, and the sudden turning off of their prey at right angles disconcerted the foremost among them, for the space of a second or two. This gave the Chairmen a brief start up the street. But the very next moment the Crowd realized the situation, and with a wild war-cry, turned to give Chase, when a Man suddenly stepped out from nowhere in particular that I could see, unless it was from the *Spread Eagle* tavern, and stood at the bottom of the street between two posts, all alone, facing the mob.

His Appearance, I imagine, had been so unexpected as well as so sudden, that the young Roisterers in the front of the Crowd paused – like a Crowd always will when something totally unexpected doth occur. The Man, of course, had his back towards us, but I had recognized him, nor was I surprised that his Appearance did have the effect of checking for an instant that spirit of Mischief which was animating the throng. Lady Barbara and the young Gentlemen at the other window were even more astonished than I at this wholly unforeseen occurrence. They could not

understand the sudden checking of the Rioters and the comparative silence which fell upon the forefront of their ranks.

"What does it all mean?" my Lord Stour exclaimed.

"A Man between the chair and its pursuers," Lord Douglas said in amazement.

"Who is it?" queried Lady Barbara.

"Not a Gentleman," rejoined Lord Douglas; "for he would not thus stop to parley with so foul a mob. Meseems I know the figure," he added, and leaned still further out of the window, the better to take in the whole of the amazing scene. "Yes – by gad! ... It is..."

Here Mistress Euphrosine's cry of horror broke in upon us all.

"Alas!" she ejaculated piously. "'Tis that reprobate Brother of mine!"

"So it is!" added Mr. Baggs drily. "'Tis meet he should raise his voice in defence of that baggage."

"But, who is it?" insisted my Lord Stour impatiently.

"Why, Betterton the Actor," replied Lord Douglas with a laugh. "Do you not know him?"

"Only from seeing him on the stage," said the other. Then he added: "An Actor confronting a mob! By gad! the fellow hath pluck!"

"He knows," protested Mr. Baggs acidly, "that the mob will not hurt him. He hath so oft made them laugh that they look upon him as one of themselves."

"Listen!" said Lady Barbara. "You can hear him speak quite plainly."

Whereupon they all became silent.

All this, of course, had occurred in far less time than it takes to describe. Not more than a few seconds had gone by since first I saw Mr. Betterton step out from Nowhere in particular into the Street. But his Interposition had given my Lady Castlemaine's Chairmen and also the Watchmen, who were guarding her, a distinct advance. They were making the most of the respite by hurrying up our street as fast as they were able, even while the Crowd – that portion of it that stood nearest to Mr. Betterton and could hear his Voice – broke into a loud laugh at some Sally of his which had apparently caught their Fancy.

From the distance the cry was raised: "To the pillory, the Castlemaine!"

It was at this point that my Lady Barbara bade every one to listen, so that we all could hear Mr. Betterton's rich and powerful Voice quite plainly.

"Come, come, Friends!" he was saying; "the Lady will get there without your help some day, I'll warrant. Aye! and further too, an the Devil gives her her due! Now, now," he continued, when cries and murmurs, boos and hisses, strove to interrupt him. "You are not going to hiss a hard-working Actor off the Stage like this. Do, in the name of Sport, which every sound-minded Englishman loves, after all, await a fitter opportunity for molesting a defenceless Woman. What say You to adjourning to the *Spread Eagle* tavern, where mine Host hath just opened a new cask of the most delicious beer You have ever tasted? There's a large room at the back of the bar – You know it. Well! every one who goes there now – and there's room for three or four hundred of You – can drink a pint of that beer at my expense. What say You, Friends? Is it not better than to give chase to a pack of Watchmen and a pair of liveried Chairmen who are already as scared as rabbits? See! they are fast disappearing up the street. Come! who will take a pint of beer at the invitation of Tom Betterton? You know him! Is he not a jolly, good fellow?..."

Of course, he did not deliver this speech uninterruptedly. It was only snatches of it that came to our ear. But we Listeners soon caught the drift of it, and watched its reception by the Crowd. Well! the Fire-eaters gradually cooled down. The prospect of the ale at the *Spread Eagle* caused many a smack of the lips, which in its turn smothered the cries of Rage and Vituperation. Anon, One could perceive one forearm after another drawn with anticipatory Pleasure across lips that had ceased to boo.

Just then, too, Heaven interposed in a conciliatory spirit in the form of a few drops of heavy Rain, presaging a Storm. The next moment the stampede in the direction of the *Spread Eagle* tavern had begun, whilst my Lady Castlemaine's Chairmen trudged unmolested past our door.

My Lord Stour gave a loud laugh.

"'Twas well thought on," he exclaimed. "The Mountebank hath found a way to stop the Rabble's howls, whilst my Lady Baggage finds safety in flight."

But Lady Barbara added thoughtfully: "Methinks 'twas plucky to try and defend a Woman single-handed."

4

I watched the turbulent throng, filing now in orderly procession through the hospitably open doors of the *Spread Eagle* tavern. Mr. Betterton remained for awhile standing at the door, marshalling the more obstreperous of his invited Guests and parleying with Mr. Barraclough, the Host of the *Spread Eagle*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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