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1900

# MISTRESS NELL.

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## A MERRY PLAY

In Four Acts.

BY

GEORGE C. HAZELTON,

of the Philadelphia Bar.

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"Let not poor Nelly starve."—*Last words of King Charles II.*

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PHILADELPHIA

1900

C1688

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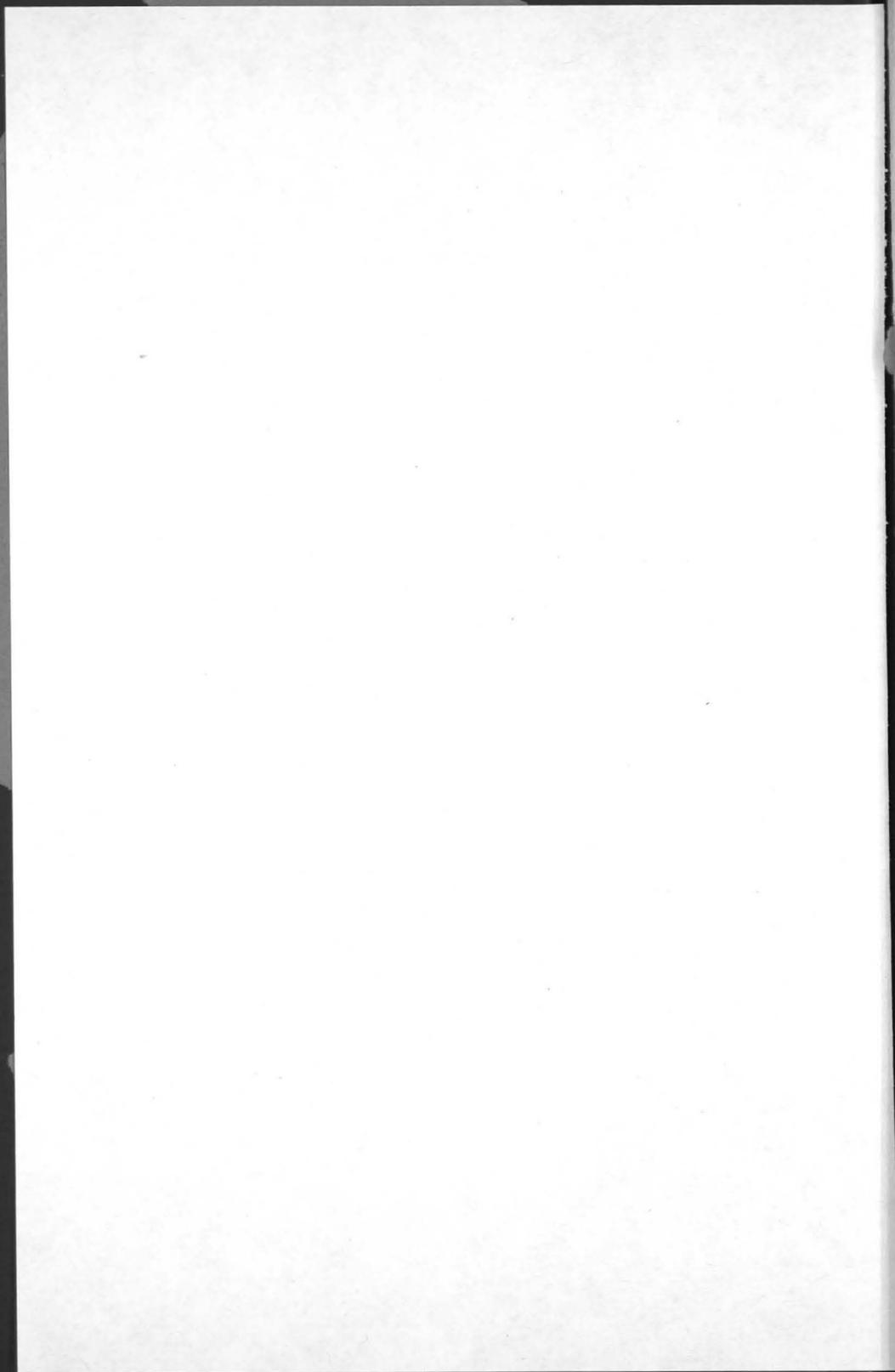
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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

KING CHARLES II.  
JAMES, Duke of York.  
DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.  
EARL OF ROCHESTER.  
JACK HART (Actor-Manager of the King's Theatre).  
STRINGS, an old fiddler (formerly of the King's Theatre  
Orchestra).  
DICK, call-boy at the King's.  
SWALLOW, His Majesty's Constable.  
BUZZARD.  
LANDLORD OF THE BLUE BOAR INN.  
OFFICER.  
PAGE.  
MOLL, an orange girl.  
LADY HAMILTON.  
LOUISE (Duchess of Portsmouth).  
NELL GWYN (Actress at the King's Theatre).  
Huntsmen, soldiers, maskers, etc.

*Act I.* Green-room at the King's Theatre. Evening of the first performance of Dryden's "Conquest of Granada."

*Act II.*

*Scene 1.*—St. James' Park before Jell's terrace by moonlight.

*Scene 2.*—The Blue Boar Inn.

*Act III.* Ball-room at Portsmouth's.

*Act IV.* Nell's at midnight.

*Period:* London in the reign of King Charles II. Some time elapses between Acts I and II; between Acts II and III, a fortnight; Acts III and IV occur the same night.

a.m.p., July 15, 1932.

ACT I.

SCENE: *Green-room at the King's Theatre. Tiring-rooms of Nell and Hart, opening off at back. Names "Mrs. Gwyn" and "Mr. Hart" on doors respectively. Doors to stage and street. First night of Dryden's "Conquest of Granada." Dick discovered posing before mirror.*

HART. (*Entering from stage, R. U. E.*) Where is my dagger, Dick? What are you doing? Get my dagger, boy. Don't you see there will be a stage wait.

DICK. Where did you leave it, sir?

HART. Never mind where I left it. Get it, get it, do you hear? Nell's on the stage already.

DICK. Why, you've got your dagger on, sir.

HART. Devil take you, boy! You are too stupid to ever make an actor. (*Exit to stage, R. 3 E.*)

DICK. How long, oh, Rome, must I endure this bondage!—"To be or not to be"—(*posing before mirror*)—

BUCK. (*Entering L. 3 E.*) Ah, boy, here! Tell Mistress Nell, Buckingham would speak with her. Lively, lad, lively!

DICK. She is on the stage, my lord.

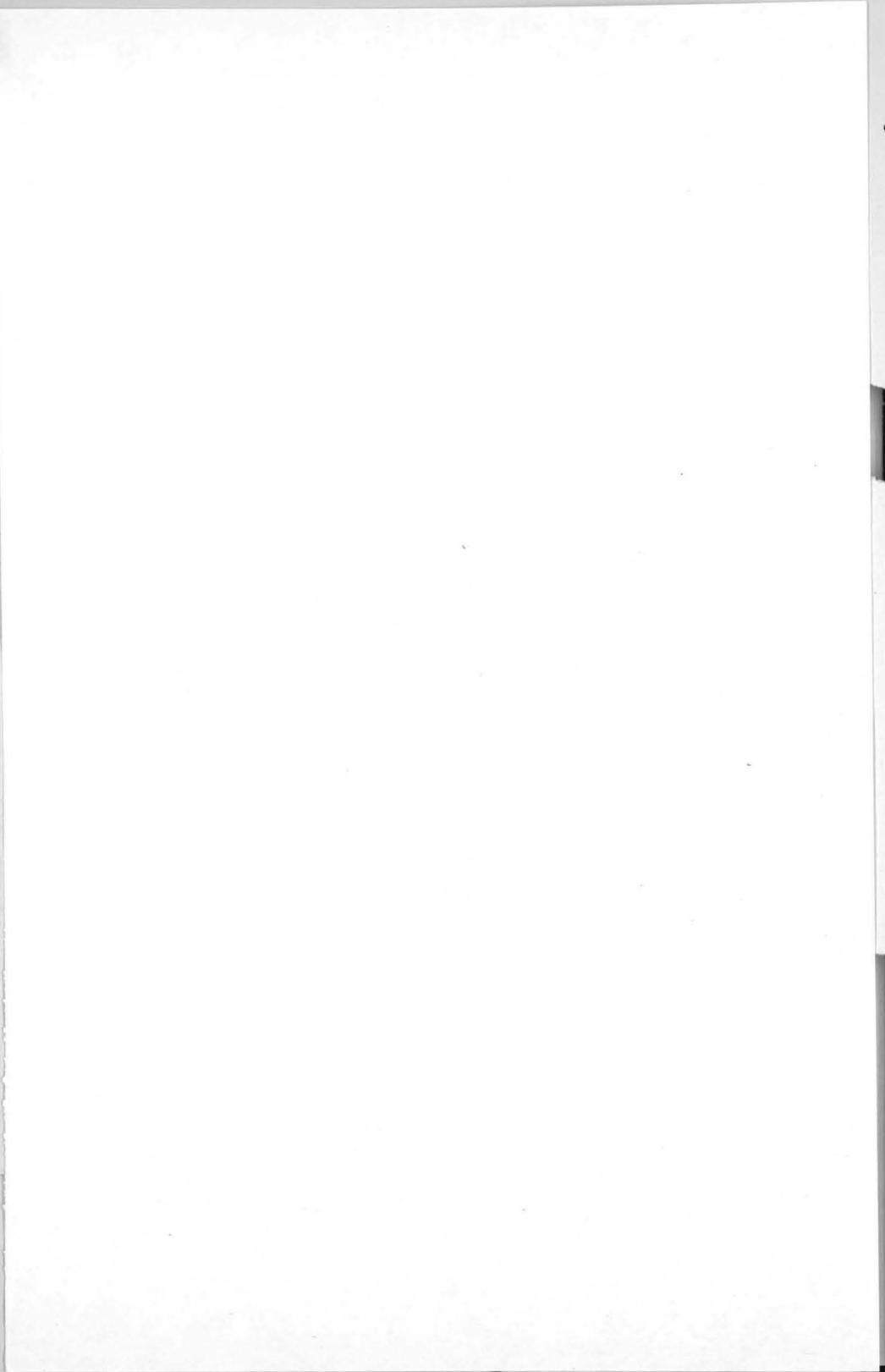
BUCK. Gad, I thought otherwise and stepped about from my box. Here, put these flowers in her tiring-room. (*Gives Dick bouquet.*)

DICK. Yes, my lord.

BUCK. (*Aside.*) Flowers strewn in ladies' ways oft lead to princely favors. Portsmouth, at Dover, told me that. Stay! You gave Mistress Nell my note, bidding her to supper?

DICK. I did, my lord.





BUCK. 'Sheart, a madrigal worthy of Bacchus! She smiled delightedly?

DICK. No, my lord, quite serious.

BUCK. Hem! Read it eagerly?

DICK. Yes, my lord,—after a time.

BUCK. Good! She folded it carefully and placed it in her bosom next her heart?

DICK. She threw it on the floor, my lord.

BUCK. My billet doux upon the floor! Plague on't, she said something, made some answer, boy?

DICK. She said your dinners made amends for your company, my lord. (*Places flowers in Nell's room, door in flat R. C.*)

BUCK. The rogue! Nelly, Nelly, your lips shall pay tribute for that. Rosy impudence! Buckingham's dinners make amends for his company! Minx! (*Sits down L, at table. Enter Moll, R. 3 F.*) Let me see, let me see.

MOLL. (*With basket of oranges.*) I am most afraid to enter here without Nell. Oranges! Will you have my oranges? Only sixpence, my lord. (*Down to Buck.*)

BUCK. What shall we have for supper? I think Nelly would like spiced tongue. Ye Gods, she has enough of that already. Ah, the vintage of—

MOLL. Oranges, only sixpence. Here is one picked for you, my lord.

BUCK. Oh, hang you, you disturb me. I am thinking, don't you perceive I am thinking? Begone!

MOLL. Only sixpence, my lord; I have not sold one.

BUCK. I have no pauper's pence. Out of my way! Rag-bag! (*He pushes her roughly away. Rises. Moll goes up stage. Enter Hart, Dick, players, lords, etc., R. 3 E.*)

HART. How can a man play when he trembles for his life lest he step upon a lord? They should be horse-whipped off the stage and, (*Sees Buck. Aside.*)—out of the green-room.

BUCK. Ah, Hart, why is Nelly so long? I desire to see her.

HART. Indeed? His Majesty and the good folk in front would doubtless gladly await your interview with Mistress Eleanor Gwyn. Shall I announce your will, my lord, unto his Majesty and stop the play?

BUCK. You grow ironical, friend Hart.

HART. Not so. I am your lordship's most obedient servant.

MOLL. Oranges! Will you have my oranges? (*Down to Hart, R. C.*) Only sixpence, sir.

HART. What are you doing here, you little imp? Back to the pit, where you belong.

MOLL. Nell told me I might come here, sir.

HART. Oh, Nell did, did she? Gadso, who is manager, I should like to know. Nell would introduce her whole trade here if she could. Every orange-peddler in London will set up a stand in the green-room at the King's, next we know. Out with you! This is a temple of art, not a market place. Out with you! (*Pushing her towards R. 3 F.*)

NELL. (*Enters between them, dressed as Almahyde.*) "O blood, Iago, blood!" Ha, ha! How now, a tragedy in the green-room! What lamb is being sacrificed? (*Moll down R.*)

HART. (*C.*) An old comrade of yours at orange-vending before you lost the art of acting.

NELL. By association with you, Jack? What is the matter, dear Moll? (*Down to Moll, R.*)

MOLL. They are all mocking me, and sent me back to the pit.

NELL. Shame on you all.

HART. Fy, fy! I'll be charitable to-morrow, Nell, after this strain is off; but a first night—

NELL. You need charity yourself?

BUCK. Pshaw! When Nell plays, we have no time to munch oranges. Let the wench bawl in the street. (*Moll cries; Nell puts arm about her.*)

NELL. Odso, my lord! It is a pity your lordship is not a player. Then the orange trade would flourish.

BUCK. Say you so, i' faith! Pray *why*, mad minx?

NELL. Your lordship would make such a good mark for the peel. (*Throws orange peel into Buckingham's face. All laugh.*)

BUCK. Devil! I would kill a man for this: a woman—I can only love.

NELL. There! Dry your eyes, Moll. Give me your basket, child. You shall be avenged still further.

HART. Great Heavens! Flee for your lives! I 'faith, here comes the veteran robber at such traffic.

NELL. Guard the doors, Moll. Don't let a rascal out. I'll do the rest. (*Picks up her queenly train, over her arm, showing petticoat. Music; sings and dances jig. Characters and players crowd about her.*)

Oranges, will you have my oranges!

Sweet as love-lips, dearest mine,  
Picked by Spanish maids divine,  
Black-eyed beauties, who, like Eve,  
With golden fruit their loves deceive!  
Buy oranges, buy oranges!

Close your eyes, when these you taste,  
Think your arm about her waist,  
Thus with sixpence may you win  
Happiness unstained with sin.  
Buy oranges, buy oranges!

As the luscious fruit you sip,  
You'll wager 'tis your true-love's lip:  
Nothing sweeter since the rise  
Of wickedness in Paradise.  
Buy oranges, buy oranges!

(*Cries of "Bravo!" "Another jig!" "Hurrah for Nelly," etc.*)  
Marry, gallants, deny me after that if you dare.

DICK. (*At stage door, R. 3 E.*) Last act! All ready for the last act. (*Some players exit, R. 3 E.*)

NELL. (*Sees Buck, about to exit, L. 3 E.*) Not sa fast, my lord. I want you with me. (*Bringing him down C.*) A dozen, did you say? What a heart you have, my lord. A bountiful heart!

BUCK. A dozen! S' life, Nelly, what would I do with a dozen oranges?

NELL. Pay for them in sooth. I never give a lord credit.

BUCK. A player talk of credit? What would become of the mummers if the lords did not fill their empty pockets.

NELL. What would become of the lords if the players' brains did not try to fill their empty skulls with wits.

BUCK. If you were a man, sweet Nelly, I should answer: The lords first had *fools* at court, then supplanted them with *players*.

NELL. And being a woman, I *do* answer: And played the fools themselves, my lord? (*General laughter.*)

BUCK. Gad, I would sooner face the Dutch fleet, Nelly. Up go my hands, fair robber. (*Holding out guinea.*) Nay, keep this and your wares, too.

NELL. Do you think me a beggar? Take your possessions, every one—every orange. (*Filling his hands.*)

BUCK. What am I to do with them?

NELL. Eat them, eat them!

BUCK. All?

NELL. All!

BUCK. Damme! I cannot hold a dozen.

NELL. A chair! A chair! Would your lordship stand at the feast of gold! (*Forces him into chair by table down L. Players watch scene with delight.*)

HART. (*Aside to players up R.*) She'll pluck his fine feathers, curse his arrogance.

NELL. Your knees together, my lord. What, have they

never united in prayer! (*Forces his knees together to make a lap.*)

BUCK. They'll unite to hold thee, wench.

NELL. I throw not! They can scarce hold their own. There! (*Piles oranges on his lap and in his folded arms.*)

BUCK. I'll barter these back for my change, sweet Nell.

NELL. What change?

BUCK. I gave you a golden guinea.

NELL. I gave you a golden dozen, my lord. Oranges, who will have my oranges! (*Going among players.*)

HART. (*Crossing to Buck, down L.*) Fleeced! Ha! ha! ha!

BUCK. (*Rises. Oranges roll upon the floor.*) A plague on the wench and her dealings.

HART. You should be proud, my lord, to be robbed by so fair a hand. 'Tis an honor, I assure you, we all envy you. (*Laughing.*)

BUCK. 'Tis an old saw, Master Hart! He laughs best who laughs last.

NELL. Oranges, sweet oranges!

DICK. (*At stage door, R. 3 E.*) It's near your cue, Mistress Nell.

NELL. Six oranges left. See me sell them, Moll.

DICK. It's near your cue, Mistress Nell.

NELL. Marry, my cue will await my coming, pretty one.

DICK. (*R. C.*) Oh, don't be late, Mistress Nell. I'll buy the oranges rather than have you make a stage-wait.

NELL. (*C.*) Dear heart! Keep your pennies, Dick, and you and I will have a lark with them some fine day. Six oranges left, going, going—

HART. (*L. C.*) What are you doing, Nell? You will ruin the first night. His Majesty in front, too! Dryden will never forgive us if Granada goes wrong through our fault.

NELL. Hey day! What care I for Granada! Not a step on the stage till the basket is empty.

BUCK. Here's music for our manager! Our deepest sympathy, friend Hart.

HART. Damn your sympathy! Pardon, my lord. There goes your scene, Nell; I'll buy your oranges, when you come off.

NELL. Now or never.

HART. The Devil take the women. (*Rushes to tiring-room L. C. for purse.*)

NELL. Marry, Heaven defend, for he's got the men already.

HART. (*L. C.*) Here! Here! (*Gives purse.*) Never mind the oranges, wench! The audience will be waiting.

NELL. Faith and troth, and is not Nell worth waiting for! Ha, ha, ha! (*Empties basket over him.*) These are yours—all—all! (*Gives basket and money to Moll, R. cor.*) There, Moll, is your basket and all the trophies.

DICK. (*At stage door, R. 3 E.*) Your cue—your cue is spoken, Mistress Nell!

NELL. Forsooth, here's another orange, Master Manager. (*Throws orange, which Hart catches.*)

ALL. Your cue—your cue, Mistress Nell! (*Exit Nell, followed by Dick, Moll and players, R. 3 E. Applause off after Nell's exit.*)

BUCK. Damme! She shall rue this work. A man might as well make love to a windmill. I forgot to tell her how her gown became her. That is a careless thing to forget. Nelly, Nelly, Nelly, you are divine to-night. Your gown is simply—

HART. (*At table down L.*) My lord, come back, my lord—

BUCK. Perfection! Your eyes,—

HART. My lord, my lord, you forget—

BUCK. (*Stopping and turning.*) Hey!

HART. Your oranges, my lord.

BUCK. Plague on't! They are sour, Master Hart. (*Exit R. 3 E.*)

HART. A good exit, on my honor; but, by Heaven, he shall better it unless he takes his eyes from Nell. Great men believe themselves resistless with the fair; more often, the fair are resistless with great men. (*Exits upon stage, R. 3 E.*)

STRINGS. (*Enters cautiously, L. 3 E. Old fiddle on back. Sees oranges.*) Oons, here is a scattering of props; a warfare of the orange-wenches! A wise head comes into battle after the last shot is fired. (*Fills pockets with oranges.*) There is but one way to eat an orange; that's through a hole. (*Sucks orange. Voice off, R. 3 E.*) Oddsbud, that's one of Master Hart's love-tones. I must see Nell before he sees me, or it will be farewell, Strings. (*Knocks at Nell's tiring-room.*) Mistress Nell! Mistress Nell! (*No answer.*) Gad, there she goes on the stage as a Moorish princess. (*At R. 3 E.*) Bravo, Nelly, bravo! She's caught the lads in the pit. They worship Nell out there. Oons, Jack Hart struts about like a young game-cock at his first fight. Ho, ha, ha, ha! Look ye, little Tompkins got my old place with the fiddle. Whack, de-doodle-de-do! Whack, de-doodle, de-doodle-de-do! It will take more than catgut and horse-hair to make you a fiddler, Tommy, my boy.

DICK. (*Entering from stage, R. 3 E.*) Heigh ho! Why, Strings, I thought we would never see you again. How fares it with you?

STRINGS. (*Hides orange, which he is eating, behind him.*) Odd! A little the worse for wear, Dickey, me and the old fiddle, but still smiling with the world.

DICK. (*Clearing up the stage.*) Have an orange?

STRINGS. How; do they belong to you, Dick?

DICK. Oh, no—but—

STRINGS. How dare you offer me what don't belong to you? Honesty is the best policy. I have tried both, lad—(*Gestures angrily with hand holding orange. Sees it.*)—Oh,—well, I 'gad, I will join you, Dick. (*Both suck oranges.*) But

mind you, lad, never again offer that which is not your own; for there you are twice cursed. You make him who receives guilty of your larceny. Oons, my old wound! (*Limps.*) He becomes an accomplice in your crime. (*Sucks orange.*) So says the King's law. Hush, lad, I am devouring the evidence of your guilt. (*Sucks orange.*)

DICK. You speak with the learning of a solicitor.

STRINGS. Marry, I've often been in the presence of a judge.

DICK. Is that where you have been, Strings, all these long days?

STRINGS. (*Sits on table down L. Swings feet.*) Heaven forbid! Traveling, lad,—contemplating the world—from the King's highways. Take note, my boy, a prosperous man! I came into the world without a rag that I could call my own, and now I have an abundance. Saith the philosopher: Some are born to rags, some achieve rags, and some have rags thrust upon them.

DICK. I wish you were back with us, Strings.

STRINGS. I wish so myself. Thrice a day, I grow lonesome here.

DICK. They haven't all forgot you, Strings.

STRINGS. Right, lad! For the old fiddle is true to me yet, though there is but one string left to its dear old neck. (*Talking to his violin lovingly.*) I tell you, a fiddle's human, Dick! It laughs at my jokes alone now, Dick; it weeps at my sorrows. Ah! The fiddle is the only friend left me and the little ones at home, my lad.

DICK. —And Dick! It's a shame; that's what it is! Tompkins can't play the music like you used to, Strings.

STRINGS. Oons, it's only now and then the lord has time to make a fiddler, Dickey. (*Noise and applause off.*) Hurrah! Nell has caught them with the epilogue.

DICK. Manager Hart's coming!

STRINGS. Oh, Lord, let me be gone.

DICK. Where can you hide?

STRINGS. Behind Richard's throne-chair! It has held sinners before now. (*Gets behind large throne-chair, L., upper corner. Dick exits, L. 3 E.*)

NELL. (*Enters from stage, R. 3 E., with bouquet, followed by Hart, who walks stage angrily.*) From the hand of the King of England! The King? How like his face to the youthful cavalier who, weary and worn, reined in his steed a summer's day, now long ago, and took a gourd of water from my hand. Could it be? Pooh, pooh! I dream again. See, Jack, my flowers; are they not exquisite?

HART. He took them from Castlemaine's hand to throw to you.

NELL. The sweeter, then! Ha, ha, ha! Mayhap he was teaching the Player-King to do likewise, Jack. (*Puts flowers in vase on table, down R.*)

HART. I am in no mood for wit-thrusts. You played that scene like an icicle.

NELL. In sooth, your acting froze me.

HART. I say, you completely ruined my work. The audience were rightly displeased.

NELL. With you, perhaps. I did not observe the feeling.

HART. You vilely read those glorious lines:

"See how the gazing people crowd the space,  
All gaping to be filled with my disgrace  
That shout like the hoarse peal of vultures rings,  
When over fighting fields they beat their wings."

NELL. And how should I read them, dear master?

HART. Like I read them, in sooth.

NELL. Like you read them, in sooth. (*Repeats lines, mimicking action and voice of Hart.*)

HART. 'Tis monstrous! You cannot act and never could. I was a fool to engage you.

NELL. London applauds my acting.

HART. London applauds the face and figure, not the art.

NELL. London is wise, for the art is in the face and figure, Master Jack. You told me so yourself.

HART. I was a fool, like the rest.

NELL. Come, don't be angry. Almahyde is the last part Nell will ever play.

HART. Your head is turned by the flowers. An honest motive, no doubt, promoted the royal gift.

NELL. Jack!

HART. Pardon, Nell. My heart rebukes my tongue. I love you!

NELL. (*Fixes flowers.*) How could you help it? Others do.

HART. I love you better than the rest, better than my life. (*Tries to embrace her.*)

NELL. Not so fast, dear sir. Admit that I can act—a little—just a little—dear heart, or tell me no more of love.

HART. By heaven, Nell! I spoke in anger. You are the most marvelous actress in the world. Nature, art and genius crown your work.

NELL. I begin to think that you have taste most excellent. (*Fixes flowers.*)

HART. Sweet Nell, when I found you in the pit a ragged orange-girl, I saw the sparkle in your eye, the bright intelligence, the magic genius, which the artists love. I claimed you for my art, which is the art of arts—for it embraces all. I had the theatre. I gave it you. You captured the Lane, then London. You captured my soul as well, and held it slave.

NELL. Did I do all that, dear Jack?

HART. And more. You captured my years to come, my hope, ambition, love—all. All centered in your heart and eyes, sweet Nell, from the hour I first beheld you.

NELL. Is love so beautiful? (*Looking at flowers.*) Yea, I begin to think it is. You paint the picture well, dear Jack. Paint on.

HART. I could not paint ill with such a model.

NELL. Well said; and, by my troth, I have relented like you, dear Jack. I admit you, too, can act—and marvelously well. (*He tries to embrace her.*) Nay, not so fast.

HART. Is't true?

NELL. 'Tis true, indeed—with proper emphasis and proper art and proper intonation.

HART. I scarce can live for joy.

NELL. In faith, I trow and sadly speak but true; for I am sad at times—yes, very sad—when I observe, with all my woman's wiles and arts, I cannot act the hypocrite like men.

HART. What mean you, darling cynic?

NELL. Darling! To tell two girls within the hour you love each to the death would be in me hypocrisy beyond my art, but you men can do such things with conscience clear.

HART. (*Aside.*) She's found me out. Nell, I never loved the Spanish dancing girl. You know I love but you.

NELL. Oho! Then, why did you tell her so—to break her heart or mine?

HART. You are cruel, Nell. You never loved me, never.

NELL. Did I ever say I did? Come, don't pout, Jack. An armistice in this, my friend, for you were my friend in the old days when I needed one; and I love you for that.

HART. I'll win your life's love, Nell, in spite of you.

NELL. (*Looking at bouquet, down R.*) Nay, do not try; believe me, do not try.

HART. Nell, you do not mean—

NELL. You must not love me; believe me, you must not. (*Kisses flower from bouquet, unseen by him.*)

HART. I must not love you.

NELL. There, there! We are growing sentimental, Jack, and at our age. (*Laughs and breaks away, crossing to her tiring room.*)

HART. (*Following her.*) Sup with me, Nell. No word of this, I promise you.

NELL. Heyday, I'll see how good you are, Jack. (*Aside.*) My second bid to sup to-night. Who sets the better feast? Your hand, friend, your hand; when next you try to win a maiden's love, don't throw away her confidence, for you will never get it back again entire. (*Exits into tiring-room, R. C., where audience see her making up.*)

HART. S'life! If I do not steal my way into Nell's heart, I'll abandon the rouge-box and till the soil. (*Sees Strings.*) How now, dog! I told you not to set foot here again.

STRINGS. I thought the King's house in need of a player, so I came back, sir.

HART. Zounds! I have had enough impudence to contend with to-night. Be gone, or up you go for a vagrant.

STRINGS. I called on Mistress Gwyn, sir.

HART. Mistress Gwyn does not receive drunkards.

NELL. (*Looking from door.*) Who takes my name in vain? My old comrade, as I live. (*Crossing to him.*) I am joyed to see you, Strings. Jack, is it not good to have Strings back?

HART. Gad, I will resign management. (*Enters his tiring-room angrily.*)

NELL. Ha, ha, ha! You desert me these days, Strings.

STRINGS. I don't love your lackey-in-waiting, Mistress Nell.

NELL. Poor Jack! Never mind him. Have you kept your word to me, Strings, and stopped—drinking?

STRINGS. Mistress Nell, I—I—

NELL. There, there, don't tell me, Strings. Try again, and come and see me often.

STRINGS. Mistress Nell, you are so good to me, and I am such a wretch. I have taught my little ones at home who it is that keeps the wolf from our door.

NELL. Not a word of that! Poor old fellow! I'll bring the babes another sugar-plum to-morrow. I haven't a farth-

ing to-night. Moll ran away with the earnings, and there is no one left to rob. Heyday, take the flowers to the bright-eyes, to make them brighter. (*Ring falls from bouquet as she raises it from vase.*)

STRINGS. A ring among the flowers, Mistress Nell. (*Picking it up.*)

NELL. A ring! (*Aside.*) Bless his heart. A ring from his finger. Is it not handsome, Strings?

STRINGS. How many have rings like that while others starve.

NELL. We can moralize now we have the ring. Ha, ha, ha! Bless the giver! Alack-a-day! Why do you not take the nosegay?

STRINGS. It will not feed my little ones, Mistress Nell.

NELL. Too true! Flowers and music feed nought but love, and often then love goes hungry—very hungry.

STRINGS. Last night, Mistress Nell, the old fiddle played its sweetest melody for them, but they cried as if their tiny hearts would break. They were starving, and I had nothing but music for them.

NELL. Starving! What can I send? No, no, I cannot think of that. Starving! Yes, I will. Here, Strings, old fellow, take the ring to the babies to cut their teeth on.

STRINGS. No, Mistress Nell, it is a present. You must not.

NELL. There are others where that came from.

STRINGS. You must not; you are too kind.

NELL. Pooh, pooh! I insist. It will make a pretty mouthful; and, besides, I don't want my jewels to outshine me. (*Exits into tiring-room, door R. C. Closes curtains.*)

STRINGS. (*Down L., admiring ring unconsciously.*) To cut their teeth on! She's always joking like that, Heaven reward her.

BUCK. (*Entering R. 3 E.*) The audience is wild over Nell, simply wild. Gad, when they are stumbling home

through London fog, the great comedienne will be playing o'er the love scenes with Buckingham in a cosy corner of an inn. She will not dare deny my bid to supper, with all her impudence. Un petit super! Ha, ha, ha! 'Tis well Old Rowley was too engaged to look twice at Nelly's eyes. His Majesty shall never meet the wench at arms' length, and I can help it. (*Sees Strings.*) Ah, sirrah, inform Mistress Nell Buckingham is waiting.

STRINGS. (*Interested in ring.*) Inform her yourself! Lord Strings is not your lackey this season.

BUCK. Hey! Lord Strings! Lord Rags!

STRINGS. (*Crossing to Buck. C.*) How does that look on my bow finger, my lord?

BUCK. (*Aside.*) The King's ring! A fine stone! How came you by it?

STRINGS. Nell gave it to me.

BUCK. Nell! (*Aside.*) Has his Majesty out-generaled me? Damme, I have taken a fancy to this gem.

STRINGS. So have I.

BUCK. I'll give you fifty guineas for it.

STRINGS. Fifty guineas! Now?

BUCK. Now.

STRINGS. Oons, Nell surely meant me to sell it. (*Takes gold.*) Oddsbud, I always did love yellow.

BUCK. Give me the ring.

STRINGS. (*Gives ring.*) Done! Oons! Fifty guineas! My little bright-eyes will not go to bed hungry to-night. (*Hart enters from tiring-room, L. C., dressed to leave theatre.*)

BUCK. (*Aside to Strings.*) Hush! Not a word of this.

HART. S'death, you still here.

STRINGS. Still here, Master Hart, negotiating. When you are pressed for coin, call on me, Master Hart. I run the Exchequer. (*Tossing up coin.*)

HART. Gold! (*Looks suspiciously at Buck.*)

STRINGS. Sup with me, Hart, sup with me—venison, capons, and—Epsom water.

HART. Thank you, I am engaged to supper. (*Crosses to mirror.*)

STRINGS. Oh, very well. Strings will sup with Strings. My coach, my coach, I say. Drive me to my bonnie babes! (*Exits L. 3 E.*)

BUCK. A merry wag! Who is that?

HART. A knave of fortune, it seems.

BUCK. Family?

HART. (*Making ready to leave theatre.*) Twins, I warrant. (*Enter Dick, L. 3 E. Knocks at Nell's door.*)

BUCK. No wonder he's tattered and gray.

NELL. What is it, Dick?

DICK. A message, very important.

NELL. Thank you. (*Closes door. Dick about to exit.*)

BUCK. Ah, boy. That was Nell's voice?

DICK. Yes, my lord. She's dressing. (*Exits R. 3 E.*)

HART. She will be out shortly, my lord. (*Aside.*) But it will do you little good.

BUCK. Nell always keeps her engagements religiously with me. We are to sup together to-night, Hart.

HART. Oddso! You will be disappointed, methinks.

BUCK. I trow not. Pepy's wife has him mewed up at home when Nelly plays, and the King is tied to other apron strings. (*Aside.*) I've seen to that. What danger else?

HART. Your lordship's hours are too valuable to waste. I happen to know Mistress Gwyn sups with another to-night.

BUCK. Another?

HART. Another!

BUCK. We shall see, friend Hart. (*Sits.*)

HART. We shall see, my lord. (*Sits. They place their chairs back to back. Enter Nell, reading letter and dressed to leave theatre.*)

NELL. A fair message on my honor! Worth reading twice or even thrice. "To England's idol, the divine Eleanor Gwyn." A holy apt beginning, by the mass! (*Reads.*) "My coach awaits you at the stage door. We will toast you to-night at Whitehall." Long live his Majesty. (*Takes up flowers from table.*)

HART. You will not believe me. Here comes the arbiter of your woes, my lord. (*Rises.*)

BUCK. (*Rises.*) It will not be hard, methinks, sir, to decide between a coronet and a player's tinsel crown.

HART. (*Hand on sword.*) Have a care, my lord. I may forget—

BUCK. Your occupation, sir?

HART. Aye, my former occupation of a soldier.

NELL. How now, gentlemen! (*Comes between them.*)

HART. Pardon, Nell; a small difference of opinion, naught else.

NELL. Between friends.

BUCK. By the Gods, the rewards are worth more than word-combats.

NELL. Pshaw! True Englishmen fight shoulder to shoulder, not face to face.

BUCK. In this case, the booty cannot be amicably distributed.

NELL. Oho! Brave generals, quarreling over the spoils. Pooh, there is no girl worth fighting for—that is, not over one! Buckingham! Jack! For shame! What coquette kindles this hot blood?

HART. The fairest maid in England.

BUCK. The dearest girl in all this world.

NELL. How stupid! You must mean me! Who else could answer the description? A quarrel over poor me! This is delicious; I love a fight. Out with your swords and to't like men! To the victor belong the spoils! Come, name the quarrel.

BUCK. This player—(*Sees Nell.*)—I mean—Master Hart—labors under the misapprehension that you sup with him to-night.

HART. Nell, it is his lordship who suffers from the delusion that the first actress of England sups with him to-night.

BUCK. My arm and coach are yours, madame. (*Offers arm.*)

HART. Pardon, my lord. Nell, my arm! (*Offers his arm.*)

NELL. Heyday! Was ever maid so nobly squired? This is an embarrassment of riches. Gentlemen, you tear my heart-strings. How can I choose between such loves? To-night, I sup—at Whitehall!

BOTH. Whitehall!

NELL. With the King! (*Enter the King, C.*)

ALL. The King! (*Nell takes the King's arm and exits. Buckingham and Hart stand looking blankly at each other.*)

(CURTAIN.)

ACT II.

SCENE 1: *St. James Park by moonlight. Terrace before Nell Gwyn's house. Strings discovered by tree, picking tune on violin softly and singing to it.*

STRINGS. "Four-and-twenty fiddlers all in a row,  
And there was fiddle-fiddle, and twice fiddle-  
fiddle."

How's that for a serenade to Mistress Nell? She don't know it's for her, but the old viol and old Strings know. Oons, my old wound again. (*Rising.*) I wish she'd walk her terrace to-night where we could see her. The lovely lady! Hush! (*Hides behind tree up stage. Enter Port., in chair, R. U. E., also page.*)

PORT. (*C. to chairmen.*) Retire beneath the shadow of the trees. Have a care; no noise. (*Exit chairmen, R. U. E.*)

STRINGS. (*Aside.*) The Duchess of Portsmouth at Mistress Nell's? Then the devil must be to pay! (*Exit, L. 1 E.*)

PORT. His Majesty came this path before?

PAGE. (*R. C.*) Yes, your Grace.

PORT. And up this trellis?

PAGE. Yes, your Grace.

PORT. Again to-night?

PAGE. I cannot tell, your Grace. I followed as you bade me; but the King's legs were so long, you see, I lost him.

PORT. Softly, pretty one. Watch if he comes, and warn me; for we may have passed him. (*Exit page, R. U. E.*) State business! Mon Dieu, does he think me a country wench? I was schooled at Louis' court. (*Looks off up L.*) A light!

Would I had an invisible cloak. (*Exit above terrace, L. U. E.*)

BUCK. (*Entering R. 2 E.*) Not a mouse stirring. Fair minx, you will not long refuse Buckingham's overtures. Come, Nelly, thy King is already half stolen away by Portsmouth of France; and Portsmouth of France is our dear ally in the greater cause and shall be more so. Hush! Nell. (*Portsmouth steels down L., looking toward house.*)

PORT. The window is so high, I cannot see if he be here or no. (*Aside.*) I am watched.

BUCK. (*Comes behind her, laughing.*) Nelly, Nelly, I have thee, wench. Come, a kiss!—a kiss! (*Tries to kiss her.*) Nay, love, it was never treason to steal a King's kisses.

PORT. Buckingham!

BUCK. Portsmouth! An unexpected pleasure, your Grace.

PORT. Yes. I did not know I was so honored, my lord.

BUCK. Or you would not have refused the little kiss?

PORT. You called me "Nelly," my lord. I do not respond to that name.

BUCK. Damme, I was never good at names, Louise—especially by moonlight.

PORT. Buz! Buz! A pretty nest. (*Points to terrace.*) A pretty bird within, I warrant. Her name?

BUCK. (*Aside.*) Ignorance well feigned. Nell Gwyn.

PORT. Oho! The King's favorite, who has more power, they say, than great statesmen—like my lord.

BUCK. Unless my lord is guided by my lady, as formerly.

PORT. (*Suspicious.*) My chairmen have set me down at the wrong house. My lord longs for his kiss. (*Starts to go.*) Au revoir!

BUCK. Pr'y thee, stay, Duchess. I left the merry hunters returning from Hounslow Heath all in Portsmouth's interest. Is this to be my thanks?

PORT. My lord must explain. I am stupid in fitting English facts to English words.

BUCK. Have you forgotten Dover, and my pledges sworn to?—the treaty at the castle—the Duchess of Orleans—the Grand Monarch?

PORT. Hush!

BUCK. If my services to you there were known, and to the great cause—the first step in making England pensioner of France—my head would pay the penalty. Can you not trust me still?

PORT. You are on strange ground to-night.

BUCK. I thought the King might pass this way and came to see.

PORT. And if he did?

BUCK. I have a plan to make his visits less frequent, Louise, for your sweet sake and mine.

PORT. Yes?

BUCK. You have servants you can trust?

PORT. I have. (*Aside.*) As true as Louis' court affords.

BUCK. They must watch Nell's terrace here night and day, who comes out, who goes in, and the hour. She may forget her royal lover; and—well—we shall have witnesses in waiting. We owe this kindness to his Majesty.

PORT. Mon Dieu! My servants *have* watched, my lord, already. The dispatches would have been signed and Louis' army on the march against the Dutch, but for this vulgar player-girl, whom I have never seen. The King forgets all else.

BUCK. Be of good cheer; my messenger shall await your signal to carry the news to Louis and the army.

PORT. There *is* no news. Charles evades me. Promise after promise to sup with me broken. I expected him to-night. My spies warned me he would not come; that he is hereabouts again. I followed myself to see. I have the papers with me always. If I can but see the King alone, it will not take long to dethrone this up-start queen: wine, sweet words—England's sign manual.

BUCK. In the last event, you have the ball!

PORT. Aye, and we shall be prepared. But Louis is impatient to strike the blow for empire unhampered by British sympathy for the Dutch, and the ball is—

BUCK. A fortnight off.

PORT. And my messenger should be gone to-night. (*Whistle.*) Some one comes! My chair! (*Enter chairmen with chair; also page, R. U. E.*) Join me. (*Enters chair.*)

BUCK. Later, Louise, later. I must back to the neighboring inn before the huntsmen miss me. (*Exeunt Port. with page, L. U. E.*) Ha, ha, ha! King Charles, a French girl from Louis' court will give me the keys to England's heart and her best honors. (*Exits, R. 2 E.*)

CHARLES. (*Sauntering in, R. U. E.*) Methought I heard voices tuned to love. What knave has spied out the secret of her bower? Ho, Rosamond, my Rosamond! Why came I here again to-night? What is there in this girl, this Nell; and yet her eyes, how like the pretty maid's who passed me the cup that day at the cottage where we rested. Have I lived to really love? I, Solomon's rival in the entertainment of the fair, to have my heart-strings torn by this roguish player! (*Hunters sing in distance.*) Hush, music! Odds; moonlight was once for me as well the light for revels, for bacchanals and frolics; yet now I linger another evening by Nell's terrace, mooning like a lover o'er the memory of her eyes, and entranced by the hunters' song. They are approaching. (*Steps under trellis L. Enter James, Buck., Rochester and hunters, singing, R. U. E. Enter Hart, L. 1 E., listening. Nell appears behind roses on balcony, where she can see, unseen.*) Cease those discordant jangles; cease, I say! No song except for Nell! Nell! Pour forth your sweetest melody for Nell! (*Music stops.*)

JAMES. Whose voice was that?

BUCK. Some dreamer of the night. Yon love-sick fellow, methinks. (*Points to Hart, who stands aloof under trees, half cloaked, watching scene jealously.*)

ROCHESTER. This is the home of Eleanor Gwyn we are passing.

JAMES. The love-lorn seer is wise. It were well to make peace with Nelly. Sing, hunters, sing!

(*Song.*)

Hail to the moon-beams'  
Crystal spray,  
Nestling in Heaven  
All the day,  
Falling by night-time,  
Silvery showers,  
Twining with love-rhyme  
Nell's fair bowers.

Sing, hunters, sing,  
Gently carolling,  
Here lies our hart—  
Sleeping, sleeping, sleeping.

Hail to the King's oaks,  
Sentries blest,  
Spreading their branches,  
Guarding her rest,  
Telling the breezes  
Hastening by,  
"Move softly on tip-toe;  
Here Nell doth lie."

Sing, hunters, sing,  
Gently carolling, *etc.*

CHARLES. Ha, ha, ha! Brother James under Nelly's window!

JAMES. The King!

ALL. The King.

CHARLES. Brother. (*Embracing James.*)

BUCK. (*Aside.*) As I feared. Devil take his Majesty's meandering heart.

CHARLES. Odds fish, we must guard our Nelly, or James and his saintly followers will rob her bower by moonlight.

JAMES. Sire,—

CHARLES. No apologies, pious brother. God never damned a man for a little irregular pleasure.

JAMES. In faith, we were simply passing—

CHARLES. Lorenzo, too, was simply passing, but the fair Jessica and some odd ducats stuck to his girdle; and the Jew will still be tearing his hair long after we are dust. Ah, Buckingham, they tell me you, too, have a taste for roguish Nelly. Have a care!

BUCK. Sire, I would not presume to follow the King's eyes, however much I admire their taste.

CHARLES. 'Tis well, lest they lead thee abroad on a sleeveless mission.

JAMES. But what does your Majesty here to-night, if we dare ask?

CHARLES. Humph! Feeding my ducks in yonder pond.

JAMES. Hunting with us were nobler business, Sire.

CHARLES. Not so. My way, I learn to legislate for ducks.

JAMES. 'Twere wiser to study your subjects' needs.

CHARLES. I go among them and learn their needs, while you are praying, brother.

JAMES. I wish your Majesty would have more care. 'Tis a crime against yourself, a crime against the State, a crime against the cavaliers who fought and died for you, to walk these paths alone in such uncertain times. Perchance, it is courting lurking murder!

CHARLES. No kind of danger, James; for I am sure no man in England would take away my life to make you King.  
(*General laughter.*)

JAMES. God grant it be ever so, brother. We heard but now an Ambassador from Morocco's Court is lately landed. He brings your Majesty two lions and thirty ostriches.

CHARLES. Odds fish, but he is kind. I know nothing more proper to send by way of return than a flock of geese.  
(*Aside.*) Methinks I can count them out at Whitehall.

JAMES. He seeks an audience to-night. Will you grant it, Sire?

CHARLES. 'Sheart! Most cheerfully, I'll lead you from Nelly's terrace, brother. Hey! Tune up your throats. On to the palace. (*Exeunt all, singing, R. U. E. Hart exits, above terrace, L. U. E.*)

NELL. (*Entering upon terrace from house, pretending she has not seen.*) Moll, here, here, quick! (*Enter Moll, after her.*)

MOLL. What is it, dear Nell?

NELL. Why did you not call me, cruel girl? To miss seeing so many handsome cavaliers! Where is my kerchief? See, see, someone waves back. It may be he, sweet mouse. Heighho, heighho! Why don't you wave, Moll? (*Horn off, R. U. E.*) The hunters' horn! Oh, I wish I were a man,—except when one is with me. (*Waving kerchief vigorously.*)

CHARLES. (*Enters cautiously, R. 2 E.*) I have lost my brother! I went one side a tree and pious James t'other; and here I am by Nelly's terrace once again. Oho, wench—(*Steps back and watches Nell.*)

(*Nell pretends not to see the King; talks to Moll, so King can hear.*)

MOLL. Why do you sigh?

NELL. I was only looking down the path, dear heart.

MOLL. He will come.

NELL. Nay, sweet, he is false as yonder moon—as changeable of face. The King! Pardon, your Majesty; I did not see you. (*Exit Moll into house.*)

CHARLES. You overlooked me merely.

NELL. I 'faith, I thought it was you waved answer, Sire.

CHARLES. No, Nell, I hunt alone for my hart.

NELL. You hunt the right park, Sire.

CHARLES. Yea, a good preserve truly. I find my game, as I expected, flirting, waving kerchiefs, making eyes and throwing kisses to the latest passer-by.

NELL. I was encouraging the soldiers, my liege. That is every woman's duty to her country—

CHARLES. And her countrymen. You are very loyal, Nell. Come down!

NELL. (*On terrace above.*) Come up!

CHARLES. Nay, come down if you love me.

NELL. Nay, come up if you love me.

CHARLES. I'gad! I am too old to climb.

NELL. I'gad! I am too young yet for the downward path, your Majesty.

CHARLES. You will fall if we give you time.

NELL. To the king's level—mayhap! I am surprised you happen this way, Sire.

CHARLES. With such eyes to lure me?

NELL. Pooh, pooh; your tongue will lead you to perdition, Sire.

CHARLES. No fear! I knelt in church with brother James but yesterday.

NELL. In sooth, quite true! I sat in the next pew, Sire, afraid to move for fear I might awake your Majesty. Ah, you come a long forgotten path to-night.

CHARLES. I saw thee twa evenings ago, lass.

NELL. And is not that a long time, Sire; or did Portsmouth make it fly?

CHARLES. Portsmouth! (*Aside.*) Can it be my conscience pricks me? You know more of her than I, sweet Nell.

NELL. Marry, I know her not at all and never saw her. (*Aside.*) I shall feel better when I do.

CHARLES. It were well for England's peace you have not met.

NELL. Faith and troth, I am happy to know our King has lost his heart.

CHARLES. Oddso! And why?

NELL. We feared he had not one to lose. It gives us hope.

CHARLES. To have it in another's hand as you allege?

NELL. Marry, truly! The Duchess may find it more than she can hold, and toss it over.

CHARLES. How now, wench, my heart a ball for women to bat about?

NELL. Sire, two women often play at rackets even with a King's heart.

CHARLES. Odds fish, Heaven help me then. (*Horn sounds.*)

NELL. The Horn! The Horn! They call you, Sire.

CHARLES. 'Tis so! The King is lost. (*Horn nearer.*) Again—nearer! Poor brother James and his ostriches! Farewell, sweet; I must help them find his Majesty or they will swarm here like bees. Yet, I must see my Nell again to-night. You have bewitched me, wench. Sup with me within the hour at—the Blue Boar Inn. Can you find the place?

NELL. Sire, I can always find a rendezvous.

CHARLES. You're the biggest rogue in England.

NELL. Of a subject, perhaps, Sire.

CHARLES. That is treason, sly wench, but treason of the tongue and not the heart. Adieu! (*Throws kiss.*) Let that seal thy lips, until we meet.

NELL. Alack-a-day, someone may break the seal, my liege; who knows?

CHARLES. How now?

NELL. It were best to seal them tighter, Sire.

CHARLES. Minx! (*Throws another kiss. Horn.*) Now we'll dispatch the affairs of England, brother; then we'll sup with Nelly. (*Exit R. 2 E., laughing.*)

NELL. Oh, Moll, Moll, Moll! (*Enter Moll from house.*) He has been at Portsmouth's all the afternoon. I could see it in his eyes. (*Descends quickly to stage, crossing and look-*

*ing after King.*) What is she? How looks she? What is her charm, her fascination, the magic of her art? Is she short, tall, fat, lean, joyous or sombre? I must know.

MOLL. Oh, Nell, what will you do?

NELL. See her, see her, from top to toe! Oh, there will be sport, sweet mouse. France again against England,—the stake, a King! Strings! (*Looks off, L. U. E.*) Heaven ever gave me a man in waiting. Poor fellow, he limps from youthful war-met wounds. (*Enter Strings.*) Comrade, are you still strong enough for service? (*Coming down C.*)

STRINGS. To the death for you, Mistress Nell!

NELL. You know the Dutchess of Portsmouth and where she lives?

STRINGS. Portsmouth! She was here but now peeping at your window.

NELL. Here, here? The imported hussy. How does she look? What color eyes? Does her lips arch? How many inches span her waist? (*Strings whispers to her.*) You overheard. Great Heaven! Drug the King and win the rights of England while he is in his cups. Bouillion—the Army—Louis—the Dutch. A conspiracy!

MOLL. Oh dear, oh dear.

NELL. Fly, fly, comrade. Overtake her chair. Tell the Duchess her beloved Charles,—she will understand—entreats her to sup at the Blue Boar Inn within the hour. Nay, she will be glad enough to come. Say he awaits her alone. Run, run, good Strings, and you shall have a hospital to nurse these wounds as big as Noah's Arc, and the King shall build it for the message. (*Pushes Strings off stage, R. 2 E. Starts up terrace, followed by Moll.*) Run, run! Ha, ha! Heigho! Now, Moll, we'll get our first sight of the enemy.

ACT II.

SCENE 2: *The Blue Boar Inn. A row of casks, C., candles, etc. Constable Swallow, Buzzard and Landlord carousing. Dark change. Song during change.*

SWALLOW. (*Astride a cask, singing.*)

Here's a health unto his Majesty, with a fa, la, fa,  
Conversion to his enemies with a fa, la, fa,  
And he that will not pledge his health,  
I wish him neither wit nor wealth,  
Nor yet a rope to hang himself—  
    With a fa, la, fa,  
    With a fa, la, etc.

Why don't ye sing, knave, to the tune of the spigot?

BUZZARD. My gullet's dry, Master Constable. (*Drinks.*)

SWALLOW. Odds' bud, thou knowest not the art, thou clod.

BUZZARD. Nay, I can sing as well as any man, and I know when to go up and when to come down.

SWALLOW. Go to, simple; thy mother gave thee no ear. Pass the schnapps. (*Knock. All start.*) Thieves. They are making off with thy tit-bit-of-a-wife, landlord.

LANDLORD. Be there thieves in the neighborhood, Master Constable?

SWALLOW. Why should his Majesty's Constable be here else? The country about's o'er-run with them; and I warrant 'tis thy new wife's blue eyes they are after. (*Drinks.*)

LANDLORD. Mercy me, sayest thou so? (*Knock, louder. All start.*)

SWALLOW. Pass the Dutch courage, good Landlord.

LANDLORD. Go thou, Master Constable.

SWALLOW. Go thou thyself. There's no need of his Majesty's Constable till the battery be complete. There must be an action and intent, saith the law.

LANDLORD. Old Rowley! Good Master Constable—  
(Starts to exit; then returns and fastens spigot. Knock.)  
Annon, annon. (Exit Landlord.)

BUZZARD. The flagon's empty, Master Swallow. (Calls.)  
Landlord! Landlord!

SWALLOW. Silence, fool of a posse! Look ye, I have other eggs on the spit. Oons, give me the pike and lantern. To thy knee, sirrah; to thy knee, knave. (Buzzard kneels, Swallow places cask on his shoulder.)

BUZZARD. 'Tis too heavy,—good Master Constable.

SWALLOW. Thou clodhopper! And thou cannot master a cask of wine, thou wilt never master the King's law. To the kitchen with thee, and keep thy eyes shut, thou knave of a posse. (Sings.)

Good stock of good claret supplies everything,  
And the man that is drunk is as good as a king.

(Exeunt to kitchen.)

(Enter Charles, disguised in ragged mantle, hat and boots, followed by Landlord, door L. C.)

CHARLES. Cook the chickens to a turn; and, mark you, have the turbot and sauce hot, and plenty of wine. Look to 't, the vintage I named, Master Landlord. I know the bouquet and sparkle and the ripple o'er the palate.

LANDLORD. Who is to pay for all this, sir?

CHARLES. Insolent! I command it, sirrah.

LANDLORD. Pardon, sir; guineas, and not words, command here.

CHARLES. (Aside.) Oddso! My temper will reveal me. Never fear, Landlord. You shall be paid, amply paid. I will pledge myself you shall be paid.

LANDLORD. Pardon sir; but the order is a costly one, and you—

CHARLES. Do not look flourishing? Never judge a man by his rags. Plague on 't, though; I would not become my own creditor upon inspection. Take courage, good Master Landlord; England's debt is in my pocket.

LANDLORD. How many to supper, sir?

CHARLES. Two! Two! Only two! A man is an extravagant fool who dines more. The third is expensive and in the way. Eh, Landlord?

LANDLORD. Two, sir.

CHARLES. Aye, mine host, thou art favored beyond thy kind. A belated goddess would sup at thy hostelry. I will return. Obey her every wish, dost hear, her every wish, and leave the bill religiously to me. (*Exit, door L. C.*)

LANDLORD. Body o' me! Round-head beggar, on my life! Turbot and capons and the best vintage! The King could not have better than this rogue. Marry, he shall have the best in the larder; but Constable Swallow shall toast his feet in the kitchen with a mug of musty ale to make him linger. Ha, ha, ha! His ragged Lordship 'll settle the bill very religiously, or sleep off his swollen Round-head behind the bars. (*Knock; goes to window.*) Bless me, a petticoat! Well, he's told the truth for once. She's veiled. Ashamed of her face or ashamed of him. (*Ushers in Nell, door L. C., veiled.*)

NELL. Not here? (*Looking around.*) Not here? Tell me, tell me, is this the Blue Boar Inn?

LANDLORD. Yes, lady—

NELL. Good, good! Has she been here? Have you seen her?

LANDLORD. Who, the goddess?

NELL. The goddess! How can you so belie the Duchess? (*Knock.*) Ha, ha, ha! 'Tis she, 'tis she! Haste ye, man, I am in waiting. What has she on? How is she dressed?

LANDLORD. (*At window.*) Body o' me! It is a lady of quality.

NELL. (*Aside.*) *Bad* quality.

LANDLORD. She has come in a chair of silver.

NELL. (*Aside.*) My chair shall be of beaten gold, then. Charles, you must raise the taxes.

LANDLORD. Mercy me, the great lady's coming in.

NELL. She shall be welcome, most welcome, Landlord.

LANDLORD. Body o' me, what shall I say?

NELL. Faith and troth, I will do the parlez-vousing with her ladyship. (*Steps into large fire-place, 2 R. E., half out of sight.*)

PORT. (*Enters door, L. C., veiling her face with lace wrap.*) (*Aside.*) This bourgeois place to sup with the King. It cannot be. Garçon!

NELL. (*Aside.*) What a voice in which to sigh, "I love you."

PORT. Barbarous place! His Majesty must have lost his wits. Yet he might sign within these walls. Garçon!

NELL. (*Aside.*) I'll wager her complexion needs a veil. That gown is an insult to her native France.

PORT. Garçon, answer me.

LANDLORD. Yes, your ladyship. What would your ladyship?

PORT. Did a prince leave commands for supper?

LANDLORD. No, your ladyship. A ragged rogue ordered a banquet and then ran away, your ladyship.

PORT. How, sirrah?

NELL. (*Aside.*) If he knew his guests, he would ne'r return.

PORT. Parbleu, a cavalier would meet me at the Blue Boar, so said the messenger. (*Sees Nell.*) This is not the rendezvous. We were to sup alone.

LANDLORD. Yes, your ladyship.

PORT. Mon Dieu, do you know nothing, sirrah?

LANDLORD. Good lack, I know not; a supper for a king was ordered by a ragged Round-head. Here are two petticoats. When I am told which petticoat is which petticoat, your ladyship, I will serve the dinner. (*Aside.*) I wouldn't give a ha'penny for the choice.— (*Exit to kitchen, L. 2 E.*)

PORT. Beggar! Musty place, musty furniture, musty gargon, musty everything.

NELL. (*Approaching her respectfully.*) You may like it better after supper, madame. A good spread, sparkling wine and most congenial company have cast a halo o'er more time-begrimed rafters than these.

PORT. Who are you, madame?

NELL. A fellow passenger on the earth, and a lover of good company, and—some wine.

PORT. Yes? Perhaps you have seen the cavalier I await.

NELL. Marry, not I; (*aside.*) and I have kept a pretty sharp lookout for him.

PORT. Is this a proper place for a lady to visit?

NELL. You raise the first doubt—

PORT. Madame!

NELL. I say you are the first to question the propriety of the place.

PORT. I came by appointment, but it seems I was misled. Gargon, my chair! (*Starts to go; Nell stops her.*)

NELL. Be patient, Duchess! He is too gallant to desert you.

PORT. (*Aside.*) She knows me! I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, madame.

NELL. Such is my loss, not yours.

PORT. Remove your veil.

NELL. I dare not before the beauty of Versailles. Remove yours first. Then I may take mine off unseen.

PORT. Do I know you?

NELL. I fear not. I am but an humble player, called Nell Gwyn.

PORT. Nell Gwyn! (*Removes veil.*)

NELL. Your Grace's most humble servant. (*Removes veil. Courtesies low.*)

PORT. This is a trap.

NELL. Heaven bless the brain that set it then.

PORT. Your own, minx.

NELL. Your Grace would be more kind if you knew my joy at seeing you.

PORT. And why?

NELL. I would emulate your warmth and amiability.

PORT. Yes.

NELL. I adore a beautiful woman, especially when I know her to be—

PORT. A successful rival?

NELL. A rival! Is the poor actress so honored in a Duchess' thought? Your Grace is generous.

PORT. I presumed you might conceive it so.

NELL. A rival to the great Duchess of Portsmouth! Perish the thought. It is with trepidation I look upon your glorious face, madame; a figure would tempt Saint Antony; a foot which makes us swear the Gods have lent invisible wings to waft you to your conquest. Nay, do not turn your rosy lip in scorn; I am in earnest, so in earnest, that, were I but a man, I would bow me down your constant slave,—unless perchance you should grow fat.

PORT. Hussy! Beware your own lacings.

NELL. Me fat! Ha, ha, ha! Be sure I shall never grow too much so. And have not the stars said I shall ne'r grow old?

PORT. Your stars are falser than yourself.

NELL. Mayhap! But mark you this truth. I shall reign Queen of Love and Laughter while I live, and die with the

first wrinkle. (*Enter Charles, door L. C. Aside.*) The King!

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) Scylla and Charybdis! All my patron saints protect me!

NELL. (*Goes up C. to King.*) Good even' to your Majesty! How can I ever thank you, Sire, for inviting the Duchess to sup with me. I have been eager to meet her ladyship.

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) Od's-pitikins, a loop hole for me. Well, you see—a little surprise—Nelly,—a little surprise—(*aside*)—for me. I hoped to be in time to introduce you, ladies. (*Enter Landlord.*)

NELL. Oh, your Majesty, we are already quite well acquainted. I knew her Grace through her veil.

CHARLES. No doubt on't.

PORT. Yes, Sire, I warrant we understand each other perfectly.

CHARLES. Better and better! (*Aside.*) Heaven see me out of this. Ah, Landlord, bring in what we live for; and haste ye, sirrah, the wine—the wine—

LANDLORD. It is ready, sir. (*Aside.*) So is Constable Swallow.

CHARLES. Good news, d'ye hear, my fair and loving friends? Come, it is impolite to keep the capons waiting. My arms, my arms! (*Each takes an arm of the King, Nell lovingly, Portsmouth haughtily. They approach table, down L.*) Who would not play the thorn with two such buds to blush on either side?

PORT. I thought your Majesty ordered supper for three. It is set for two.

CHARLES. Odds fish, for two!

NELL. Egad, our host is teaching us the virtues of economy. (*Enter Landlord with tray, etc., L. 2 E.*)

CHARLES. What do you mean, knave, by this treachery? Another plate, dost hear, another plate, you dog.

LANDLORD. Bless me, you said supper for two, sir; that a man was a fool who dined more; that the third was expensive and in the way.

CHARLES. Villain! I said two besides myself. I never count myself in the presence of these ladies. (*Exit Landlord, L. 2 E.*)

PORT. Which one of us did you expect, Sire?

CHARLES. Oh, my head,—well, well,—you see Duchess—

NELL. Let me help your Majesty. Her ladyship is ill at figures. You see, Charles and I are one, and you make two, Duchess.

PORT. I spoke to the King.

CHARLES. This is a question for the Prime Minister and sages of the Realm in council.

PORT. There are but two chairs, Sire.

CHARLES. Two chairs! I am lost.

NELL. That is serious, Sire; but perhaps *we* might make out with one for the Duchess' sake. I am so little. (*Laughs.*)

CHARLES. 'Sheart, I have construed grave controversies of State in my time, but ne'er drew the line yet between black eyes and blue, brunette and blonde, when both were present. Another chair, Landlord! Come, my sweethearts, eat, drink and forget. (*Sits at table, C. L.*)

NELL. Aye; eat, drink and forget! (*Sits at table.*) I prefer to quarrel after supper. (*Begins eating.*)

PORT. I do not. (*Standing, C.*)

NELL. (*Eating.*) Oh, very well! I have a solution. Let's play sphynx, Sire.

CHARLES. Anything for peace. How is it?

NELL. Why, some years before you and I thought much about the ways and means of this wicked world, your Majesty, the Sphynx spent her leisure asking people riddles; and, if they could not answer, she ate them alive. Give me some of that turbot. Don't stand on ceremony, Sire, for the Duch-

ess is waiting. Thank you; that will do for now. Let the Duchess propound a riddle from the depths of her subtle brain. And if I do not fathom it upon the instant, Sire, 'tis the Duchess'—not Nell's—evening with the King.

CHARLES. Odds fish, a great stake!

PORT. Don't be too confident, madame; you are cleverer in making riddles than in solving them. (*Enter Landlord with two chickens on a platter. Portsmouth sees them.*)

CHARLES. The court's famished; proceed.

PORT. (*Aside.*) Two capons. I have it. Let your wits find then three capons on this plate.

CHARLES. Three chickens! There are but two. (*Taking plate from Landlord.*)

NELL. Another glass, Landlord, and I'll see four. (*Toast.*) Here's to you two and me, too.

PORT. That is not the answer, madame.

CHARLES. Are we to come to blows over an innocent chicken? Bring on your witnesses.

PORT. (*With much formality.*) This is one chicken, your Majesty. (*Pointing to one chicken.*) Another's two; and two and one make three. (*Counting first chicken again.*)

CHARLES. Gadso! It is too much for me.

NELL. Pooh, pooh, 'tis too simple for you, Sire. I solved it when a child. (*Takes plate and large fork.*) Here is my bird (*putting chicken on her plate*), and here is your bird (*placing the other on the King's plate*); and our dearest Duchess shall sup on her third! (*Politely offering her the empty plate.*)

PORT. Hussy! Oh,—Sire,—I—(*Strikes plate to floor. Pretends to faint. Charles supports her.*)

CHARLES. What is it? You are pale, Louise.

PORT. I am faint. Pardon my longer audience. Sire, I am not well. Garçon, my chair. Assist me to the door.

NELL. Call a leech, Sire. Her Grace has choked on a chicken bone.

CHARLES. Be still, wench. Do not leave us, Louise; it breaks the sport.

NELL. Nay, do not go because of this little merry-making, Duchess. I desire we may become better friends.

PORT. Sans doubt, we shall, madame. Pas adieu, mais au revoir. (*Exit.*)

NELL. Ha, ha, ha! If I were a man, I would love her to devotion. Her wit is so original, her repartee so sturdy. Your Majesty's taste in horses—and some women—is excellent. (*Sits on bench down R., laughing.*)

CHARLES. Heaven help the being, naughty Nell, who offends thy merry tongue; but I love you for it.

NELL. Love me? Ah, Sire, I am but a plaything for the King at best, a caprice, a fancy, naught else.

CHARLES. Nay, sweet, you have not read this heart.

NELL. I have read it too deeply. It is this one to-day, that one to-morrow, with King Charles. Ah, Sire, your love for the poor player-girl is summed up in three little words: I amuse you!

CHARLES. Amuse me! Hark ye, Nell; states may marry us, they cannot make us love. Ye Gods, the humblest peasant in my realm is monarch of a heart of his own choice. Would I were such a king!

NELL. What buxom lass teaches your fancy to follow the plow, my truant master?

CHARLES. You forget; I, too, have been an outcast, like orange-Nell, seeking a crust and bed.

NELL. Pardon, Sire, if I recall unhappy times.

CHARLES. Unhappy! Nell, in those dark days, I learned to read the human heart. God taught me then the distinction 'twixt friend and enemy. When a misled rabble had dethroned my father, girl, and murdered him before our palace gate, and bequeathed the glorious arts and progressive sciences to religious bigots and fanatics, to trample under foot and burn, when, if a little bird sang over-joyously, they cut

out his tongue for daring to be merry, in some lonely home by some stranger's hearth, a banished prince called Charles Stuart oft found an asylum of plenty and repose; and in your eyes, my Nell, I read the self same loyal English heart.

NELL. My King!

CHARLES. My Queen. (*Kisses her.*)

NELL. (*Head on Charles' shoulder.*) And Milton says that paradise is lost.

CHARLES. Not while Nell loves Charles.

NELL. And Charles remembers Nell.

LANDLORD. (*Entering.*) The bill! The bill for supper, sir!

CHARLES. (*Rising.*) How opportune! We feared you would forget it, sirrah.

NELL. See that it is right.

CHARLES. Gad, what are a few extra shillings to Parliament? Here, my man,—it is in the other pocket. Devil on't, I—have—forgotten—Odds fish, where is my Treasurer?

LANDLORD. Your Treasurer! Want your Treasurer, do ye? Constable Swallow'll find him for ye. Constable Swallow! I knew ye were a rascal by your face. Constable Swallow!

NELL. Peace, my man; be still for Mercy's sake.

LANDLORD. Good lack, my lady, good lack, but you would not see a poor man robbed by a vagabond, would ye? Constable Swallow!

CHARLES. Nell, have you no money to stop this heathen's mouth?

NELL. Not a farthing. I was invited to sup, not pay the bill.

LANDLORD. If the King knew this rascal, he would be behind the bars long ago.

CHARLES. Verily, I believe you.

LANDLORD. (*L. 2 E.*) Master Constable! Let my new wife alone; they are making off with the house.

NELL. He'll raise the neighborhood, Sire. Have you no money?

CHARLES. Not even holes in my pockets.

NELL. Odds fish, what a company have I got into!

LANDLORD. Constable Swallow! Help, help, thieves; Constable Swallow!

SWALLOW. (*Enters L. & E., tankard in hand, intoxicated.*) Murder—hic! Thieves! What's the row?—hic!

LANDLORD. Arrest this blackguard, this perfler of honest men.

CHARLES. Arrest, you drunken idiot! (*Draws sword, R. C.*)

NELL. You will raise a nest of them. You need your wits, Sire; not your sword.

CHARLES. Nay; come on, I say. We'll see what his Majesty's constables are made of.

SWALLOW. You rogue—Posse!—You ruffian—Posse!—You outlaw—Posse commi-ti-titous—Hic!

BUZZARD. (*Enters L. & E., intoxicated and singing.*) The man that is drunk is as great as a king.

CHARLES. Another champion of the King's law!

NELL. Oh, Charles!

SWALLOW. Posse, arrest that vagabond.

BUZZARD. Aye, aye, sir. On what charge,—hic!

LANDLORD. He's a law-breaker and a robber—

SWALLOW. He called the law a drunken idiot. Hic!—hic!—Odds bud, that's treason! Arrest him, posse,—hic!

BUZZARD. (*Starting to arrest Charles.*) Knave, I arrest—hic! Arrest him yourself.—Hic!

SWALLOW. I'll arrest you, you Buzzard—hic!

BUZZARD. I'll arrest you, you Swallow—hic!

SWALLOW. I'm his Majesty's constable—hic!

BUZZARD. I'm his Majesty's posse—hic! (*They seize each other angrily C. Landlord tries to separate them.*)

CHARLES. A wrangle of the generals. Now is our time.  
(Crosses to door L. 2 E.)

LANDLORD. Body o' me, the vagabonds 'll escape.

NELL. Fly, fly! This way, Charles. (Crossing to door  
L. C.)

LANDLORD. Stop, thief! Stop, thief! The bill! The  
bill! (Waving it.)

NELL. Send it to the Duchess! (Exits with King, door  
L. C. Constables, starting toward door, seize Landlord in  
the confusion, and all three roll on the floor.)

(CURTAIN.)

ACT III.

SCENE: *Masked ball at Portsmouth's. Charles, James, Buckingham, Rochester, Portsmouth and Hamilton discovered. Music without. General jollification at rise of curtain. Gallants are trying to steal a kiss from Hamilton. Cries of "A kiss!" "A kiss!" "This way; make a circle or she'll escape us," etc.*

HAMILTON. (*Breaking away after being kissed.*) Nay, I am very angry, very,—

BUCK. That there were no more, wench? Marry, 'tis a merry night when Portsmouth reigns. Long live the Duchess in the King's heart.

CHARLES. (*Aside to Buck.*) So you may capture its fairer favorite, friend Buckingham?

BUCK. (*Aside to Charles.*) So I may console her, Sire, that she is out-beautied by France to-night.

CHARLES. Out-beautied?—not bidden, thou mean'st.

BUCK. (*Pipe heard.*) What is that?

CHARLES. A plaintive note, as mourning a lost love.

ROCHESTER. Whence comes it?

CHARLES. Yonder, yonder. (*Aside.*) Strange so sweet a strain should cut so deep. (*All cease sport and listen. Enter Nell, C., dressed as a young Irish gallant, masked across the eyes and playing a reed pipe. She speaks with a slight brogue in this act. Voices: "Who is it? Nay, who is it?" "What a pretty fellow! He dances gloriously; I've been eying him," etc. All crowd about Nell with curiosity.*

ROCHESTER. Who can it be?

HAMILTON. Marry, I'll find out. (*To Nell.*) Who art thou, my butterfly? Tell me now, e'er I die. (*General laughter.*) Peace! jealous ones. I know thou art Apollo himself, good sir.

NELL. Apollo, truly, if thou art his lyre, good lady. (*Laughter.*)

PORT. (*Coming up. As the hostess, she is not masked.*) What's all this merry-making?

HAMILTON. The Duchess! Oh, your Grace, tell us in a breath, tell us, who is this dainty beau of the ball? (*Nell, C., playing pipe unconsciously.*)

PORT. How am I to know my guests with their visors down? Nay, sweet musician, unmask and please the ladies. I' faith, who art thou?

NELL. I' faith, I know not, Duchess.

PORT. D'ye hear? He knows not himself.

NELL. But I have a suspicion, Duchess.

PORT. Hark ye, he has a suspicion, ladies.

NELL. Nay; you will tell?

LADIES. Trust us, fair sir. Oh, we are good at keeping secrets.

NELL. Then, 'twixt you and me, I am—

LADIES. Yes—yes—

NELL. I am the Pied Piper of Hamlin Town.

PORT. The rat catcher! Oh, oh, oh! (*General laughter, lifting of skirts and a scramble for chairs.*)

HAMILTON. Flee, flee! He may pipe us into the mountain after the children.

PORT. You fill me with laughter, ladies. The man does not live who can entrap me.

NELL. (*Aside.*) The woman does. (*She circles about the stage several times, playing the pipe, and exits L. U. E. All fall in line and follow the music off, seriously, as if spell-bound, except Charles, James, Buckingham and Rochester,*

who remain, each being deserted by his lady in turn. They unmask and look at each other in wonderment.)

CHARLES. Sublime audacity! Who is this curled darling, this ball-room Adonis? Ods-pitikins, we are in the sear and yellow leaf.

JAMES. Truly, Sire, I prefer a stag-party myself.

CHARLES. Brother James, will you favor me with your lily-white hand for the next dance? I am driven to extremity.

JAMES. Pardon, Sire, I am engaged to a handsomer man.

CHARLES. Odds fish, King Charles of England a wall-flower. Come, Rochester, my Epitaph!

ROCHESTER.

Here lies our sovereign lord the King,  
Whose word no man relies on;  
Who never said a foolish thing,  
And never did a wise one.

CHARLES. The matter is easily accounted for—my discourse is my own, my actions are my ministry's.

PORT. (*Entering, L. U. E., aside.*) The King! The courtiers! Unmasked! (*Laughs.*) Fy-fy, your Majesty! For shame! Gallants! Are you children that I must pair you off?

CHARLES. We are seeking consolation; for modest souls have small chance to-night, Louise.

PORT. When did you turn modest, Sire?

CHARLES. When I was outstripped in audacity by yon Hibernian youth. (*Laughter off L. U. E.*) Who is this peacock you are introducing?

PORT. The piper the maids would now unmask? (*Laughter off L. U. E.*) Marry, 'tis the fascinating Beau Adair of Cork. Oh, he is a love, Sire; he does not sulk in corners. See! See! (*Nell crosses and recrosses at back, surrounded by ladies, and exits. She throws a kiss to Port. The King pretends jealousy. Nell sees this as she exits.*)

BUCK. 'Sdeath, that I were a woman to hope for one of his languishing smiles.

JAMES. Even the old hens run at his call.

CHARLES. Brother James is jealous of the old ones only. You know his favorites are given him by his priests for penance. (*Laughter.*)

PORT. And you are jealous of the young ones only. Pooh, pooh! Le Beau had letters to me, Sire. Nay, we do not love him very much. We have not as yet had time.

CHARLES. Alas, alas, that it should come to this.

PORT. My liege,—I protest—to-night is the first I ever saw the youth. I adore you, Sire.

CHARLES. Not a word! Friends, we will mix masks and dominoes, and to 't again to drown our sorrows.

JAMES. In the Thames, Sire?

CHARLES. Tush! In the punch bowl, pious brother! You know very little water will drown even a King. (*King sighs, casts a longing glance at Port., and exits. All but Port. and Buck., whom she detains, exeunt.*)

PORT. Ha! ha! ha! What say you now, my lord? I am half avenged already, and the articles half signed. The King is here despite his Madame Gwyn, and in a playful mood, which may be tuned to love.

BUCK. Merriment is oft but sadness' mask, Louise.

PORT. What meanest thou; this trifle of the gossips that Charles advances the player's whim to found a hospital at Chelsea for broken-down old soldiers? Ha, ha, ha! Ce n'est rien!

BUCK. Aye! The orders are issued for its building, and the people are cheering Nell throughout the realm.

PORT. Ma foi! And what say the rabble of Portsmouth?

BUCK. That she is Louis' pensioner sent here from France—a spy! The hawkers cry it in the streets.

PORT. Fools, fools! Before the night is done, thou shalt hear that Luxembourg has fallen to the French—Mark! Luxembourg! Feed the rabble on that, my lord! Heaven preserve King Louis!

BUCK. Luxembourg! King Charles did not consent—

PORT. Nay; but I knew he would, and so I sent the message in advance.

BUCK. Forgery! 'Twas boldly done, Louise.

PORT. I know my power, my lord. The consent will come. Nay, what have you there?

BUCK. Merely a ring the King gave Nell.

PORT. A ring! A royal setting.

BUCK. I borrowed it to show it you. Is your mission quite complete?

PORT. (*Half aside.*) I have a potion I brought from France.

BUCK. 'Sh! For Heaven's mercy, woman; as you love yourself and me,—poison is an unhealthy diet to administer in England.

PORT. My servants have watched her house without avail. Your plan is useless; my plan will work.

BUCK. Stay! We can ourselves entice some adventurous spirit up the trellis; then trap him. So our end is reached.

PORT. Aye; the minx presumes to love the King, and so is honest! But of her later. The papers! He shall sign to-night—to-night, I say.

BUCK. Lord Hyde, St. Albans and the rest are here to aid the cause.

PORT. Bah! In the field, men; at court, women! This girl has outwitted you all. I must accomplish my mission alone. Charles must be Louis' pensioner in full; England the slave of France! My fortune—the Grand Roi's regard—hang upon it.

BUCK. Hush!

PORT. Nay, I may speak frankly, my lord; for your head is on the same block still with mine.

BUCK. And my heart, Louise. Back to the King! Do nothing rash. We will banish thy rival, dear hostess—(*aside*)—to Buckingham's country estate.

PORT. Leave all to me, my lord. (*Exits L. U. E.*)

BUCK. Yea, all but Nell! With this ring, I'll keep thee wedded to jealous interest, and so enrich my purse and power. Thou art a great woman, fair France; I half love thee, myself. But thou know'st only a moiety of my purpose. The other half is Nell! (*Aside.*) Jack Hart! A happy meeting.

HART. (*Entering R. U. E. and down E. Aside.*) It is a sad hour when all the world, like players, wear masks.

BUCK. (*Coming down C. to Hart.*) Whither away, Master Hart? Let not thy fancy play truant to this gay assemblage, to mope in St. James' Park.

HART. My lord,—pardon; but we prefer to change the subject.

BUCK. (*Aside.*) The drift's the same; we may turn it to advantage. Be not angry, for there's a rift even in the clouds of love. Brighter, man; for King Charles was seeking your wits but now.

HART. He'd have me play court-fool for him? There are many off the stage, my lord, in better practice.

BUCK. (*Laughter off L. U. E.*) 'True, most true. I could point them out. Hark ye, here come the merry maskers. By Bacchus, the little bantum still reigns supreme; Charles and his gallants in tears. Let us join the mourners, Master Hart. (*They mask and join the King. Enter Nell C. from L., surrounded by all the ladies, who flatter her and hang upon her every word. The King and the cavaliers, masked, enter in a row at back, disconsolate, and stand or sit in a row as wall-flowers. Nell uses the mask when she comes face to face with the King in this scene.*)

NELL. (*Laughing. C.*) You overwhelm me, my fair ones. I assure you, I am not used to such attention—from the ladies.

PORT. Our hospitality is beggarly to your deserts.

NELL. You quite overpower me, Duchess. (*Aside.*) No wonder we men are fools, if you women talk like this.

PORT. (*Hamilton whispering to her.*) Beau Adair married! It cannot be. He looks too gay for a married man.

NELL. (*Sees them whispering.*) No confidences, my pretty ones.

PORT. Mistress Hamilton asks after the wife you left at home.

NELL. My wife! Great Heavens, I never had a wife—never, never, never!

PORT. So,—so,—modest, for a bachelor.

NELL. A bachelor! Well,—not exactly a bachelor either,—ladies.

HAMILTON. Alack-a-day, neither a bachelor nor a married man!

NELL. Well, you see—that might seem a trifle queer; but—I'm in mourning—deeply in mourning, ladies. (*Weeps.*)

HAMILTON. A widower! Our united congratulations, sir. (*Ladies all pretend to weep.*)

NELL. Mesdames, the memory is sacred. (*Pretends to weep.*) Believe me, very sacred.

PORT. The memory is always sacred—with men. Nay, tell us the name of the fair one who left you so young. My heart goes out to you, dear Beau.

NELL. Kind hostess, the name of my departed self is—Nell!

HART. (*Overhearing. Aside.*) Nell! Who spoke that name?

PORT. Nell! Strange, another cavalier who graces *ma bal masque* to-night has lost a loved one whose name is Nell. Ah, but *she* was unworthy of his noble love. (*Speaking pointedly at the masked King.*)

CHARLES. (*Overhearing the last speech. Aside.*) Yes, unworthy—he of her.

NELL. Unworthy truly, if he dances so soon and his own Nell dead.

CHARLES. (*Walking away. Aside.*) Perchance, Nell, too, thinks so. I wish I were with her on the terrace.

NELL. 'Sdeath, Duchess, the lady's spirit may visit the ball to the confusion of us all. Such things have been.

PORT. The Nell I mean will not venture here, e'en in spirit.

NELL. She has not been bidden, I presume?

PORT. The vixen would not stop for asking.

NELL. Come without asking? How ill-bred. Thine ear, loved one. (*Whispers to Port. Hart hears.*) My Nell revisits the world at midnight. The rendezvous—St. James' Park!

PORT. (*Aside.*) St. James! Can it be? No, no! (*Nell whispers to Port.*)

HART. St. James at midnight. 'Tis my Nell's abode.

PORT. (*Laughing.*) And you would desert me for such a fleshless sprite?

NELL. Not so; but, when my better-half returns to life, I surely cannot refuse an interview—especially and she come from afar. (*Points downward, laughing.*)

PORT. Ladies, is not Le Beau a delight?—so different from ordinary men. (*Ladies gather about Nell.*)

NELL. I am not an ordinary man, I assure you.

LADIES. Positively charming! A perfect love! (*Etc.*)

NELL. 'Sheart, I cannot help it. 'Tis all part of being a man, you know.

PORT. Would all men were like you, Le Beau! (*Glances at King, who still sits with courtiers against wall.*)

NELL. Heaven help us, if they were!

ROCHESTER. (*To King.*) Egad, there's a rap at you, Sire. Ha, ha, ha! France would make you jealous.

BUCK. (*Aside.*) And succeeds, methinks. A good ally, i' faith.

NELL. Your eyes are glorious, fair hostess, did I not see

my rival in them. (*Aside.*) I believe lying goes with the breeches; I never was so proficient before.

CHARLES. I can endure no more, gallants. Are we to be outdone in our own realm by this usurper with a brogue? (*Music off.*) The coronato! (*To Port.*) Madame, I claim the honor of this fair hand for the dance. (*Taking hand.*)

PORT. My thanks, gallant masquer; but I am—

NELL. (*Stepping between King and Port.*) Engaged! Engaged! For sooth, some other time, strange sir.

PORT. Pardon, sir masquer; but the dance was pledged—

CHARLES. No apologies, Duchess. (*Aside.*) All's one to me at this assemblage.

NELL. (*Aside.*) 'Twas a jealous look he gave her. (*To Port.*) Oddsbud, we may have to measure swords in your behalf, dear hostess. I trow the fellow loves you.

PORT. (*Aside to Nell.*) Have a care; it is the King!

NELL. (*Aside to Port.*) What care I for a King! My arm, Duchess! Places, places, or the music will outstrip us.

BUCK. (*Aside.*) Strut on, my pretty bantam; I like you well. (*All join in the dance, Nell and Port. leading.*)

NELL. (*Kissing Portsmouth's hand graciously at close of dance.*) You dance divinely, your Grace. A goddess on tiptoe.

PORT. Oh, Beau Adair!

NELL. Oh, Duchess! (*Aside.*) How I love her! (*Crossing L., she sees Strings, who comes down L. C. with violin. Dancers form groups, chatting.*) How now, sirrah! I knew you were here.

STRINGS. (*Aside.*) Gads-bobbs, the Irish gentleman knows me!

NELL. There's nothing like your old fiddle, Strings. It fills me with forty dancing devils. If you were to play at my wake, I would pick up my shroud and dance my way into Paradise.

STRINGS. Your lordship has danced to my fiddling before?

NELL. Danced! I have followed your bow through a thousand jigs. To Hades with these court steps. I'm for a jig, jig, jig, jig, jig! Oh, I'm for a jig! Tune up, tune up, comrade, and we'll have a touch of the old days at the King's House.

STRINGS. The King's House! Jigs!

NELL. Jigs. Jigs are my line of business. (*Sings and takes a few jig steps.*)

Oranges, will you have my oranges?

Sweet as love-lips, dearest mine,  
Picked by Spanish maids divine,—

STRINGS. Mistress Nell, as I live, turned boy!

NELL. Boy, indeed! I'm a full-grown—widower!

STRINGS. (*Observing groupes watching Nell.*) Oons, you will be discovered.

NELL. Marry, I forgot. You may have to help me out o' this scrape, Strings, before the night be done.

STRINGS. You can count on me, Mistress Nell, with life.

NELL. I believe you! (*Aside.*) Oh, for just one jig with no petticoats to hinder. (*Goes up L. and mingles with dancers, most of whom now stroll off.*)

PORT. (*Coming down R. to table with the King.*) Can you forgive me, Sire? I had promised the dance to Beau Adair. I did not know you, Sire; you mask so cleverly.

CHARLES. S'death, fair flatterer! I have lived too long to worry over the freaks of woman.

PORT. The youth knew not to whom he spoke? His introduction here bespeaks his pardon, Sire.

CHARLES. Ha, ha, ha! He is too pretty to kill. We'll forgive him for your sake. And now good night.

PORT. So soon?

CHARLES. It is late.

PORT. Not while the King is here; night comes only when he departs.

CHARLES. Your words are sweet.

PORT. Ah, my thoughts stumble in your speech. I regret I have not English blood within my veins.

CHARLES. And why?

PORT. The King would trust and love me then. He does not now. I am French and powerless to do him good.

CHARLES. Nay; 'tis thy fancy! Thy entertainment has made me grateful—to Louis and Louise.

PORT. Think not of Louis and Louise, but of thy dear self and England's glory! For shame! Ah, Sire, my childhood-dreams were of sunny France, where I was born; at Versailles—at Fountainbleau, among the monarch trees—my early womanhood sighed for love. France gave me all but that. It came not till I saw the English King.

CHARLES. And am I not good to thee, child?

PORT. You are good to none; for you are not good to Charles.

CHARLES. You speak enigmas.

PORT. Have you forgotten your promise?

CHARLES. Nay; the passport, pretty one? All this subterfuge of words for that? Give it me. (*She gives it; he signs.*) There; rest in peace. Thy friend has a path to France at will. (*Starts to depart.*)

PORT. Stay, Sire. Passports are trifles. Will you not leave the Dutch to Louis and his army? Think!

CHARLES. But, my people demand that I intervene and stay my brother Louis' aggressive hand.

PORT. Are the people King? Do they know best for England's good? Nay, Sire; for your good and theirs, I beseech, no more royal sympathy for Holland. (*Hands King a paper.*) I speak to avoid entanglements for King Charles and to make his reign the greater. I love thee, Sire. (*Looks bewitchingly into his face.*) I speak for the glory of England.

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) For the glory of England? True, my people are wrong. 'Tis better we remain aloof. No wars! (*Nell and Strings appear at back of stage, where, unseen, they watch King and Portsmouth. King looks casually at paper.*) Bouillon's signature for France. 'Tis well! (*Signs. To Port.*) No more sympathy for the Dutch, Louise, until Holland sends a beauty to our court to outshine France's ambassador.

PORT. Holland may outshine in beauty, Sire, but not in sacrifice and love. (*Port. makes love to the King; he submits complacently without showing more than admiration for her beauty, flattery and sophistry.*)

CHARLES. I believe you do love England and her people's good. Thy words art wise.

PORT. One more request—a very little one, Sire.

CHARLES. Nay, and I stay here, thy beauty will win my kingdom! What is thy little wish, sweet sovereign?

PORT. No more Parliaments in England, Sire.

CHARLES. What, woman! (*Rises.*)

PORT. To cross the sway of thy great royal state-craft. The people's sufferings from taxation spring from Parliament only, Sire.

CHARLES. 'Tis true.

PORT. (*Half embracing him.*) For the people's good, Sire—for my sweetest kiss and two million livres, the kiss' dot from its Godfather Louis.

CHARLES. You are mad; my people—

PORT. Will be richer for my kiss,—and their King, by divine right and heritage, will rule untrammelled by country clowns, court knaves and foolish lords, who now make up a silly Parliament. With such a King, England will be better with no Parliament to hinder. Think, Sire, think!

CHARLES. I have thought of this before; the taxes will be less and contentions saved.

PORT. Why hesitate then? This hour's as good for a good deed as any.

CHARLES. For England's sake? (*Takes parchment from her hand.*) Heaven direct my judgment for my people's good! I sign. (*Signs.*)

NELL. (*Aside to Strings.*) I must see those papers. There's no good brewing.

PORT. I seal it for the English people, Sire. (*Kisses him; he sits thoughtful.*) Now, indeed, has England a great King. (*Aside.*) And that King Louis' slave. (*Kisses Charles again.*)

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) Portsmouth's kisses and Nell's do not mix well. (*Exits.*)

NELL. (*Enters. Strings disappears. Aside.*) S'death! He kisses her before my very eyes! He kisses her. I'll kill the minx! Pshaw! No! no! I am too gallant to kill the sex. I'll do the very manly act and simply break her heart. Aye, that is the swagger of true bravery in breeches! (*Crossing down R. to Port.*) Your Grace?

PORT. Yes.

NELL. It seems you are partial of your favors.

PORT. Yes.

NELL. Such a gift from lips less fair would make a beggar royal.

PORT. You would be pleased to think me fair?

NELL. Fairer than yon false gallant thinks you. (*Aside.*) Charles' kiss upon her lips? 'Tis mine, and I will have it. (*Embraces Portsmouth forcibly and kisses her.*)

PORT. (*Rising angrily.*) Sir, what do you mean?

NELL. Tilly-vally! A frown upon that alabaster brow, a pout upon those rosy lips; and all for nothing!

PORT. Par bleu! Your impudence is outrageous, sir! We will dispense with your company. Good night!

NELL. Ods-pitikins, angry because I kissed you! You have no right, madame, to be angry.

PORT. No right?

NELL. No right. It is I who should be outraged at your anger.

PORT. Explain, sir.

NELL. Because your Grace can have no appreciation of what my temptation was to kiss you.

PORT. I' faith, was there a temptation?

NELL. An overwhelming passion.

PORT. And you were disappointed, sir?

NELL. I only got yon courtier's kiss, so lately bestowed on you.

PORT. Do you know whose kiss that was?

NELL. It seemed familiar.

PORT. The King's.

NELL. The King's! Take back your kiss; I would not have it.

PORT. Indeed!

NELL. 'Tis too volatile. 'Tis here, 'tis there, 'tis everywhere bestowed. Each rosy tavern wench with a pretty ankle commands it halt. A kiss is the gift of God, the emblem of true love. Take back the King's kiss; I do not wish it.

PORT. (*Aside.*) He does not love the King. A possible ally! A kiss is a kiss the world over, fair sir; and the King's kisses are sacred to Portsmouth's lips.

NELL. Zounds,—not two hours since he bestowed a kiss on Eleanor Gwyn—

PORT. Nell Gwyn!

NELL. With oaths, mountains high, that his lips were only for her. (*Crossing L., aside.*) Methinks that speech went home.

PORT. (*Following Nell L.*) He kissed her in your presence?

NELL. I was not far off, dear Duchess.

PORT. You saw the kiss?

NELL. No;—I—I—felt the shock. (*Enter Charles, L. U. E.*)

PORT. I hate Nell Gwyn.

NELL. Is't possible?

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) In a passion over Nelly? Ye Gods, I'd sooner face Cromwell's soldiers at Boscobel! All hail the oak! (*Steps behind arras, R. U. E., representing wood scene.*)

NELL. Most strange! Nell told me but yesterday that Portsmouth was charming company, but a small eater.

PORT. 'Tis false. I never met the swearing orange-wench.

NELL. Ods-pitikens, Nell's oaths *are* bad enough for men.

PORT. Masculine creature!

NELL. Verily, quite masculine—of late.

PORT. A vulgar player;—loves every lover who wears gold lace and tosses coins—

NELL. Nay; 'tis false! (*Hand on sword.*) Pardon, dear hostess, a thousand pardons; but I have some reason to know you misjudge Mistress Nell. With all her myriad faults, she never loved but one.

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) But one! But one! (*Exits.*)

PORT. You seem solicitous for her good name, dear Beau?

NELL. I am solicitous for the name of all good women, or I would be unworthy of their sex—I mean, their friendship.

PORT. Dear Beau, what do the cavaliers see in that horrid creature?

NELL. Alack-a-day, we men, you know,—well—the best of us make mistakes in women.

PORT. Are you mistaken, too?

NELL. What? I love Nelly? Ha, ha, ha! Nay, Duchess, I adore but one!

PORT. And she?

NELL. How can you ask? (*Looks into Portsmouth's eyes adoringly.*)

PORT. Do you not fear?

NELL. Fear what?

PORT. My wrath.

NELL. Nay, more, thy love!

PORT. My love?

NELL. Aye; for 'tis hopeless.

PORT. Try.

NELL. I am doing my best. (*Embraces her lovingly.*)

PORT. Do you find it hopeless?

NELL. Until you trust me. Give me the secrets of your brain and heart, and then I'll know you love me.

PORT. Nay, they would sink a ship.

NELL. One would not. (*Aside.*) I must have the packet.

PORT. (*Aside.*) Why not? Of Irish descent, no love for the King, young, brave, no court ties; none will suspect or stay him. Can I trust you?

NELL. My sword and life are yours.

PORT. This little packet—a family matter merely—must reach the Rainbow Tavern on the Canterbury road by sunrise, where one is waiting. You'll find his description on the packet.

NELL. I know the place and road. (*Portsmouth hands Nell the papers. The King, returning to listen, trips and makes a noise.*)

PORT. Hush! Be true, and you will win my love. (*They separate quickly.*)

NELL. (*Sees King behind arras.*) The King returned—an eavesdropper! Jealous of Portsmouth! His eyes follow her. Where are his vows to Nell? I'll defame Nell's name, drag her fair honor in the mire; so, Charles, we'll test your manliness and love. (*To Portsmouth.*) Madame, I have been deceiving, lying to you. I stood here, praising, honoring, Eleanor Gwyn—an apple rotten to the core!

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) How now?

NELL. I had a friend who told me he loved Nell. I loved that friend. God knows, I loved him.

PORT. Yes, yes!

NELL. A man of noble name and princely mien; a man of honor, who would have died fighting for Nell's honor.

PORT. Mised youth.

NELL. Who, had he heard a murmur of disapproval, a shadow cast upon her name, would have sealed in death the presumptuous lips which uttered it.

PORT. She betrayed his nobleness?

NELL. Betrayed—and worse! A woman, base, defamed, without a spark of kindness—an *adventuress*! This is the picture of that Eleanor Gwyn! Where is a champion to take up the gauntlet for such a Nell?

CHARLES. (*Coming down C., sword in hand.*) Here, thou defamer; thou base purveyor of lies; answer me—*me*, for those words. I am Nell's champion. I'll force you to own your slander a lie! (*Enter James, Buckingham, Strings, etc., L. U. E.*)

BUCK. Ho, look to the King!

JAMES. The guard! The guard! (*Enter guard, R. and L.*)

CHARLES. I want no guard. An insult to Nell Gwyn is my cause alone.

BUCK. (*Aside.*) Nell Gwyn! Plague on't, my game is up.

NELL. (*Aside.*) He loves me, he loves me; he will fight for Nell.

PORT. (*R. C., restraining the King.*) Shed no blood, Sire, for my sake!

CHARLES. (*To Portsmouth.*) Unhand me, woman!

STRINGS. (*Aside to Nell, L.C.*) By the window; save yourself!

ALL. Treason! Treason! (*King rushes upon Nell. She realizes situation for the first time; disarms King by a wild*

blow. Her courage fails. Tries to exit by doors; prevented by guard. Strings assists her to French window, C.; shaking hilt of sword at King, until surrounded and pressed to fight, she leaps from window. Picture.

(CURTAIN.)

ACT IV.

SCENE: *Drawing-room at Nell's. Windows at back looking upon terrace and St. James' Park. Lights low. Moll discovered asleep in chair. Town Crier:—"Midnight and all is well."*

MOLL. The midnight crier! I have been asleep and the candle's nearly out. (*Lights new candle.*) I wish Nell would come. The ghosts and skeletons fairly swarm in this old house at midnight, and I am all alone to-night. It's different when Nell's about. The goblins are afraid of her merry laugh. Boo! I am cold all over. I am afraid to stand still and I am afraid to move. (*At window C.*) Someone glided behind the old oak in the park. Oh, oh! Nell will be murdered. I begged her not to go to that horrid ball. She said she just wanted to peep in and pay her respects to Portsmouth. Moll, you better pray. (*Kneeling L. U. corner.*)

NELL. (*At door R. U. E.*) Safe home at last! Heaven reward you, Strings.

STRINGS. (*At door R. U. E.*) Good night, Mistress Nell, and good sleep.

NELL. Good night, comrade. (*Exit Strings. Nell comes down R., as Adair, pale and trembling, shoes in hand.*) Moll! Moll! What are you doing, Moll?

MOLL. (*Rising.*) Praying for Nell.

NELL. Hump! There's no spirit in this flesh worth praying for. (*Falling on couch R. C.*) Some wine, some wine, and the blessing after—

MOLL. (*Coming down R. to Nell.*) Nell, dear Nell! You are ill.

NELL. Wine, wine, I say. (*Moll gets wine up L.*)

MOLL. You are wounded, you are going to die. Moll will be alone in the world again.

NELL. (*Moll fills glass.*) To the brim, girl, to the brim, —there! (*Drinks.*) I tell you, sweetheart, we men need lots of stimulating.

MOLL. You are all of a tremble. (*Moll puts on Nell's shoes.*)

NELL. Little wonder! These braveries are a trifle chilly, sweet mouse. Boo! Ha! Ha! You see, I never was a man before, and I had all that lost time to make up; acres of oats to scatter in one night. Open my throat; I cannot breathe. Take off my sword. The wars are done, I hope. Ha! Ha! Ha! Moll, I was the gayest madcap there. The sex were wild for me. I knew their weak points of attack, lass. If I had been seeking a mate, I could have made my market of them all and started a harem.

MOLL. Wicked girl.

NELL. Oh, I am a jolly roysterer, little one. I ran the gamut. I had all the paces of the truest cavalier. I could tread a measure, swear like one from the wars, crook my elbows, lie, gamble, fight,—Fight?—Did I say fight?

MOLL. You have been in danger!

NELL. Danger! Ha! Ha! Ha! I taught the King a lesson he will dream about, my sweet, though it near cost me my life. He loves me, d' hear, he loves me, pretty one! Dance, Moll, dance,—dance, I say! (*Seizes Moll and dances wildly about the room.*) I could fly for very joy! (*Falls in a chair down L., laughing and crying alternately.*)

MOLL. (*Out of breath.*) Nell, Nell; one minute you laugh and then you cry. Have you lost your wits?

NELL. I only know I made him swear his love for Nell to Portsmouth's face. Ha! Ha! Ha! I made him draw his sword for Nell.

MOLL. Great Heavens, you did not draw yourself? A sword against the King is treason!

NELL. Odds' bodkins, I know not! I know not what I did or said. I was mad, mad! All I remember is: there was a big noise—a million spears and blunderbusses turned upon poor me! Gad! I made a pretty target, girl.

MOLL. A million spears and blunderbusses!

NELL. An army, child, an army! I did not stop to count them. Then, next I knew, I was in my coach with dear old Strings beside me. The horses flew. We alighted at the Chapel, tip-toed about several corners to break the scent; then I took off my shoes and stole up the back way like a good and faithful husband. Oh, I did the whole thing in cavalier style, sweetheart. (*Calling Moll to her and speaking confidentially.*) But, twixt us, Moll,—I wouldn't have it go further for worlds—Adair is a coward, a monstrous coward! He ran! (*Noise off R. U. E.*) Hark, what is that?

MOLL. The men, perchance, I told you of; they've spied about the house for weeks.

NELL. Nonsense, you little goose,—some of your ex-lovers nailing their bleeding hearts to the trees. (*Noise.*)

MOLL. No, no; listen! They're in the entry.

NELL. In the entry! I wish we were in bed with our heads under the sheet.

MOLL. Here is your sword. (*Bringing it to Nell.*)

NELL. Oh, yes, my sword! I never thought of my sword; and this is one of the bravest swords I ever drew. (*Takes it.*) I am as weak as a woman, Moll.

MOLL. Take heart; you know you faced an army to-night.

NELL. True; but then I was a man, and had to seem brave whether I was or no. Who's there? Who's there? Support me, Moll. Beau Adair is on his last legs. (*Prepares to exit, sword in hand, R. 3 E., followed by Moll. Serenade begins off L. U. E.*) Ha! Ha! Ha! A serenade! A serenade!—ha, ha,—Moll—why, Moll, what feared ye, lass? Come! (*Goes to window C. and looks out.*) Oh, ho, masqueraders from the moon. Some merry crew, I'll be bound. I am generous. I'll give thee all but one, sweet mouse. The tall knight in red

for me! I know he's gallant, though his visor's down. Marry, he is their captain, I trow; and none but a captain of men shall be captain of my little heart.

MOLL. It is Satan and his imps.

NELL. Tush, little one; Satan is my warmest friend. Besides, they cannot cross the moat. The ramparts are ours. The drawbridge is up. (*Throws mantle about shoulders to hide dress and puts on old helmet. Opens window.*)

MOLL. Nell, what are you doing? They can see and shoot you.

NELL. Tilly-vally, girl; we'll parley with the enemy in true feudal style. Ho there, strangers of the night—breakers of the King's peace and the slumbers of the righteous! Brawlers, knaves; would ye raise honest men from their beds at such an hour? What means this jargon of tipsy voices? What want ye?

VOICES. (*Outside.*) Drink! Drink! Sack! Rhenish!

NELL. Do ye think this a tavern, knaves? Do ye think this a vintner's? There are no topers here. (*Laughter outside.*) Jackanapes, revellers; away with you or we'll rouse the citadel and train the guns.

VOICES. (*Outside.*) Down with the doors! Break in the windows!

NELL. Heaven preserve us; they are coming in! (*Closes window hastily.*) Oh, Moll, Moll, I did not think they would dare. (*Throws off mantle and helmet.*)

VOICE. (*Outside. Knock L. 2 E.*) Ho there, within!

NELL. Yes.

VOICE. (*Outside.*) Nell! Nell!

NELL. (*Aside.*) Some knave calls Nell at this hour. Nell's in bed!

MOLL. Yes, Nell's in bed. Everybody's in bed. Call tomorrow!

VOICE. No trifling, wench! Down with the door!

NELL. Stand close, Moll. Who are ye? Who are ye?

CHARLES. (*Outside.*) Old Rowley himself! (*Laughter outside.*)

NELL. The King—as I thought! Good lack; what shall I do with Adair?

MOLL. Nay, I know not.

NELL. Plague on't; he'll be mad if I keep him waiting, and madder if I let him in. Where are your wits, Moll? Run for my gown; fly,—fly! (*Exit Moll, R. 3 E.*) The bolt sticks, Sire. How can I get out of these braveries? (*Trying to undress.*) I don't know which end of me to begin on first.

MOLL. (*Re-entering, R. 3 E., with gown, opening down front.*) Here is the first I found.

NELL. Help me out of this coat. Marry, I would I were a fairy with a magic wand; I could befuddle men's eyes easier. (*Moll takes coat and helps Nell into gown, which is put on over boy's clothes. Knock and laughter outside.*) Patience, my liege.—There, there; that hides a multitude of sins. The girdle, the girdle! Ha, ha, ha! Adair will not escape from this—if we can but keep him quiet; the rogue has a woman's tongue, and it will out, I fear.

CHARLES. (*Outside.*) Down with the door. The ram; the battering ram.

NELL. I come, my love; I come. (*To Moll.*) 'Sdeath; under the couch with Adair's coat! (*Moll throws it under the couch, leaving a sleeve still showing.*) Patience, Sire! Help me, Moll. How this lock has rusted in the last five minutes! (*Opens door.*) I' faith, I regret to have kept you waiting, Sire. (*Enter, merrily, Charles, James, Rochester, and one or two maskers, who remain by entrance.*) Welcome, royal comrades, welcome all!

CHARLES. Scurvy entertainment!

NELL. Yea, my liege—you see—I did not expect the King so late, and so was unpresentable.

CHARLES. It is the one you do not expect who always causes the trouble, Nell.

MOLL. We were in bed, Sire.

NELL. Marry, truly,—asleep, Sire, sound asleep and our prayers said.

CHARLES. Tilly-vally, we might credit thy tongue, wench, but for the prayers. No digressions, spider Nell. My sword is in a fighting mood. 'Sdeath, call forth the knight-errant who holds thy errant heart secure for one short hour.

NELL. The knight of my heart? Ah, Sire, you know his name.

CHARLES. Yea, marry, I do—a pretty piece of heraldry, a bold escutcheon, a dainty poniard—pale as a lily; and how he did sigh, and drop his lids, and smirk and smirk, and dance your latest galliard to surpass De Grammont. Ask Brother James how he did dance.

ROCHESTER. Nay, Sire, his Highness of York has suffered enough.

JAMES. Hang the coxcomb.

CHARLES. 'Slife, I will—and you overtake him, brother.

ROCHESTER. His back was shapely, Sire.

CHARLES. Yea, and his heels! He had such dainty heels—Mercury's wings attached, to waft him on his way.

NELL. This is moonshine madness! There's none such here. By my troth, I would there were. Nay, ask Moll.

MOLL. Not one visitor to-night.

CHARLES. Odd' so! Whence came the Jack at the window—the brave young challenger—"Would ye raise honest men from their beds at such an hour?" (*Laughter.*)

ROCHESTER. (*Up L., holding up decanter.*) Sire! "Do you think this is a vintner's? There are no toppers here." Ha, ha, ha!

JAMES. To your knees, minx, and crave mercy of your prince.

NELL. Faith and troth, 'twas I myself with helmet and mantle on. You see, Sire, my menials were guests at Portsmouth's ball—to lend respectability.

CHARLES. Saucy wag, a ball! A battle, which would have killed thee straight.

NELL. (*Aside.*) It had liked to. A war of the sex without me? It was stupid, then. The Duchess missed me, I trow.

CHARLES. Never fear; you were bravely championed.

NELL. I am sure of that; my King was there.

CHARLES. And a bantam cock, upon whose lips "Nell" hung familiarly.

NELL. Some strange gallant took my part before them all? Who was he, Sire? Don't tantalize me so.

CHARLES. A chip from the blarney stone,—surnamed Adair!

NELL. Adair! Adair! We spent our youth together. I see him in my mind's eye, Sire, throw down the gauntlet in Nell's name and defy the world for her. Fill the cups. (*Moll passes wine.*) We'll drink to my new-found hero. Fill! Fill! To Le Beau Adair, as you love me, gallants! Long life to Adair!

CHARLES. Stay! Not a drop to a coward!

NELL. A coward! Adair a coward? I'll never credit it, Sire. (*Aside.*) He is trembling in my boots now. I can feel him shake.

CHARLES. Our pledge is Nell, Nell only!

ALL. (*Drinking.*) Aye, aye, Nell! Nell! We'll drink to Nell!

NELL. You do me honor, royal gentlemen. (*Aside.*) Poor Adair! Here's health to the inner man. (*Drinking.*)

CHARLES. Now, fair housewife, set forth the dish that we may carve it to our liking. 'Tis a dainty bit—lace—velvet and ruffles. (*General laughter, and cries of "Aye, aye!"*)

NELL. Hay-day, Sire, the larder's empty.

CHARLES. Devil on't; no mincing, wench. In the confusion of the ball the bird escaped my guard by magic. We know whither the flight.

NELL. Escaped the guard! Alas, I trow some petticoat has hid him then.

JAMES. I'll stake my life upon 't.

NELL. Sire, you would not injure Adair! You are too generous. Blue eyes of Heaven, and such a smile! Did you mark his smile, Sire?

CHARLES. Odds fish, this to my teeth, rogue! Guard the doors, gallants; we'd gaze upon this paragon.

JAMES. And set him pirouetting, Sire.

CHARLES. Yea, to the tune of these fiddlesticks. (*Draws sword.*) Search from tile to rafter.

ROCHESTER. Aye, aye; from cellar to garret.

NELL. Sire,—(*Gets between the King and a curtain, R. U. cor., as if to shield a hidden man.*) Spare him, Sire, for my sake, Sire. He is not to blame for loving me; he cannot help it.

CHARLES. (*Aside.*) Can he really be here? Saucy wench! Hey! My blood is charging full-tilt through my veins. By Jove, we'll try his mettle once again.

NELL. Pr'y thee, Sire, he is too noble and brave and handsome to die. I love his very image.

CHARLES. Oh, ho! A silken blind for the silken bird! Hey, St. George for England! Come forth, thou picture of cowardness—thou vile slanderer. (*Passes Nell, tears down curtain and faces himself in a long mirror.*) Ye Gods, my own reflection! (*All laugh.*) Rogue, rogue, I should turn the point on thee for this trick; but England would be worse than a Puritan funeral with no Nell. Thou shalt suffer anon.

NELL. I defy thee, Sire, and all thy imps of Satan. Cast Nell in the blackest dungeon, Adair is her fellow prisoner; outlaw Nell, Adair is her brother outlaw; off with Nell's head, off rolls Adair's. Who else can boast so true a love?

CHARLES. Thou shalt be banished the realm.

NELL. Banished!

CHARLES. Beyond sea, witch! Virginia shall be thy home.

NELL. Good, good! Sire, the men grow handsome in Virginia, and dauntless; and they tell me there's a dearth of women there. Oh, banish me at once to—What's the name?

JAMES. Jamestown.

NELL. Yea, brother James; Jamestown.

CHARLES. Savages, wildmen, cannibals—

NELL. Cannibals! Marry, I should love to be a cannibal. Are there cannibals in Jamestown, brother James? Banish me, Sire, banish me to Jamestown of all places. Up with the sails, my merry men; give me the helm! Adair will sail in the same good ship, I trow.

CHARLES. I trow thou wert best at home, cannibal Nelly.

NELL. Then set all the men in Britain to watch me, Sire; for, from now on, I'll need it.

CHARLES. (*Noise off L. 2 E.*) Ho, there! A night disturbance, a drunken brawl, beneath our very ears! Fellow Saints, what mean my subjects from their beds this hour of night? Their sovereign does the revelling for the realm. James, Rochester and all, see to 't! (*All exit except King and Nell.*) A subterfuge! Nell, quick, one kiss!

NELL. You question my constancy to-night. You do not trust me.

CHARLES. I do, sweet Nell.

NELL. You bring me Portsmouth's lips.

CHARLES. I left her dance for you.

NELL. At near sunrise, Sire. (*Points toward window.*)

CHARLES. Nay, do not tantalize me, Nell. I'm sad to-night.

NELL. Tantalize my King! (*Kisses him.*) The day will be so happy; for I've seen you at the dawn.

CHARLES. My crown is heavy, Nell. Heaven gives us crowns, but not the eye to see the ending of our deeds.

NELL. God sees them. Ah, Sire, I thank the Maker of the world for giving a crown to one whom I respect and love.

CHARLES. And I curse it; for 'tis the only barrier to our united love. (*Kisses Nell.*) It is the sparkling spider in the center of a great web of intrigue and infamy.

NELL. You make me bold to speak. Cut the web, Sire, which binds thy crown to France. There is the only danger.

CHARLES. Thou art wrong, Nelly, wrong! I have decided otherwise.

NELL. Then, change your mind, Sire; for I can prove—

CHARLES. What, girl?

NELL. Stay! (*Aside.*) I will reveal Adair!

CHARLES. What, I say?

NELL. To-morrow and to-morrow, Sire—(*Sound of a struggle off L. 2 E.*)

CHARLES. Ho! without there! (*James, Rochester and all re-enter L. 2 E.*) Whence comes this noisy riot?

JAMES. Pardon, Sire, the guard caught but now an armed ruffian prowling by the house. They report they stayed him on suspicion of his looks and insolence.

CHARLES. Adair! Adair! My life upon 't! Ha! Ha! Ha! Set him before us. (*Exit officer, L. 2 E.*)

ALL. Adair! Adair! A trial, Sire! Bring in the coward!

CHARLES. Aye, gallants, we'll form a court of inquiry. This table shall be our bench, on which we will hem and haw and puff and look judicial. Odds fish, we will teach Rada-manthus and Judge Jeffreys ways of terrorizing. (*Sits on table L. of C.*)

ROCHESTER. Oyer, oyer; all ye who have grievances—

CHARLES. Mistress Nell, thou shalt be counsel for the prisoner; Adair's life hangs upon thy skill to outwit the law.

NELL. Or bribe the judge, Sire?

CHARLES. Not with thy traitor lips.

NELL. Traitor lips! By my troth, I never kissed Adair. I confess, I tried your Majesty; but I could not.

CHARLES. Have a care; I am growing jealous.

NELL. Adair is in such a tight place, Sire, he can scarcely breathe, much less speak for himself. Mercy! (*Kneels to King.*)

CHARLES. We will have justice; not mercy. Guilty or not guilty, wench?

NELL. Not guilty, Sire! Did you ever see the man who was? (*Rising.*)

JAMES. I'll plead for the Crown to rid the realm of this dancing Jack.

CHARLES. (*On table L. C.*) Thou hast cause, brother. Ha, ha, ha! Rochester, thou shalt sit by us here. Judge Rochester!—Judge of good ale. We'll confer with the cups, imbibe the statutes and drink in the law. Set the rascal before us! (*Enter Hart L. 2 E., muffled with cloak and guarded. Strings enters with others and remains in background.*)

HART. Hold off your hands, knaves.

CHARLES. Silence, rogue! Thy name?

HART. (*Throwing off mantle.*) Sire?

ALL. Jack Hart!

CHARLES. 'Slife, a spy upon our merry-making! What means this prowling, sir?

HART. Pardon, pardon, my reply, your Majesty. Blinded by passion, I might say that I should regret.

CHARLES. Your strange behavior and stranger looks have meaning, sir. Out with it! These are too dangerous times to withhold a secret from your King.

HART. No need for command, Sire, the words are trembling on my lips and will out themselves in spite of me. At Portsmouth's ball, an hour past, I o'erheard that fop, Adair, boast to-night a rendezvous here with Nell.

NELL. (*Aside.*) This—my old friend.

CHARLES. Our jest turned earnest! Well?—Well?

HART. I could not believe my ears, Sire. I watched to refute the lie—

CHARLES. Yes—yes—

HART. I cannot go on.

CHARLES. Knave, I command!

HART. I saw Adair enter this abode at midnight.

CHARLES. Ye Gods, my heart stands still as if 'twere knifed. My pretty golden head,—my Nell!—Your words are false, false, sir! (*Aside.*) Kind Heaven, they must be.

HART. Pardon, Sire, I know not what I do or say. Only love for Nell led me to this spot.

NELL. Love! Oh, inhuman, to spy out my ways, resort to mean device, involve my honor and call the motive love!

HART. You are cruel, cruel, Nell.

NELL. Love! True love would come alone, filled with gentle admonition. I pity you, friend Hart, that God has made you thus!

HART. No more, no more!

CHARLES. Do'st hear, do'st hear? Ha, ha, ha! Sir, you are the second to-night to belie the dearest name in England. You shall answer well to me.

HART. Ask the lady, Sire. I'll stake my life upon her reply.

CHARLES. Nell?—Nell?—

NELL. Sire—(*pretends to weep, but laughs.*)

HART. Her tears convict her.

CHARLES. I'll not believe it.

NELL. (*Aside.*) Adair's sides are aching. He is laughing through Nell's tears.

MOLL. (*At window C.*) A coach and six at break-neck speed has landed at the door. A cavalier alights.

NELL. (*Aside.*) Time someone arrived.

MOLL. The Duke of Buckingham!

CHARLES. How now! No leisure for Buckingham now. We have other business.

MOLL. He is entering, Sire. (*Enter Buckingham L. 2 E.*)

CHARLES. How now!

BUCK. Pardon, your Majesty, my mission will excuse my haste and interruption. Your ear I crave one moment. (*Whispering.*) Sire, I am told Nell has to-night secreted in this house a lover!

CHARLES. 'Tis hearsay, the give and take of gossips? I'll none of it.

BUCK. My witness, Sire! (*Opens door L. 2 E. Enter Portsmouth.*) The Duchess of Portsmouth!

ALL. Portsmouth!

NELL. (*Aside.*) The day of reckoning's come.

BUCK. Speak, your Grace. The King attends you.

PORT. Nay, *before all*, my lord? I could not do Madame Gwyn such injustice.

NELL. If your speech concerns me, out with it boldly. (*Aside.*) My friends will consider the source.

CHARLES. Speak, and quickly!

PORT. I would rather lose my tongue than speak such words of any one, but my duty to your Majesty—

CHARLES. No preludes.

PORT. My servants, passing this abode by accident, this very night saw a strange cavalier entering the boudoir of Madame Gwyn.

NELL. (*Aside.*) She would make my honor the price of her revenge. She shall rue those words or Adair's head and mine are one for naught.

CHARLES. What say you to this, Nell?

NELL. Sire—I—I—there's some mistake or knavery!

PORT. She hesitates—

CHARLES. You change color, wench. Ho, without there! (*Enter officer L. 2 E.*) Search the house.

NELL. Stay, Sire, my oath, I have not seen Adair's face this night.

PORT. (*Aside.*) Mon Dieu! Adair! Could it be he my servants saw? The packet! Fool, why did I give it him!

BUCK. (*Aside to Port., down L.*) The scales are turning against us. Throw in this ring for safety. Adair's gift to Nell, you understand. (*Slips ring on Portsmouth's finger.*)

PORT. (*Aside.*) Yes! yes! 'Tis my only chance. Your Majesty recognizes this ring?

CHARLES. The one I gave to Nell!

PORT. The one Adair this night gave to me.

NELL. 'Tis false! I gave that ring to dear old Strings.

PORT. A rare jewel to bestow upon a fiddler.

STRINGS. (*Coming down.*) It is true. My little ones were starving, Sire, and Nell gave me the ring—all she had. They couldn't eat the gold; so I sold it to the Duke of Buckingham!

BUCK. (*Aside to Port.*) We are lost.

PORT. (*Aside to Buck.*) Coward! I am not ready to sail for France so soon. Our hostess will pardon my eyes for wandering but her abode is filled with pleasant surprises. Sire, here is a piece of handy-work. (*Crosses R. and draws Adair's coat from under couch.*) Marry, 'tis Strings', of course. The lace, the ruffle, become his complexion. He fits everything here so beautifully. Mon Dieu, Adair's coat—the packet! (*Attempts to withdraw it from pocket. Nell catches her hand.*)

NELL. Not so fast, dear Duchess. Our King must read these papers—and between each line as well.

CHARLES. Enough of this! What is it?

NELL. Some papers, Sire—given for a kiss and taken with a kiss. I have not had time to read them. (*Hands papers to King.*)

PORT. (*Attempting to take papers from King.*) Some family papers, Sire, stolen from my house.

NELL. Aye, stolen! But by the hostess herself—from her

unsuspecting royal guest. There, Sire, stands the only thief!  
(*Points towards Port.*)

CHARLES. My signature! The treaties! (*Reads.*) No more Parliaments for England. I agreed to that.

NELL. I agree to that myself. England's King is too great to need Parliaments. The King should have a confidential adviser, however—not French, (*speaking to Port.*) but English. Read on.

CHARLES. A note to Bouillion! (*Reads.*) "Charles consents to the fall of Luxemburg." I did not sign all this. I see it all: Louis' ambition to rule the world, England's King debased by promises won and royal contracts made with a clever woman—forgery mixed with truth. Ye Gods, what have I done!

NELL. The papers have not gone, Sire.

CHARLES. Thanks to you, my Nell. (*To Portsmouth.*) Madame, your coach awaits you.

PORT. (*Starts to go. Stops.*) But, Sire, Madame Gwyn has yet Adair to answer for!

NELL. Adair will answer for himself! (*Throws aside dress and appears as Adair.*)

ALL. Nell! Nell!

NELL. At your service. (*Bowing very low.*)

PORT. A player's trick!

NELL. Yes, Portsmouth, to show where lies the true and where the false.

PORT. You are a witch.

CHARLES. You are the King's true love. To my arms, Nell, to my arms; (*Embraces her*) for you first taught me the meaning of true love! Buckingham, you forget your courtesy. Her Grace wishes to be escorted to her coach.

NELL. Bon voyage, madame. (*Exeunt Buck and Port., L. 2 E.*)

CHARLES. (*To guards with Hart.*) Away with this wretch! I am not done with him.

NELL. Forgive him, Sire; he took his cue from Heaven, and good has come of it.

CHARLES. True, Nell. (*To Hart.*) You are free, but henceforth act the knave only on the stage. (*Exit Hart L. & E.*)

STRINGS. Sire, Sire.

CHARLES. Well, Strings?

STRINGS. Let me play the exit for the villains. The old fiddle is just bursting with tunes.

CHARLES. You shall, Strings, and on a cremona. From to-day, you lead the Royal Orchestra.

STRINGS. Oddsbud, I can offer Jack Hart an engagement.

NELL. Ha, ha, ha! Just retribution, Strings. Can you do as much for Nell, and forgive her, Sire?

CHARLES. It is I who should ask your pardon, Nell. You are Charles' Queen, you should be England's.

(CURTAIN.)







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