

THE GREAT ROMANTIC

E. Barrington

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SAMUEL PEPYS
and His Elizabeth

THE famous Samuel Pepys and his Elizabeth lived in the picturesque, drinking, wenching, plague-infested England of the Restoration.

Here is young Pepys with his near-sighted eyes, his inquisitive nose, his full, good-natured, sensual lips, the Pepys of petty amours who composed ballads and kept a diary. And here also is old Pepys who insinuated himself into one success after another until he died, rich, honored, loaded with titles.

Pepys never understood his pretty French wife, the lovely, jealous, overpassionate child who studied the cipher of his diary until she could eventually read it and bend him to her will.

This is one of the most glamorous true romances by the author of "GLORIOUS APOLLO" and "ANNE BOLEYN."

The Great Romantic

BOOKS BY

E. BARRINGTON

(L. Adams Beck)

The Great Romantic

Anne Boleyn

The Irish Beauties

The Duel of the Queens

The Laughing Queen

The Divine Lady

Glorious Apollo

Exquisite Perdita

The Ladies

The Gallants

The Chaste Diana

The Thunderer

The Empress of Hearts

THE GREAT ROMANTIC

Being an Interpretation of MR. SAM^L PEPYS
and ELIZABETH His Wife

By E. BARRINGTON

(L. Adams Beck)

1933

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FIRST EDITION

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Part One

Chapter One

YOU are to imagine a little London modestly surrounded by green fields and lanes none too safe from the point of view of travellers, as forming nests for highly undesirable birds in the shape of ambushed cutpurses and the like. A London using its Thames as its principal highway with a not unnatural preference of clean water to dirty cobbled or uncobbled streets, even with the added risk to water-farers of shooting London Bridge and possible collision with the piers in the sweeping downward tide. Pretty ladies took their chance thus sooner than trip or jolt through the arteries of the little city. Yet a London holding its head high as a magnificent capital and, through its citizens, despising the dull and backward country folk in the villages about as unlearned alike in virtues and vices—after the manner of cities from time immemorial.

It was indeed a gay and gallant life there, especially after it had closed its gates for the night enclosing bad and good alike. Oil lights cheered the playhouses, and wax candles the abodes of the great, but rogues and vagabonds infested the dark corners and blind alleys of the narrow streets, and when Mr. Samuel Pepys returned home late from enjoyment of good company and the society of Mrs. Knipp and other pretty actresses it was often with his heart in his mouth and one hand feeling doubtfully at his sword—as a man of peace will—with a bribe to the coachman in the other to drive helter-skelter from suspicious-looking rogues peering out from the black shadows about Paul's Cathedral or corner boys at the end of Blowbladder Street and elsewhere. Indeed, the fair young Elizabeth Pepys, his French wife, would often sit up at night palpitating and trepidating with the fear that they had got that gadding gentleman at last.

True, he might have stopped for a drink at the Cardinal's Cap, or the Swan on the Hoop, and be mighty merry there in the company of like-minded gadders, but who can tell?—for she knew very well it was at least as likely he had stayed on to exchange jokes with the easy-mannered ladies of the theatre.

Therefore Elizabeth Pepys often walked up and down in her long low-beamed parlour in the Navy Office between Seething Lane and Crutched Friars in much disquiet, less afraid of rogues and vagabonds than of pretty women, and wishing with all her young heart and soul that her Samuel's flesh was not so weak and his spirit a little more resolutely willing to climb the chilly heights of virtues which he admired only as snowy peaks looking handsome in the distance, but which he would never surmount.

And yet it was puzzling for Elizabeth, take it how you will. She was none too grave herself and passionately relished the gaieties and frivolities of life—a match for her husband there! The only difference between them lay, so far as she could see as yet, in the fact that she always wanted him to enjoy the good times with her whereas he could reach the fulness of enjoyment in quite other company than his wife's.

Unfortunate Elizabeth! That simple statement, brief and unpretending though it be, covers most of the mysteries of married disagreement. They had been passionately in love with each other when, she a girl fifteen, he but twenty-two, and not a penny between them, they had married in haste and often repented in haste, but happily not as yet at leisure. She was ready to scratch back with the sharp claws hidden in velvet paws when he provoked her, but for all that could not for an instant comprehend how he could be content to sun himself in the soft eye-beams of other company than hers, except indeed that of the ladies of the Sandwich family, where of course he was in duty as a sort of retainer of my Lord Sandwich's. Much less could she understand those unexplained absences when he would come in a little hurried, a little flushed, and with excuses tripping off his tongue a little too readily. This would be one of them now.

She walked up and down, the moonless night outside hanging black and low over the narrow streets with feebly flickering oil lamps occurring here and there where people chose to take the trouble of shedding a dim light on a naughty world. A girl of twenty-four, exceedingly pretty in a dark, impetuous French fashion, eagerly bright-eyed and with that golden colouring which assorts itself with a damask flush in cheeks and lips, full-bosomed, swan-throated—a beauty, if she could set herself off as her fine French taste desired. But then—there also were difficulties, to be dealt with later.

She stopped by the narrow window and leaned her head against it, sighing on a memory. She saw herself with her father and mother—a newly made wife, and their delight that she should have married an Englishman

and a sound Protestant, likely to rise in the world because Roman Catholicism was no longer the fashion in high places.

“For it is very much to my taste,” said her father, stroking the little dark head, “that my girl should be safe from the temptations of Rome and allied to a faith which promises prosperity in this world and the next. I can wish no better.”

A lovable if not very prosperous father, and she had put her arms about his neck and kissed his eyelids close with all manner of pretty caresses. She could still hear herself say:

“Dear father, though in my tender years” (tender enough still!) “I was deluded to popery by my low fortunes, there is now no fear, for I have for my husband a man too wise and religious to suffer my thoughts to bend that way more!”

“For I did love him most heartily and with passion,” she said to herself now, tears brimming in her eyes, “but time changes all things and me with them. Do I love him now? Indeed, I cannot tell. If asked in confession as I confessed long ago in the Ursuline Convent I must say, No. At least, if the other was true love I must think this is not.”

A sound of feet outside and a roistering shout from one half-drunken man to another. She pressed her face against the pane and looked down eagerly into Seething Lane. Nothing—the voices died away, shouting, laughing into the distance. She sank again into her thought, not wholly sad, for there would always be tomorrow with its procession of small excitements and diversions which were somehow comforting—the sea-coal fire shooting bright homely gleams over panelled walls, the skirmishing fights for a visit to the playhouse with her husband. She had few gaieties, but even the fresh eggs which Pall Pepys, her sister-in-law, sent up from Brampton, and the chine of salted beef which Pepys cut into so manfully when he praised her good housekeeping, were little events that cheered her, not to mention the crowning glory of an occasional expedition to the Exchange to buy some beautiful stuff for a new gown after the French mode. All these things which came creeping softly about her heart when it was sad assured her that she had after all a warmly cushioned even if small nest in the great world of London.

Indeed, there was her old petticoat now, which would be so much more modish if she put the black lace on it which Pepys had brought from the Exchange. To light the lamp and build the fire and stitch away at it would bring a very different train of thought from that engendered by the lonely menacing night outside.

“Lord, what a fool I am!” she said half aloud; “after all, there’s life left, and comfort, and praise, and to make the rooms pretty and what not, even if he does stay out late o’ nights. I can’t better it by drizzling like a rainy day. And young men will seek amusements.”

In a minute more the room flamed like the heart of a carbuncle with rosy fire and lamplight, and laying the petticoat on the table she began loose-stitching her lace into position with her head now on one side now on another to see the effect as it became of more importance that petticoats should be straight-falling and sufficiently full to set off the stealing in and out of pretty feet than that husbands should come home before the grey line grew eastward in a weeping sky. After all, there is always some comfort in life, if it be only a dress that all the world commends, or a gift here and there, or a supper or what not. Why should a pretty woman of twenty-four despair, dark-eyed, dark-haired, sweet-mouthed, whom men turn to look upon in the street? But the night went on, and the needle grew heavy in her hand, the lace dropped floorward, her head sank back against the cushion, and lo! the patient Penelope was sound asleep, forgetting her Ulysses whether in Circe’s arms or the more enduring embrace of Bacchus at the Swan on the Hoop.

So Pepys found her when with the wariest caution he approached the door of the Navy Office which gave on Seething Lane. Quite apart from his Elizabeth he would be unwilling that any head should peer out of curtained windows and behold the young Clerk of the Acts returning home somewhat foxed with drink to the august abode of Naval Affairs where in virtue of his office he was permitted a house. Therefore he unlocked the door with a well oiled key, turning it like velvet, crept up the oak stair with a burglar’s softly padded step, and so into the parlour, purposing a last sleeping draught from the great jug of sack posset that stood on the table. If there were any fire left he would warm himself some sack, for the air was sharp and frosty.

As he opened the door, waves of drowsy firelight overflowed into the dark outside. The lamp had given out, and at first he did not see Elizabeth in the deep chair. Well and good! She would be asleep in the big curtained feather-bed, and he would creep in beside her and so melt into her dream, and could please himself as to what he would tell her next morning as to the hour of his return. But first the sack.

With his hand on the saucepan he turned to the fire and became suddenly aware of two dark eyes watching fixedly. He started and stumbled over a chair with a clatter that might have roused the whole Navy Office. Elizabeth

sprang from her own and holding on by the back faced him, a tell-tale flame lighting up the clock and the hour.

“ ’Tis one o’clock and you come creeping in like a spy. Where have you been?”

Pretty to see how his bold florid face, yet a little sneaking and evasive about the eye, fell when this met his ear. A man that would be cock on his own dunghill yet let the hen crow—what is to become of him?

“Lord, ’tis but one o’clock, and after I came out from the play Mr. Coventry would have me go back with him to a bit of supper and a bottle of wine and therefore——”

“Did I or did I not hear you vow to the Almighty God two days agone that if He would be gracious to you, you would drink no wine for a fortnight and——”

“Lord, my dear, I said he had a bottle of wine prepared. I did not say I drank it. Give me leave to finish!”

“Finish! You that can scarce stand upright! And warming the sack!—It is wine, what else? You that vowed not to drink wine for a month and——”

“Sack,” says Mr. Pepys with the gravity of an owl, “is no longer wine when mingled with sugar and spices and heated in a saucepan, and therefore ——”

She made a dart at the saucepan and, catching it by the hand, hurled it to the end of the dining room, where it grazed the wall and fell with a noise to rouse the City, not to mention the Navy Office, not to mention also sending a shower of sack not only on carpet and cloth but on Samuel’s cloth coat where the sugar and spice would leave tracks like the crawling of a snail.

She put herself in the wrong and gave him the advantage which he immediately seized.

“What! I that am working day and night for a worthless slut that I took without penny or petticoat to her back, am to come home after seeing a man on business that must not wait, to be be-called and worsted in my own house and the tongues of the neighbours drawn upon me! Get to your bed, wench, lest I shake your bones and shake sense into you!”

He advanced upon her furious, she crouching back in the corner pale, with eyes distended like a cat’s, her teeth showing, silent. Indeed, something in her face so frightened him that he halted a second and thus gave her the courage she lacked.

“You and your rotten heart set on the play-acting wenches to call me slut that am the daughter of a family that were gentlefolk when your father was cutting out breeches for his betters! And who but me should teach you manners that never knew them? Why not marry a woman of your own condition that could put up with a servant maid’s base treatment by nature? If you had no money with me, you had consideration you could spare less. Taylor’s son! Look at your base family and beginnings and order yourself better.”

Even Pepys’s easy nature could not stand this, though it was not for the first or fortieth time he had heard it. He sprang at her and catching her by the shoulders shook her till the light danced about her and her teeth chattered. Then threw her from him so that falling against the edge of the table she bruised her cheek villainously. They heard a window thrown up, heaven knows which, but near, and thoughts of the outer world which had flamed away, leaving them face to face only with each other, returned. She became conscious that she was appointed to visit Lady Sandwich the great cousin and patron that day (for it was edging on dawn); he, that questions would be asked about the scarred face and that it would entirely depend on Elizabeth’s account what my lord the Earl of Sandwich would think of his right-hand man! And the window! What greedy listening neighbour, roused from sleep, had heard the saucepan, the violent voices, and turned to his spouse in her cosy bed to say:

“Merciful God, there’s that low-bred Sam Pepys that gives himself such airs home drunk again and fighting with his wife like Rag Alley. And that man to have his nose in our Navy Office! Best send for the watch to quiet ’em!”

And first he ruefully picked up the saucepan and put it in the grate considering what he would do, she with her hand to her cheek, sobbing like a hurt child. And then he picked up her work-box, swearing a little (but under his breath) because the hanks of cotton and scissors and thimble were gone away like malicious devils, and so turned to her.

“Bess, my dear, if I could find in my heart to profess myself sorry, could you? Sure man and wife that have everything in common should not snarl and bite like cat and dog that have nothing.”

“In common?” she sobbed. “Have I Knipp and Pierce in common with you?—painted jades to make a woman sick that her husband should kiss their lips! Have I the gifts in common (that should be mine) you give them slyly behind my back—I that washed and cooked for you when you could

have no better, that go shabby that you may go brave! *O mon Dieu, mon Dieu, ayez pitié de moi! . . .*”

For still she fell into French when much moved, and indeed her heart stung more than her cheek. So she sat sobbing, and Mr. Pepys, his broad nose somewhat cocked in the air, considering how to brush aside her passion and get at the woman in her.

“And to think this should fall tonight of all nights when what should Mr. Coventry have for me but a flagon of fine silver sent me by Captain Everard in gratitude for the service I did him with my lord! And what should be in it but a ring set with a true Orient pearl for my lady, as he was pleased to say, and I, poor wretch, with it in my pocket thinking to have a loving welcome of my dear wife that only I consider in this world!”

He paused to hear if the sobs moderated, but still she covered her hurt cheek and wept. The bait was too plainly set in the sight of the bird.

“Keep your ring and throw it among your mistresses and let them scramble for it. What is a pearl to me that have my face spoiled by a brute in my own house, and so I will tell my lady today. *O mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*”

His was not a hard heart though a choleric one, and her wail moved him. He rushed in upon her and caught her round the little waist. She struggled at first violently and angrily, then more feebly, as he pulled her to his breast, her unhurt cheek on his shoulder.

“Sure, my dear, I love you and only you. Even if a man played with other women, which I do not nor will but in idle jest and before your eyes now and again, a man’s wife’s his wife to share all he has and climb the ladder with him. The poor cheek! Let me kiss and make it well! ’Tis your high heels make you trip and fall!”

“ ’Tis your base heart that makes you trip and lie! My heels indeed!” she retorted through sobs, trying to wrest herself away, but he was the stronger. “No—I’ll not forgive you. Why should I?”

“Because you are my wife and love me. Because I am your husband and love you. Because in this world ’tis best to take the comforts and let the troubles go by. Come, Bess, my dear, I’ll warm a drop of sack for the two of us. Put out your little hand, the prettiest in London, and I’ll slip the pearl on it for a love token, and all be well!”

He rubbed his cheek caressingly against hers, kissing her with full, good-humoured sensuous lips, putting back her falling curls to do it like a child’s. It soothed her. The storm of anger was past, and the rain falling

healingly, and a pearl for her finger—half child, half woman, how could she resist him and it?

Suppose like my Lord Sandwich he should spend all his time and means in the country at Chelsea with a worthless jade like Mrs. Becke—then what redress? My lady must bear it with patience. Could she herself? And neither men nor women dared tell my lord what they thought of him. Would anyone tell Samuel? No—a woman must steer her course as best she could, and angers would only drive him worse.

So she ceased to sob but still said nothing. Presently the warmth of his lips on her face touched her, and she could not understand why. She moved a little nearer so that her lips met his and rested in a kiss that set his heart throbbing with relief. Now she would not tell my lady. Now they could concert a decent story. Now—all was well until next time, and perhaps if his carriage was wary there need be no next time.

With one arm about her he took her hand; with the other, and she helping him, fumbled in his pocket for the ring and put it on her finger with a sounding kiss. She craned free to see it and in a voice small as the chirping of a bird at dawn said:

“Thanks, sweetheart,” putting the ringed hand feebly about his neck.

Now, quite reassured, he led her to a chair, and picking up the saucepan poured the rich mixture from the jug into it, and beat down the coals to make a place. Soon it was simmering, and fetching two fine glasses with heavy stems he brimmed them and took a comforting sip, pushing the other before her. Pale and red-eyed, with a heavy bruise flaming on her cheek, she raised it to her lips and pushed it from her.

“How can I? My heart is not healed. O to have such love as mine hurt daily! If I could——”

Mr. Pepys perceived the wisdom of an instant diversion.

“I have a word for your ear, Bess, that must be private indeed. There is none I can trust but you, and indeed a woman’s judgment may serve me very well. Sip your sack and hear.”

She sipped and listened listlessly at first, then with zest.

“Mr. Coventry tells me that all round the town goes word that my lord is utterly besotted on the jade Becke, and goes never to Court and loses all his consideration in the world. He acquainted me very soberly of this, saying that as I had my lord’s ear it would become me to plead with him to reform, and that this would become me the better because I owe much to him and must rise or fall by his protection. . . . And so——”

“Lord, for Heaven’s sake, no!” cried Elizabeth, too horrified at the risk of her husband’s offending their great patron to consider the obvious retort of “set a thief to catch a thief” and the devil preaching piety. “Would you make him sicken at the sight of you? After all, it is but what all the great lords do, and even the——”

She pulled herself up sharp. Was this the way to put Samuel in the wrong where she ever meant to keep him? He was too wary to insist on the slip, though he marked it for future reference.

“Why, Bess, for the man to slight his wife openly and spend her substance and spoil his favour with the King—who could bear to see a great man so throw himself away? I think it will become me, as Mr. Coventry says, but also I see your wisdom and must move like a man on eggs—most delicately. And this being so, the question is whether to write or speak—what is your counsel?”

“If it must be done, then to write!” says Elizabeth sagely. “For then you are not there to anger him, and I do and must own there is something in the cock of your nose, Samuel, that drives a man or woman mad when you would be preaching. So I would have you write, if done it must be, though for my part I would sooner let him go on in his folly and see where it leads him. What! A man with a wife like my lady as faithful to him as the moon to the sun—the vile wretch! He deserves the name!”

“He does—he does!” agreed Mr. Pepys hurriedly. “Then writing it shall be. Something it must, for if he falls, Bess, I fall with him. Now, drink up your sack. Mine is drunk.—The dawn!”

And indeed there was a grey edge over the skyline of the Tower.

He raked the fire out, put his arm about her waist, and kissing her led her up the stair. Next day his entry in his diary ran as follows:

Very foule words with my wife on my coming home late and I pushing her in anger she did fall over the table and bruised her face, much to my scandalisation should it be known. But I coying with her and taking her counsel as if it were anything worth did bring her to be friends at last and give me her lips. And so to bed.

Chapter Two

As a consequence of these events Mr. Pepys was late at his office—a proceeding much against the list of vows he had written and signed as a faithful pact to be kept with the Almighty. It was clearly understood in his own mind that he could not expect favour and the zealous forwarding of his worldly concerns unless he observed these vows under penalty of a fine which it wrung his heart to pay. He hoped the conditions would be as faithfully observed on the other side but also with a little colouring of mercy to human frailty. These vows covered his consumption of alcohol, his visits to the theatres and relations with women, and their review every month was a system of bookkeeping which gave him nearly as much trouble as the tallying of his accounts for the Navy Office. But it had taken possession of him, and he never omitted it, fearing consequences in dealing with the Incalculable.

There had been moments when he had considered including domestic quarrels in the list of his vows and fines but had never carried this out, partly because there were two to that bargain, and if she should be provoking as she had been the night before, it would be difficult to square his own debts with the Almighty. It could not be just that he should fine himself for her misbehaviour. He sat awhile reflecting whether it were necessary to do so if his lateness at work were caused by her temper, but then, remembering the black bruise on her cheek, dropped one shilling and sixpence into the box and pushed it from him, feeling his debt was handsomely paid.

Elizabeth at home was turning over something of the same question in her mind while she slowly dressed herself for a visit to Lady Sandwich. Her cheek was lamentable—a livid bruise like a ripe fig just under the eye—a forlorn and feverish brightness above it. But that could be dealt with after a fashion, and Lady Sandwich had no pretensions to any but the domestic virtues and would mildly accept any story as to its origin. The real question was—what was the story to be? Should it incriminate Samuel with a view to interesting the Sandwiches in her protection? Or would it be best to keep up the ingratiating fiction that in him all the domestic virtues embraced the official as the Sandwiches fondly believed?

She put on a dark red hood, frilled, which set off what she allowed to be seen of her mignonette features to perfection. It was not very much; the frill fell over her left eye and contrived to shadow the bruise decently. It released the other long-lashed sparkler, and the rosy full lips like camellia petals which set off the flushed and lovely olive of her skin. She resented the bruise the more because it spoiled so charming a picture.

“I am a beauty like any of the others he runs after!” she thought miserably, staring at her reflection in the glass with the long full cardinal cape in deep crimson draped becomingly about her and held with a little French clutch of the hand in front that no Englishwoman could rival. “Women with faces like sheep and heavy as a half-baked loaf! What can he see in them that has a live woman handsome like me to keep him alive and stirring, if he had the good sense to know his fortune. What did my Lord Sandwich himself say to me behind Samuel’s back?—‘My neighbour has a great beauty to his wife if he did but know it. Unfortunately, he knows better what looks his neighbours’ wives have! Am I right or wrong, fair Mrs. Pepys?’—And I, like a fond fool, pulled away my hand when he squeezed it, and said, ‘Samuel is the best of husbands, my lord,’ only getting red in the cheeks when he broke out laughing. Suppose that little passage came to Samuel’s ears! But, Lord!—a sensible woman tells her husband what’s good for his health and no more.”

She had her own cards to play in the great Sandwich house, as may be seen, and had hitherto played them with all regard for Samuel’s interest. But the future? Her thoughts were confused on that head. Even the news that my lord had transferred his fickle regards to the despicable Mrs. Becke was a factor that might change matters considerably in the long run. Summing up, her impulse was “Trust to chance and watch how Samuel behaves himself.” They could live easily enough between the storms, but if the storms should perpetually obscure a clear sky, then——

She sent her clear voice ringing down the stair to bid the tall maid Jane call her a coach to take her to my lord’s house.—“And see that the coachman be not drunken, and condition for his fare!”

Tumbling and jumbling through the rough streets her resolutions were nearly as confused as the shaking, and when she reached the big house and climbed down the steps of the coach she had got no further, her only clear thought being to hide her cheek until time disclosed the way to be taken. Unfortunately Elizabeth’s thoughts were more accurately passionate impulses and Heaven only could foresee the issue. Ushered into my lady’s waiting chamber, a smart Mrs. Prue in cap and apron informed her that my

lady was in bed and would receive her in her bedroom and that my young ladies Jemima and Paulina were gone forth to visit their cousin, Mrs. Betty Pickering, and so tripped high-heeled before her to the bedroom—a much finer lady to look at than the Countess of Sandwich herself, with a finical mincing accent studied from the most fashionable of the madams who came about the house.

“It is Mrs. Pepys, my lady, who desires the favour to speak with you,” was the announcement at the door of the large and heavily furnished chamber.

“Bess, my dear, come hither! Mrs. Prue, if the chair is by my bedside, close the door.”

And Elizabeth advanced to the purple velvet bed curtains as a white ringed hand parted them, and Lady Sandwich’s mild face crowned with an unbecoming tight lace nightcap looked out.

“I trust, madam, I see not your ladyship ill?” was the obvious question as she curtsayed low and reverently.

“Ill, child? No. A touch of cold in the throat that made Jemima beg of me to stay abed, and the more so because my lord is at Chelsea and does not return until Monday. But sit down. How goes it with you and Mr. Pepys the good and faithful?”

She primmed her mouth as she sat down. Chelsea? Aha! And “the good and faithful”? Aho! But she answered discreetly, biding her time.

“My husband is well, and gone to the office, madam, where extremely much people and business. And you did well to remain in bed, because the wind is chill down the streets. And see, madam, I have brought you a gift—four oranges that Samuel had from Orange Moll at the playhouse, and there were five, but one I ate, not knowing I was to have the honour to see your ladyship.”

Many thanks followed. Oranges were oranges and a costly enough dainty, and a silver knife and plate were sent for that the giver might prepare an orange for the patient.

“But, Bess, put off your hood. Why be so ceremonious and hide a pretty face it gives me pleasure to see? Only two days gone my lord said you grow prettier daily. When your husband’s purse is fuller you will blossom on the town a beauty indeed. I profess I know none prettier, no, not even that slut the King’s Lady Castlemaine.”

Now this abuse was a great favour and intimacy, because, in view of honours and moneys to come—and received—from his Majesty, my Lady

Sandwich controlled herself in all mention of that fair plunderer of the Crown, and her allusions were invariably graceful and complimentary, while for my lord there was perhaps no hand he kissed with such devotion unless it were the lady's at Chelsea, and there he probably wasted no time in preliminaries but came straight to the lips. Elizabeth therefore took this as a favour and joined her pretty soprano in a duet of condemnation.

"The vulture! God knows, madam, the tales I hear of how she picks with both hands. They say her last diamonds cost the King ten thousand pound, a thing not to be believed unless sworn to. And I—God knows I must consider before I buy a rump of beef for my family, so anxious is my husband for saving."

"Your day will come," her ladyship said comfortably from her comfortable pillows. "But Jemima heard some talk of a necklace of pearl he brought you home t'other day. We hear it cost him fifty pound, but he said it was a shame such a sum should be mentioned of him till he was better to do in the world. A generous deed and pleasure in it!"

Red wrath flamed in Elizabeth's cheek.

"Fifty pound! O madam, the lie! I would have your ladyship know that that necklace of pearl, for all his boast, cost four pounds ten shillings, and that he spent twenty pound on a suit of brown shag with gold buttons and trimmings for himself. Stay! I have the thing on. Yourself shall see! It is Samuel for carrying himself like a generous liberal soul that will give all to his wife but all the time spend and spend on himself!"

She raised trembling hands, and undoing the clasp dangled the necklace before Lady Sandwich. A thin gold chain with small pearls at intervals and seed pearls set in the clasp. The moon-faced mildness of Lady Sandwich's expression expanded into a smile as she looked at it.

"Pretty for a young woman, child, though not what I had thought. But Mr. Pepys does not boast beyond his doings, and prudence is a fine virtue for young people. He is no spendthrift one way or another, but a very wisely getting young man. But I have a treat for you, Bess, in return for your oranges. One of his navy captains has given my lord two pounds of the China drink they call tea, and you and I will taste it together. But untie your hood."

No doubt she could have excused herself if she had wished, but the necklace was the last snowflake on the avalanche. She took off the crimson hood and disclosed an angrily flushed face, two sparkling eyes, and the swollen bruise below one of them. The last caught my lady's eye instantly and she sat bolt upright in her bed.

“Lord save us! Did you fall in the coach, child? A slice of raw beef laid on it— Crying? You are hurt! Call Mrs. Prue!”

The tears welled over.

“O madam—you that lives so happy, what can you know of my troubles! It was someone pushed me in anger and I fell against the table and must hide my face for fear the world should know I have troubles in my house. I had no mind to tell, but your ladyship is so kind——”

The tears flowed fast now, but my lady’s mouth had hardened a little. She wanted no adverse confidences about Mr. Pepys for two good reasons. First, she liked himself and finding him extremely useful about her husband and herself meant to continue to like him. Secondly, she who had a good deal of her own to bear did not approve of useless wailings about the shortcomings of a husband. If it were necessary that order should be taken with them, then indeed—otherwise, husbands always short-came and it was a woman’s business to grin and bear it according to her vow of obedience. It had already annoyed her that she had made a slip over the necklace, and she would have no more. Elizabeth’s eyes, though flowing with tears were still useful as observers. She changed her course instantly like a swift barque on a wind.

“Alas, madam—great and rich persons like yourself do not guess the trouble of the poorer. I did rebuke my maid Jane as in reason I should for being out at night with young Salmon our joiner’s boy, and she gave me the lie to my teeth and a push behind it that sent me flying. If it had not been that my good husband came in and comforted me and laid a plaster on it I had not been here this day. And as for the necklace, it is a love token, and I know when he can better it he will. I did only jest.”

Lady Sandwich nodded approval, whether of the matter or manner was best known to herself, and Elizabeth knew that channel of sympathy closed. That there was another unknown either to her husband or her ladyship she also knew, but that was a secret weapon in reserve, no more, and a secret attended already with alarms and doubts. She turned the talk adroitly to the daughters of the house and their prospects, Lady Sandwich lamenting the difficulty of finding husbands nowadays for young women of birth unless their portions were as high as their blood.

“And my lord is become a perfect courtier and says none but a man with a peerage and estate to his back will serve him for my daughter Jem, whereupon I saying I could get a fat merchant for her and be satisfied, he answered he would sooner see her with a pedlar’s pack on her back than she should marry a man from the City! I did not know he was so proud.”

“A very proper pride, and for such a lady,” Elizabeth answered obsequiously. “Indeed his lordship is right, and you are too modest, madam. And have you, madam, seen the new gold-laced *juste-au-corps* coats? My Lady Jem would look noble indeed in the like”—and so forth, for this was safe ground to walk on and pleasant to the lady on her pillows.

From this they fell easily to talk of dress, and when more than an hour was past they were in the midst of relacing and altering a noble velvet gown of hers in discussion. Mrs. Prue glided satin-voiced into the room to inform her mistress that Mr. Pepys waited below, having heard that madam was with her ladyship, and would conduct her home.

“Bid him come up, and throw my bird’s-eye hood about my head and shoulders. Be not jealous, child, that I receive him in bed, for I have a word to say about my lord’s business. And I will take the chance to say a pretty woman I know of would look as well as another in a gold-laced *juste-au-corps* of the new fashion. Trust me for that!”

There was a hurry in her voice, and Elizabeth responded to it instantly, kissing her hand and curtsying at the door. She guessed very well what the business might be, and when safely outside a shadow of a sneer curled her charming upper lip at the thought of great ladies who might complain of their husband’s errors almost as a matter of state, while little ladies must bear them unhelped as best they could. But mutual interests enabled her on meeting him in the big drawing room to shoot a glance in a cipher unknown to the watchful Mrs. Prue. It said:

“I have not disparaged you to my lady. All is safe. Yet go warily—warily!”

And Mr. Pepys, in his new suit of silk ferrandin, his feathered hat at the best angle over his elevated nose, followed Mrs. Prue with more assurance and a look which answered, “Trust me for that!”

Passing over the compliments of admission and reception, we come to the point as speedily as my lady, who wasted no time oh preliminaries.

“Mr. Pepys—and yet as my lord’s cousin (though distant) why should I not name you cousin?—this is not the first time I have given you to know I am uneasy about my lord. Not as a wife—a woman must take her, chance and bear her burden—but as a partner in his concerns.”

“True, dearest madam,” responds Mr. Samuel, very erect and attentive in the chair by the bedside, and inwardly reflecting that my lady ages quickly, though a charming sweet woman, and that Mrs. Becke may well hold the winning cards unless the other hand is played with extreme skill. But he was

exceedingly troubled for many reasons. He held my lord's promise that they should climb together—his own future was bound up there. And more. He had a sincere affection for my lord and lady. To see them injured would hurt him in a tenderer spot than his interests. And it is against any player's gain to watch a magnificent hand full of all the honours flung away as my Lord Sandwich was flinging his at the moment and for a worthless trull whom very much less would serve and yet be beyond her deserts. But caution—caution born of adversity, must be observed by a climber like Mr. Pepys. He therefore shook his head with melancholy gravity and held his tongue. My lady considered a moment and continued:

“Mr. Samuel, through divers channels not needful to be particular in I hear there is notice taken that my lord changes his course, that he takes his pleasure too freely, not seeking the King and Duke of York at Court but following about the ladies and playing at cards with them, and that when he is away from Court he do not spend his time in his own home but at Chelsea in amusements not becoming his wife to discourse on. Have these rumours reached you?”

Mr. Samuel replied very gravely:

“Madam, they have. It would ill become me to deceive your ladyship.”

She looked at him with all a woman's keenness.

“Was there ever a smoke without a fire? Is there fire here, Mr. Samuel? You are his lordship's true friend and servant, and to you I may safely apply.”

“Madam, you may. And I have a great mind and resolution to do what a true friend and servant should, yet cannot see my way to anything beyond angering his lordship and so spoiling the whole broth.”

My lady considered in silence for a minute, then:

“A wife can say nothing because I understand there is a woman at Chelsea—a slut as bold as brass” (there was much human and feminine feeling in this passage) “—and therefore anything I might say must needs be called a jealous humour which I take God to witness it is not, for every sensible woman knows a man must have his diversions.”

Mr. Samuel coughed: my lady looked round sharply as he answered:

“No wisely conducted gentleman will put his wife to open shame and anger even if he only considered his own peace of mind at home. May I make bold to ask if your ladyship has opened the matter with my lord?”

That was a home question. He saw her eyes droop a minute, then open wide and candidly as a lady's should.

“Never, Mr. Samuel. I am a woman of a reasoned temper. But you will see the more that it is impossible I should break it with him now, and yet the sore must be opened, for if the King is angry and my lord’s good name tarnished, then good-bye to all our hopes and the promised four thousand pounds a year and all my children’s prospects and my own. What wise man will give his daughter to my poor son Hinchingbroke if his father is a spotted man? And what for my poor Jem and Paulina? O Mr. Samuel, my true friend, we are in sorry case—if you come not to our aid!”

“I, madam? I? What can a poor man do without interest or money to back his words? I should ruin myself with my lord, and that were a pity when some day the mouse may help the lion!”

“It is now or never!” she said leaning forward earnestly. “I have acquainted you of this matter soberly and not like a wild jealous woman that will have all or nothing. You are his right hand in the Navy Office. He has said words of your mind and carriage that your modesty would blush to hear. Your words weigh with him like gold. See him, Mr. Samuel. Be open but loving with him. Speak to him of the heights he may climb and the bottomless deep he may fall to, and the prayers and tears of a careful mother and wife and the blessing of God will support you!”

Whether it was that Mr. Pepys did not trust to this support as he should cannot be known, because that especial distrust was the last colouring he would give his resolute answer. God was no institution to be lightly insulted in His incomprehensible powers.

“Madam, not for this world’s riches. And this refusal is in your own interest, for God knows I do not value my heart’s blood if it would serve. But consider! My lord is a haughty man and choleric when his feathers are stroked the wrong way, and we shall but harden him. No. It is for yourself to plead lovingly, setting forth your children and their stake in it; above all saying no hard word of Mrs. Becke, but rather wishing her well as herself one of my lord’s well-wishers. All this may be done with love and discretion, and I look for a great reward from my lord’s good heart.”

“So do not I!” said my lady and checked herself. She could not give her reasons for knowing that door shut. Pepys must speak—he only. In all the range of her friends and followers she knew no other way possible. She tried another tack, saying gravely:

“Mr. Pepys, we are to consider this as wise persons whose all is bound up in it, for this is your case also. I hear from my lord that in spite of your deservings you have enemies in the Navy Office. The station you hold of Clerk of the Acts makes enemies, for there are men that covet it and your

standing with my lord. In the latter class I speak of Minnes and Pett. Now, if my lord falls, how much countenance may you expect from the Commissioners and the others? I put it to your wisdom.”

Pepys, red to the ears, shifted in his seat.

“None, madam, none. I know it. I am as keen to this business as yourself.—But speak to my lord I neither can nor dare! I must be plain. I have my wife and household—I dare not face beggary.”

“Yet it must be faced one way or the other!” said my lady, a slow tear channelling her sallow cheek. “I know your will is good, but it is hard to be a courageous man in matters moral, Mr. Pepys. Well, I dare not blame you. I too shrank from facing my lord with his darling vices. Let me consider.”

They sat a time in silence, Pepys studying the rosettes on his shoes, fingering his knots of ribbon, knowing his all depending on either cast of the die, exceedingly ill at ease. It seemed an hour to his fears when at last she leaned forward and whispered in his ear—a long whisper, very serious and urgent. He shifted and coughed and shifted.

“Why, madam, I think it as dangerous as the other and not a pin to choose.”

“Many pins. In this case you are not there to anger him or be angered. He has time to think coolly and answer with his wits about him instead of like a man surprised. O promise—promise, good Mr. Samuel, that you will undertake this, and the blessings of . . .”

And much to the same purpose, but her prayers could wring no more from him but that he would consider of it. That he promised with as much eagerness and earnestness as if it were a full agreement, though setting the contra arguments before her eyes with a skill impressive even to the lady who had so high an opinion of Mr. Samuel’s astuteness. He kissed her hand at parting with a true tear dropped upon it for her misfortune and his own. And indeed his heart lay sufficiently near the surface to melt very readily either with his own emotions or those of anyone else who could set them out movingly, and he knew that tear was very grateful to the poor lady who saw her all vanishing in the whisk of a bad woman’s petticoat tail, for what else but a pirate can any woman be who scours the seas in search of derelict husbands with the skull and crossbones hoisted at her own masthead but hidden beneath the colours of love and sympathy to deceive her prey? Mr. Pepys was still bowed over the be-diamonded hand of my lady when the door opened and in marches my lord.

And here it is needful to explain that Elizabeth had sat in the smaller guest room below stairs wondering and expecting when Samuel would return. She could allow half an hour or more for their discourse, for she knew the subject was weighty, but she thought of her petticoat unstitched at home, of Jane as likely as not in the arms of Tom Salmon to the total neglect of the stewed rabbit and two little broiled lobsters that were to make their dinner, and as the time ran on she grew more and more impatient. The cup of promised tea was brought in to her full of black leaves and as bitter as sin, and she thought it detestable, though it would be pleasant to relate to that painted Jezebel whom Samuel called “la belle Pierce” how she had been served with the costly new drink and in the house of my Lady Sandwich. She tasted a few drops, whisked the rest out of the window and practised saying, “An exquisite drink indeed!” with smiling rosy lips in the gilded mirror brought from Paris. She was in the act when the door opened and my lord walked in, newly returned from Chelsea.

“The fair Mrs. Pepys!” he said in his very masculine and winning tones, and she turned smiling and blushing faintly to meet him. My lord was an extremely personable man, still in his forties, with a fine open sailor’s face and a dash of manner extremely captivating. His dark periwig fell in long curls over a coat that suited his high station—a coat of black velvet very full in the skirts, with white linings and falling lace bands, the waistcoat white, the breeches very wide and gathered full below the knees with lace falling over the tops of his high boots of perfumed leather. King Charles was known to have a liking for black and white in his own and his courtiers’ dress, hence the choice. A gallant figure of a man.

“What do you here, child? Has my lady not seen you?”

“Indeed yes, my lord,” says Elizabeth with her little demure curtsy and in agonized doubt whether to mention her Samuel’s audience. “I wait a coach but am not hurried.”

“Hurried? No, *ma belle!* Come sit by me and tell me how Sam has been behaving. Can you manage him within bounds, or will he still be running after pretty player-women? I tell you I have seen Master Samuel at play when he did not guess it. But wise men tell no tales of one another. Eh, pretty one?”

He leaned over her and began to untie the ribbons under her chin that held the hood. She put up a hand, but in vain; the hood fell back and disclosed the charming face with the bruise not to be passed over. He stopped, stared, then clasped her hand.

“What? He dared? O, I had as soon taken a rose and trampled it in the mud. Alas, pretty Bess, that any man should treat you so! I know one that would do far otherwise. Pepys is my friend and an excellent good soul—but has no notion of the trembling fineness of a woman’s apprehension, and I must own——”

She interrupted, almost wild with fear at the complications the case was taking. Pepys would be fit to kill her if he guessed that my lord had heard any complaint, and especially when he himself might have to tell him unpleasant truths to his teeth. In desperate haste she gave her story of Jane, yet at the same time dwelling little on the affection between herself and her husband, for who could tell her own interest with my lord might not be needed!

“Your lordship does not believe me,” she ended, sorrowful-eyed, as he shook an incredulous head, “yet it is most true. Samuel has been too long in your lordship’s company not to have learnt manners with women. I am safe there.”

“I am glad to hear it!” he said seriously. “I should value Pepys the less did I not think he valued the beauty he has the good luck to possess. A man need not stray from home who has charms like those to grace his bed and board. May a beggar ask for crumbs, Mrs. Elizabeth?”

“My lord, I know not what are crumbs,” she answered, rose-pink and with dropped eyelashes.

“Crumbs are kisses and kisses are crumbs, earnest of the feast to come, whetters of appetite.”

He put his arm about her, and drew her face to his to taste the pleasure of her lips. But those he did not reach, being obliged to satisfy himself with a velvet cheek. Elizabeth’s Catholic training, together with her habitual affection for her husband, drew a line between the two, though the warmth of his lips and the look in his eyes sent a hurrying tingle along her blood and softened the look of reproof that sat on lifted eyes and soft lashes.

“My lord, my lord, you frighten me!” she gasped.

“Would I might frighten you more, my pretty, pretty girl, and soothe your fears after. But damn—damn and double damn!—what is this?”

It was the lacquey’s high heels tapping along the polished passage without to remove Elizabeth’s empty cup, and even as the door creaked she was prim and upright in her chair.

“And tea is a noble drink, my lord. I know not when I have had such a flavour!”

The revulsion had cooled him. He turned roughly on the flunkey.

“Any person to see me in my absence?” He had been away four days at Chelsea.

“Plenty, my lord. The groom of the chamber holds the list. And the worshipful Mr. Pepys is upstairs now with my lady!”

Lord Sandwich cast one searching glance at the prim beauty in her stiff chair. Why could she not have told him that? He wasted not another minute on her but went straight upstairs with his long swinging stride. Possibly a guilty conscience might suspect something in a conference between the wife of his bosom and his right-hand man. There were few secrets they could not know between them.

Chapter Three

THEY were scarcely in the coach when Pepys was eagerly questioning his wife as to whether she had seen my lord and what mood he was in. "For he walked in upon us with a flushed and tumbled air as if come from the kind of company he frequents in Chelsea, all tag, rag, and bobtail, dancing and singing and drinking. Lord! the fool a man may be to choose such instead of wealth and honour! But did he speak with you, Bess?"

"Certainly. He spoke chiefly of tea that I had before me for my treat while you kept me waiting. Sure you and my lady had time to settle his hash once and for all!"

Pepys recoiled at the irreverent mention of so great a man and woman, not to mention himself, but stifled the rising passion.

"Please God there shall be no hash to settle. Was it you let leak that I was upstairs?"

"Not I. Sanderson. But you had no reason to cover it. Did he take it amiss?"

"Not he. My mind was very much eased and joyed by my lord's expressions of kindness, but I saw a question in his eye behind them. Bess, if you should ever let a word or hint slide about this business, you are a gone woman and I a gone man!"

She tossed her head.

"To treat a woman like a fool is to make her one, but I am and will be none. I hope I can keep a secret as well as another and not spoil my own brewing. But what was my lady's business?"

"Lord! she held up her hands to beseech me to reason with my lord and tell him the flying rumours of his passion for this woman at Chelsea, crying aloud that she was undone if I refused."

"I dare to say his passion may not lead him too far!" said Elizabeth dryly. She felt the warmth of eager lips on her cheek as she spoke, and now the spell was broken for the moment would gladly have shared her ground for this belief if she had dared. But she knew her Samuel's code too well. It

was a praiseworthy weakness—if a weakness—for a husband to be deadly full of jealousy and to make himself and his wife as uncomfortable as possible on the strength of it even though no breath of a reason existed. It was a point where he scarcely attempted to control himself. But jealousy in a wife was a narrow-minded cantankerous business with which no man could be supposed to put up for a minute, whatever cause given. And knowing this she knew she had discomforts enough without risking more and held her tongue, her vanity secretly tickled to think what a different complexion she could put on the business if she would; she whose wits her husband made so little of!

“And what was resolved?” she asked.

“Nothing as yet, but I to take counsel with myself and consider if a letter carefully written might not aid. And this I have a great mind and resolution to, if such a letter could be contrived, and my thoughts are very heavy and in pain about this, and I trust no outside annoyances with Jane or the lobsters spoilt or such-like will come my way to distract me.”

Elizabeth fervently hoped the same but put in a word to the effect that if she were kept cooling her heels at my Lady Sandwich’s she certainly could not be keeping Jane from Tom Salmon’s embrace. “It is well known to yourself that I did baste her with the broom last week. I could not today,” she added.

That was undeniable, and Pepys was the more ready to let it slip because he had an important question still to put.

“And, Bess, what story did you make of the bruise?—an accident much against the grain with me, and makes me, I do confess, most truly sorry. What to my lord and to my lady?”

He had taken her ungloved hand in his and held it; nor did she pull it away.

“The same to both, and one little deserved by you. I said Jane pushed me and I fell. You are safe enough. It is I must bear the bruise and the shame.”

The moment was too crucial for Pepys to permit of his reviewing the original cause of offense. He followed her in silence into the house, meditating on the expensiveness of an uncontrolled temper. It had given her but too many advantages which she had not been slow to take, and though the rabbit was underdone he took the savoury lobsters in amends, and peace was preserved because it must. But he needed time to consider the case of my Lord Sandwich, knowing so much at stake, and the upholsterer coming to take order for hanging the dining room with green serge and gilt-stamped

leather, followed by Dr. Clerke and his lady unexpectedly for some music and to hear Mr. Pepys's song set by himself, being "Gaze not on swans" (and a lovely melody in his opinion)—the evening was gone like a dream.

To each and all Elizabeth repeated her story of the origin of her bruised cheek, but it had now become an accident on Jane's part, because her present company were persons more nearly approaching Jane's sphere than did my lord and lady, and caution was needful. The guests, feasted with sack posset and cold meat, took themselves off about ten o'clock with merry farewells and a health to Mr. Pepys the great composer and performer on the flageolet, leaving him highly exalted.

"And now to bed!" said he when the door shut on them. "God send I come to the power to entertain my friends more often and better. But a man needs a finer cupboard of plate that he may go handsomely about it, and a better cook-maid than we are come to!"

"For my part," says Elizabeth, "I would have no entertaining where it is such cost and care. It means to be up and in the market at five in the morning and toiling all day in the house to keep the maids in order. But did her ladyship drop any word to you of me?"

"Not one. Her whole mind taken up with her business, and good reason it should.—What should she say?"

"Nothing," says Elizabeth, putting away two little silver cups in the cupboard and thinking how like a great rich woman to forget the hoped-for *juste-au-corps* of a poor one. She regretted the oranges she had given her, regretted her sparing of her husband, regretted everything. True, a woman might have a worse husband, but also she might certainly have a better. What shall a woman do who lives in constant fear of storms about her ears if so much as a tablecloth is awry, who though she cannot be assured of it has always the fear that he is betraying her with any pretty woman who will look his way? Not by any means the husband of her dreams—but a sensual full-lipped fellow, somewhat coarse in grain yet his emotions balanced on a trembling hairspring, ready to weep over a mouse one minute and kick it out of his way the next, according to how it took him. Must love always be like that?

"Let us go up to bed," she said lighting a candle, "and I wish for luck tomorrow, for we have a proverb in France that the man that interferes between husband and wife gets blows and no halfpence for his pains and puts his hand between the tree and the bark. I wish you well out of it."

They went up leaving the maids to clear the confusion in the kitchen and dining room, she so pale now that the bruise stood out black on her cheek. In

bed he pulled her to him and kissed her.

“And if I thought any other man should come ever to that pleasure I would stick a knife in you or myself or both,” he said with passion.

“Were it the King himself?” she asked with a cool edge to her tone. She felt the hesitation before he answered with bravado:

“The King himself!—As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!”

She said no more, but her thoughts flew to my Lord Sandwich. Men could be complaisant when complaisance filled their purses—but for herself—impossible! She had no temptations that way.

Mr. Pepys at his office, Clerk of the Acts, and in reality the brain and backbone of the Navy, was a very different person from Mr. Pepys at his pranks at home and in the houses of his friends. He was convinced it would be so bad a day for his credit if ever those two worlds should intersect one another that Will Hewer his clerk and all others of the personnel of his office knew that no flutter of a petticoat was permitted over the threshold. His very expression changed as he crossed it. His lips drew together and became firm, a line deepened between his brows. He looked what he was: a man charged with great affairs—such as brought him in contact with the King and the King’s brother—the Duke of York, Lord High Admiral of England. And he knew that though he crept as yet under the shadow of my Lord Sandwich, yet he had his little niche in even royal eyes. They congratulated my Lord Sandwich on an excellent servant. If a few years went by in this growing security the day might come when he could well adventure to walk alone. But for this he must keep his private credit also. Kings and lords might range about among other men’s wives. Mr. Pepys, the dependent Clerk of the Acts, must walk very warily in his diversions, and so great was the sense of this that there were moments when he wished he was a gay bachelor with no one to please but himself and a very easy code of masculine manners.

“And yet I know not!” he said, pulling a heap of papers to him. “A man that has wife and household has more credit than the loose bachelor. It may be as well or better as it is, if only I or any man knew how to manage a woman. God send I learn the knack before we come to open fisticuffs.”

The next moment only the official Mr. Pepys was in presence—the domestic dead and forgotten till dinner time. It is a singular fact but true that Mr. Pepys was no hypocrite. He felt to the full the value of both aspects of life and shared in both with sincerity. Could he have kept them entirely apart and with an untroubled conscience he had been a happier man, but the one would occasionally slop over into the other and spoil the taste.

It was after dinner and hard work following, with a little tendency to drowsiness from the strong meats and ale, that his clerk approached him with reverence.

“Sir, there is a woman entreats on her knees to see you, having a petition concerning her husband where none may help but your worshipful self.”

“A beggar. Take her off. Am I to be troubled like this?” asks Mr. Pepys, scratching away like mad with his quill. The clerk departed and returned.

“Worshipful sir, she begs on bended knees and with tears that you would see her. She has a thing to ask that none but you can aid, and she says you may of your goodness recall one Bagwell, a carpenter in Deptford Shipyard, and how you had the condescension to approve him and wish him well.”

A gleam of interest lit a spark in Pepys’s eye, bent over his work. He remembered very well the spruce young ship carpenter of Deptford Yard and how they met one sunny morning on the cobblestones by the dock, and Bagwell had pulled a humble forelock and made his leg (bow) to the great man, and a charming pretty young black-haired woman had stood behind him pulling at her apron and glancing up under shy eyelashes to catch the look of admiration that shot from under Mr. Pepys’s beaver at the carnation mingled with cream in her fresh cheeks. They had said a humble word then about the husband’s desire for a better ship than the *Cockrel*—something in Mr. Pepys’s easy good-nature had emboldened them so far—and he remembered he had said with condescension on leaving:

“Some day I will hear you further on this matter, and possibly——” There he had broken off short, but it was likely enough this had stuck in their heads and the pretty girl was come to try her chance today. Certainly Pepys thought of his vows. Certainly also he thought of the office routine, but the upshot was what it generally was in his facile pleasure-loving nature.

“Inquire if the woman’s business be urgent and let me know. We must needs show consideration for the people connected with the Navy Yards, for this is their encouragement. But if it be a light matter I cannot be disturbed.”

The clerk went and returned:

“She is weeping like an April day, sir, and has walked all the way from Deptford. If it were only for five minutes she begs an audience.”

“Show her in!” says Mr. Pepys, still industriously scribbling. “And Hewer, if you hear the tinkle of my bell come in that instant and convey her away with all speed. I have no room for women here.”

In five minutes timid, self-effacing feet were heard outside, and Hewer, opening the door, presented Mrs. Bagwell—the prettiest creature in a mob

cap and wide straw hat tied over it with blue ribbons that ever met a man's eye. Her full figure and trim waist in a flowered linen gown were enchanting to a taste preferring seductive curves to the nymph-like style of beauty. Black hair, bright black-lashed eyes, and rosy lips tucked in with a dimple at either corner excused a nose as *retroussé* as that of Mr. Pepys—a beaming full-blown beauty washed with tears like a rose in dew; such was Mrs. Bagwell, wife to the happy carpenter of Deptford Shipyard. She could scarcely advance for the tremulous curtseys she dropped on the way.

“O worshipful sir, I'm ashamed to trouble you, I am indeed, and Jack he says, ‘What!—go trouble the great Mr. Pepys because a poor carpenter needs advancement?’ and indeed, sir, I was feared, desperate feared, but I says to Jack, says I, ‘Lord bless the gentleman. He hath such a heart as don't despise the pore and needy. God bless him!’ says I!”

“Excellent—excellent!” says Mr. Pepys, motioning to a seat with the most gracious condescension. “Have no fear, my good woman. Speak to the point but briefly. The men in the yards are my children to be aided when such is in my power. What would your husband?”

She sat and wiped her eyes with a handkerchief white as the driven snow. Indeed, all about her was clean and dainty in a way that many a fashionable slut might envy, and he eyed her with favour as she preened herself like a settling bird, sighing a little as is natural with a woman that has much on her mind.

“And the business?” he inquired in a tone of encouragement.

“O sir, worshipful sir, what should it be but what my man broke with you before? A better ship. Good sir, in these times, with prices gone up and a bit of meat costing a'most as much as the whole beast did twenty years ago, what's a poor young couple to do?”

“And why come to me, Mrs. Bagwell?” He was twiddling his pen, as if eager to get on with work, but was fully conscious of the warm scent of her presence and the submission of her appeal.

“Because, worshipful sir, it is well known in the yard that Mr. Pepys's word goes with everyone if it was the Duke himself, and moreover that it is your own merciful eye over all the men that does or undoes them. O sir, indeed, in your riches you can't know the pinch it is for the likes of us!”

“Pretty soul!” says Mr. Pepys, relaxing the business line on his brow. “But it is not the wives but the husbands that come under my consideration. Is your Jack an honest carpenter? Is he all for his duty to the King and country, or is he besotted on his pretty wife that he won't leave her?”

The conversation was now taking a turn which Mrs. Bagwell could appreciate. The woman does not breathe who is unconscious of the stir of interest created by her presence, and she was as well able to gauge the softened temperature as if she had been a duchess. She simpered prettily, folding her clean handkerchief into a tight little square.

“O sir, it is owned that Jack Bagwell is as good a carpenter as stirs, and as for King and country, sure he would go to the ends of the earth and think his wife nothing beside it as is but his duty. And I wouldn’t stand in his light. No, not I! I hope I know my place better.”

She looked down as she uttered these admirable sentiments, never catching his eye, but showing to admiration the thick black lashes on the warm round of her cheek. Presently, in a low voice Mr. Pepys observed:

“Mrs. Bagwell!”

The words were nothing. The whole Board of Commissioners for the Navy headed by the Duke of York might have heard them and without objection. But the silence which followed was pregnant. So also was the movement of Mr. Pepys’s hand sliding along the desk to take possession of hers as it lay on her flowered lap. She looked up, shot one glance of liquid appeal, and looked down again.

“Mrs. Bagwell, I have not seen your husband in a great while, and perhaps were his wife a pitiful old ugly ill-bred woman it might make me loathe his petition, for of him I know nothing. But when a pretty woman comes to ask me a favour it do please me exceedingly if I can grant it, as I think I may this. Not that I could promise, as you will well understand. But supposing I could carry the matter I am sure of the husband’s gratitude, but what of the wife’s?”

The snowy handkerchief crossing and veiling her bosom rose and fell quickly with her heartbeat.

“O sir—anything—anything!”

“In or out of reason?” questions Mr. Pepys, merry eyes asking arch questions beneath raised eyebrows.

“O sir, anything!” reiterated Mrs. Bagwell faintly.

“A kiss?”

She looked downward, folding the handkerchief tighter. It was a mere packet now. He leaned forward and took the pleasure of her lips lingeringly, then stiffened in a revulsion. The paper of his vows with the fines opposite each entry was folded on the table before him. Withdrawing his hand he sat erect before his desk.

“Very well, Mrs. Bagwell. You have put your plea, and it is a clear case of justice. A valuable man should not be neglected. I am coming down before long Deptford way, and your husband shall hear further from me. And now I recommend urgently you would keep yourself straight and honest, avoiding all ill company and rakish, for I do always see it leads man or woman to poverty in this world and, as we are taught to believe, discomfort in the next. Farewell.”

He had now risen, and Mrs. Bagwell dropped a humble curtsey at each comma. Mr. Pepys was just about to tinkle the bell when once more the flesh overtopped the spirit, her lips glowed so warm and sweet in her troubled face. He had startled her more than he meant with the gravity of his admonition. This must be looked to.

“Be not alarmed, Mrs. Bagwell. Your needs shall be my care. Though I promise no certain success, I promise this.”

He put his arm about her and saluted her again with a warmth and frequency which the occasion could have spared, then rang for the clerk and craned over the window blind to see her trip away outside without a backward look, but light of step as a woman discharged of a care. Again the paper of vows caught his eye. In that reckoning with the Almighty each kiss of dalliance was charged at twelvepence.

“Most excellent pretty company!” he said half aloud. “And worth it if it had cost me five shillings and more. And though I have had her lips as much as I would and mighty pleasure in seeing her, still I do not stand committed in any manner of means beyond a jest. Heaven grant I keep within bounds, but, Lord I to see how a pretty woman sweeps me beyond all my resolutions! This must not be again in the Office—I will take order for that.”

He extracted two shillings from his pocket, and, considering still further, added a third, and dropped them in his box, now growing ominously heavy; then, relieved in conscience, resumed the business awfulness which kept the Office dancing to wait upon his pleasure.

That evening after an interlude of song and music in the garden which brought all the neighbours’ heads to the windows, Pepys informed his wife that he would be private and she might devote the evening to anything she pleased. He pointed this favour with the kiss connubial, a little hasty, a little cool, but quieting to a conscience which he could never drug wholly to sleep. And so, sitting in his book room, set himself to anxious consideration of the letter to be written to my Lord Sandwich. It was late indeed when he opened the door to the room where Elizabeth was nodding half asleep over

her petticoat. He would not read it to her—"For I design to say no other eye than mine has seen it."

"I see nothing to prevent your saying that in any case!" answered madam, yawning over her petticoat, "and since I know so well what pleases my lord—or not pleases——"

"You? And how?" says Samuel starting.

"By observation. I am not blind, Samuel, even if I do speak little before him. But keep it to yourself if you please."

The end was that he read it aloud with measured pride in his performance and yet a true sense of its worth that went deeper than the successful author's vanity. And thus it ran:

"MY LORD,

"I do verily hope that neither the manner nor matter of this advice will be condemned by your lordship. Being now fearful of a sudden summons to Portsmouth I judge it very unbecoming the duty which every bit of bread I eat tells me I owe your lordship, to expose the safety of your honour to the uncertainty of my return. Finding, both in city and Court, that discourses pass to your prejudice I shall, my lord without the least greatening or lessening the matter do my duty in laying it before you.

"People of all conditions, my lord, raise matter of wonder from your lordship's so little appearance at Court; to which purpose I have had questions asked me, and asserting the contrary, they have replied that your lordship's living so out of the way hath been more than once discussed before the King. Others, my lord, have said that now your turn was served and the King had given you a good estate, you left him to stand or fall as he would, and particularly in that of the Navy they have enlarged on your letting fall all service there.

"Another sort insist on the bad name of the house wherein your lordship continues to sojourn, and by name have charged one of the daughters for a common courtisan and how much her wantonness occasions (though unjustly) scandal to your lordship as well as gratifying some enemies and the wounding of friends.

"Lastly, my lord, I find a general coldness in all persons towards your lordship such as I never yet knew, wherein I shall not offer any thoughts or advice of mine knowing your lordship needs not any. But with a most faithful assurance that no person under

heaven is privy to what I here write and which I shall be careful to put into your own hands I rest confident of your lordship's just construction of my dutiful intents and in all humility take leave, may it please your lordship.

“Your lordship's most obedient servant,
S. P.”

“I think it cannot hurt and may do good,” he said anxiously as he concluded.

“I think so also,” said Elizabeth more seriously than he had heard her yet. Then after a silence: “I think it a noble letter, just and temperate, O Samuel—if only——”

“If only what, my dear?” asks he.

“If only you thought it as well as wrote it,” she answered in a sob.

He stood amazed.

“I think it with all my heart and soul,” says he, “and could swear to it before any judge and jury.”

She broke away and ran from the room. Certainly to a disposition like that of Mr. Pepys women are kittle-cattle to shoe. But none the less his heart as well as his wit were engaged in the service he did my Lord Sandwich, and the fear of ill results to himself from the letter was merged in the anxious hope it might serve its turn.

The little lie contained in the tail of the letter as to its privy was neither here nor there, and what Elizabeth meant by her comment he could not for the life of him tell. In his own opinion he was no hypocrite nor could be, for he expressed each sentiment in action as he felt it and truly desired to be as well with the Almighty as with the Navy Office.

Chapter Four

THE days which passed between my lord's reception of the letter and the next opportunity Pepys would have of seeing him were none too easy to either Pepys or Elizabeth. He was alternately terrified of having meddled and exalted by the thought that he had had the courage to risk his own future to serve a friend—and such a valuable one. Never was there a man in whom the baser and higher elements were more equally mixed—and with a more equal pull on his actions. A fine sermon and a lecherous song met with equal acceptance, supposing each were an equally good bit of work, and it was this astonishing liberality of admiration that left Elizabeth at sea without compass or direction as to what he would be at next.

They would leave their parish church of St. Olave's, Hart Street, Pepys moved to the soul by the eloquence of discourse on the virtues, and the heavenly aspiration of the organ breathing devotion through all its golden pipes. A pretty face in the street would catch his eye, and she would see the furtive glance, the loose-lipped half smile she knew and feared. If she had had more dignity or less sensitiveness they might have rubbed along better, but she was piteously unable to understand how a man's passions being satisfied at home he must needs seek their satisfaction abroad.

The letter to my lord troubled her on more than the material risk. She thought it a smugness that ill became the writer. She listened gravely while he explained that far from being a preachment it was only a plain statement of rumours current about my lord which must be met and of which a faithful servant would warn him as he would of a mad dog loose in the street. She shook her head silently, feeling in every bone that her husband's wish was to seem one thing and be another and at as little cost as possible. Indeed, there were moments when my Lord Sandwich openly daring public opinion at Chelsea seemed to her a more respectable figure than a man who took his pleasure on the sly as she began to fear he might. She could at least imagine an excellent retort from his lordship. But this she did not say, though her thoughts lowered the marital temperature and neither knew why. Such a thermometer is the most sensitive instrument on earth. A tone, the sweep of an eyelash, will send it up to torrid heat or depress it below zero.

It was on the fourth day after the despatch of the letter that Pepys betook himself to my lord's lodging to attend him to chapel, it being Lord's Day. The streets were echoingly still, only a person here and there walking briskly to his devotions, and he had plenty of time for anxious reflection before he found himself on the steps, knocker in hand and the rat-tat-tat volleying up the stair. He found my lord soberly dressed as beseemed the day and sober-faced as beseemed the occasion. He began without delay upon the subject with a promising dignity tempered with frigidity:

"I have received your letter, Mr. Pepys, and do full justice to your care for my honour and me. That sits very becoming on so old a friend and servant."

"My lord, my lord," interposed Pepys eagerly. "Do me so much justice as to observe that I made no reproach and believe the contrary of what others have stated. It was mere matter of information which I judged you should be possessed of."

"So I took it," answered my lord, fingering the lace of his cravat, and with an expression not wholly according with his words. "But it is very clear, Mr. Pepys, that I must have the names of those who belie me. And it is desirable I should know whether these lying rumours have reached my cousin (though distant) your wife. For if a woman hears, all hear."

This put Pepys in a sad quandary, but he perceived that evasion would not serve. He gave the names of the rumourers clearly and succinctly with his Navy Office manner and added:

"And certainly my wife is aware, my lord, because she hath heard the matter laughingly and otherwise discussed by ladies and so reported it and her unbelief to me."

"Her unbelief?" said my lord very quick, but no more, adding instantly: "And now let the subject close. There is no profit and much offense in the discussion. You have done your duty. I have so received it and there an end."

But it could not end so with the emotional Samuel. The ready tears welled to his eyes and overflowed, and his voice choked as he professed his tenderness and good will. That was not in my lord's vein. He suspected much caballing behind the simple statement, and saying briefly: "And now to church," led the way with a resolution that discouraged further sentiment. Pepys, taking his cue, dried the tears with his sleeve and hoped for a private interview with my lady and information as to the corner the wind set in from her.

He got it after the midday meal which he was asked to share with the family, being a lovely chine of beef roasted, boiled oysters going first with a cod and some prawns, and custards and fritters to follow, the whole served in the dining room very nobly, the walls hung with fair tapestries representing the story of Joseph. They began with his sale into captivity in the land of Egypt as a boy with golden curls and coat of many colours, and later (in a dark wig and lace ruffles) his escape from the importunate wife of Potiphar the Governor, she in a stiff farthingale which in itself defied temptation. Pepys was mighty proud to be in such company both on the walls and off them, for though my lord took little or no notice, being very silent, Lady Sandwich discoursed with him prettily and innocently, serving him with the best cuts of her own carving and desiring the lacqueys to pay attention to keeping his cup filled with wine which he drank till he was red to the ears and in debt near five shillings to the account of his vows. Yet it was worth it. The company was high and the position comfortable which he had achieved for himself in it.

After dinner my lord rose without a word and calling for his coach went off sullenly, and my lady summoned Mr. Pepys to her antechamber.

“And I desire to thank you, Mr. Samuel, for as good and friendly a bit of work as ever man did another, and indeed a better letter was never written, for it accused my lord in nothing, but told him the news going about, leaving him to draw his own conclusion—so that even if he would be angry with you he cannot. It was shrewdly done indeed.”

“Lord, madam, I am glad it pleases you but above all glad my lord had that confidence that he showed it to you, for if he takes your counsel he will be well guided.”

She threw up her pretty hands in horror:

“Good Lord, Mr. Samuel, he never showed it. Is it likely a man should lower himself to have his wife see him brought to book?”

“Then how—madam . . .”

She blushed a little with a touch of compunction.

“Why, a man will have hiding places his wife knows, and if a woman wills . . .”

“And very right too!” says Pepys, at the same moment congratulating himself that his diary was in a cipher which, leave it where he would, his wife could never unravel, though as an additional precaution he usually kept it under lock and key, and when seen writing had told her seriously that these were minutes of the State of the Navy kept for his Royal Highness the

Duke of York's secret information. But circumstances alter cases, and it was easy to be mighty merry with Lady Sandwich on her cunning in gaining information. He joked with her for a while on this, and then:

“But what do you think, madam—is my lord likely to set his house in order?”

She looked at him mildly. Nothing really ruffled my lady for long.

“Why, Mr. Pepys, I will be plain with you. I think he will not give up the woman. I am told she is very comely and well-carriaged and a witty pleasant woman and mighty pretty, and if so it may be as well she as another. But I think he will live at his house and show himself at Court, and this I owe to you and am grateful, as I should be.”

“And indeed your ladyship takes it with good temper and like yourself. If a man's heart does go a-gadding, better his wife shut her eyes and so keep peace at home.”

“Do you speak for yourself, Mr. Pepys?” asked my lady very shrewdly, “because I tell you if so that one man's meat is another man's poison, and I would not be the man that would rouse Bess's jealousy! One good turn deserves another, so I say, ‘Go easily there if you value your peace!’ These Frenchwomen!—they fly out like a hive of hornets when an Englishwoman will water the quarrel with a few tears and a little ranting and so an end, and love growing and flowering again.”

Pepys's florid good-humoured face clouded over in a moment; there was alarm in every note of his voice.

“If your ladyship has any reason to think Bess a fool I take it as a friend's part to let me know it, but never woman in the world had less reason when God knows there is hardly a night but I sup at home and all my comings and goings known to my friends and this in a time when there is scarce a man to whom his neighbour's wife is not as free as his own. But I bless God I am not so, but see the folly of it.”

“Indeed, cousin, I never doubted it, but I have observed Bess to be discontented more than once and chewing on some thought in her own mind, but I dare to say it is no more than a new dress she needs to keep her courage up. For she grows prettier and more noticeable every day, and my lord said lately that who but the Duke of York should say to him that Mr. Pepys has a mighty pretty woman to his wife.”

Pepys's face was a study of contending terror and pride.

“Madam! The Duke? And how should he hear tell of my wife? I honour his Royal Highness as I should, but all the world knows that where his

passions are concerned he is a devil—God forgive me! Sure my lord would never speak of her?”

“Why, Mr. Samuel, her looks speak for her! Look at her dark hair like curling silk and eyes like stars in clouds and lips like roses, and sure you know that if it is only an old rag of a dress she puts it on with an air that makes it look the newest fashion from Paris. Why, I have seen Bess in an old petticoat with a bit of lace tagged about the tail and me in my new flowered lavender silk, and who would cast a look at it by hers? Indeed you should be proud of your wife that costs so little in clothes and yet looks so handsome that all the men talk of her and even the Duke——”

“All the men?” cries Mr. Pepys in the utmost consternation. “If I thought the baggage——”

“The baggage indeed! I warrant you a pretty woman knows she is pretty if you kept her in a box under lock and key. And all I say is, give her no cause for jealousy, for such a woman can pay a man in kind if she will.”

He thought best to change the subject hurriedly:

“Madam, one thing I must ask of your ladyship’s wisdom. Have I hurt myself with my lord by my honesty?—for if so it will go very ill with my gettings which are little enough, God knows, as it is. I would be very loath to think he would avenge himself on a worm like me.”

She shrugged her pretty, matronly shoulders:

“Why, Cousin Samuel, you must not take it amiss if he sulks a bit. A man will do that when he is made to stand in the corner like a child, but it will go off, and I have a notion come into my head in which you may be of service to him, and so all be well.”

She would say no more at the moment, and he made his way home from the interview with a mind fully satisfied that Lady Sandwich had the situation in hand as far as her lord was concerned, if she could put up with a trifle of infidelity. That commended itself to him as sterling good sense, and he was fully satisfied that he had strengthened his position as a friend of the family by his action. He swelled with pride that my lady had called him “cousin,” and she a lady of rank with a page to bear her train and a great house to live in. On the other hand, since human happiness must never be without alloy, her references to Elizabeth were more than disquieting. Certainly he knew she was pretty. He had fallen so desperately in love with her that he was a sight for gods and men, languishing, despairing, sick of love, watching her door and window, enduring her father’s cranks and humours with a dog’s patience in hopes of a smile from the daughter. But

now? Does a man ever realize his wife's charms when once he is recovered from the love fever? He knows the drawbacks that dim lovely eyes and chill rosy lips. He is behind the scenes when my lady steps on the stage to act her pretty part and knows the make-up and how she has learnt it by heart and how to distinguish between scanty truth and abundant affectation. But yet, other men cannot share his knowledge, and if the marauder has his eye on the ewe lamb, what is a man to do? To burn in a flame of jealousy as Pepys did at that moment. It sickened him to think any other man should look at his wife, should think, should speak of her as all the men he knew both spoke and thought of women. Why, if the worst came to the worst and the Duke should cast those wooing melancholy Stuart eyes upon her as he had done on twenty others, how could he himself expect a better fate than that of many a man he knew and laughed at as an excellent jest? Yet all might be safe enough if Elizabeth believed she could count on his fidelity. After all, why should he doubt her? She had borne poverty with him and had not murmured when he who must keep up his position in the Navy Office spent four times as much on his clothes as what he would spare to her. She stitched and altered and made new out of old and he had never so much as guessed she had a thought of self-pity—it came so naturally to economize on her that he might spend on himself. Good Lord, if she should guess that he had given la belle Pierce two pair of silk stockings, and Mrs. Knipp, the twinkling little actress, a new velvet vest, mighty fine, which Elizabeth had cast her eyes on and dismissed with a sigh as out of reach! And if she should hear of—— Even in his own mind he scarcely ventured a name, but he knew, if she did not.

Indeed the good-humoured Lady Sandwich's remark had opened a new chapter in his life with a very alarming heading, for above it "Beware!" stood in great black letters that he who ran might read. Not a word—not a word to her! It would be deadly should she guess that the Duke was so much as conscious of her existence—she who had never suspected that any man but her husband had ever cast an eye upon her! But it must now be his duty to watch that no such pernicious knowledge ever reached her, and above all he must keep her ignorant that his own store of money was so greatening, for if once a woman takes to spending and dressing herself out, Heaven knows where she may end!

"And it is partly my own fault," he thought, making his way along Seething Lane, "that I do find my mind so apt to run to the thought of pleasures that I keep no watch on her, and it is high time to betake myself to my late vows, which I will tomorrow, God willing, bind myself to, that so I may increase my good name and esteem in the world and get money which

sweetens all things and of which I have much need, but by no means to give my wife her head, for that would be to her own ruin and mine. So God send me discretion in dealing with her.”

In this pious frame he reached the house, and there, to his disgust, found the street door left open so that any wandering beggar might make his way in and help himself. And this after all his angry admonitions to the women from Elizabeth downward! Good God!—the sluts, the fools, the drabs! Fury blazed up, and Luce the new ugly cook-maid emerging at that moment with a pail of garbage in her hand, he made at her and roaring with rage delivered so shrewd a kick that it got her in the knee and threw her and the pail to the ground with a crash. He heard a crow of laughter and looking up beheld Sir William Penn’s footboy at the window grinning with glee to see the kick and hoping for the blow that would have followed but for his face bubbling over with curiosity and pleasure. The Pepys household lived under the eye of the Penns, who were several rungs higher on the naval ladder of promotion, and it was a frightful shock to Pepys that he should have been caught in the act. Heavens, how that base rascal Sir William and the bragging Lady Penn and the ugly baggage Peg, their daughter, would be chuckling over the cowardly lout Mr. Pepys that beats his maids and has the manners with women of the tailor his father! He picked up his hat that had fallen and dusting the feather with would-be nonchalance strolled up to the boy with a smile of friendly greeting, noting the little villain’s roguish eye on his condescension.

“A fine day, Will! Is Sir William at home or my lady? Or Mrs. Peg? Because I have tickets given me for the playhouse for a play, *Love in a Mist*, that might be agreeable to them. Do not forget to say that I would have a word with them. And there is standing room somewhere in the house and an orange or two for a brave boy that forgets not his messages!”

Even this hope could not stifle the underlying giggle in Master Will’s accepting voice. He understood the situation perfectly and knew himself the possessor of a tidbit of news that would delight the Penn family, and so swaggered in and was gone.

“To think the slut should get in my way and do me such a damage!” was his thought as he growled past the cowering Luce and up to the parlour to take Elizabeth to task for her share in the misdemeanour.

Alas! the sound of a manly voice smote his ear, apparently humming a dance tune, and much to her satisfaction, for he could hear her fluting laugh in answer and then the little silver babble of French-touched English that he knew so well. A pair very comfortably provided in his absence—and who the devil could it be? The Duke? Never!—Yet who?

With the most chilling reserve he advanced, his hat still on his head, and opening the door walked in on them.

Mr. Pembleton the dancing master! Brave in a suit of black cloth pinked with white after the King's latest fashion, the legs ruffled with black ribbon like a pigeon's, and a hat with a black and white feather of the longest and curliest on the chair beside him. No denying that it suited him exceedingly, he being a neatly made black-complexioned man very comely to look at! Elizabeth in her new blue mohair gown which had cost him a pretty penny but a fortnight since, and looking like a little figure in French porcelain, so dainty and pretty with a buckled shoe thrust out before her that the King might have kissed and been thankful.

"Good-day, Mr. Pembleton!" says Pepys, very haughty and unwilling to show the mad jealousy that ate his heart at this, following as it did on my Lady Sandwich's talk. "What, a dancing lesson on the Lord's Day?"

"Not so indeed, worshipful Mr. Pepys, but I did myself the pleasure to call in and ask madam if she could do me the favour to shift her lesson day from Tuesday to Wednesday this week, and having found she can oblige me will take my leave with your permission."

"It is granted!" replies the host solemnly and so bows him to the door and returns to rend Elizabeth, cowering a little in her chair like a partridge that scents the coming storm, but with a bright angry eye above her ruffled feathers.

"And what do you mean, you saucy jade, by the freedom of entertaining men in my absence as no honest woman would do? If you were in the church this morning as became you, could you not see the man there and save him his errand if you had a mind? Not you! You knew I must be with my lady and you would have the house to yourself for your junketings, I warrant you! And if I——"

He would have stormed on, but propping her elbow on the arm of the chair and cupping her pretty chin in her hand she looked at him and uttered one word only—but with venom:

"Pricklouse!" (tailor).

A word picked up in the street or from the maids, but she was well aware of its implications and the sting it must give his pride that might be said to carry a tailor's shears for his coat of arms. A naughty vile word for such sweet lips—though something must be allowed for provocation, for if Pembleton walked in how was she to help it? But still a word no lady should utter! The moment it jumped out of her mouth she was ashamed and knew

herself at a disadvantage, and very soon was to know it from her husband also, for he broke out in a storm that half frightened her, calling her all the sluts and baggages in England, one that would get the maid Ashwell out of the way being Sunday that she might show so little discretion as to entertain a man alone that smelt like a perfume box and looked the dancing master with his minikin finicking ways that any sensible woman would vomit at. And much more. His uncontrol gave her more courage than she naturally had, and she sat up in her chair and eyed him with a jeering smile.

“So much ado about nothing. What—are we in Turkey where a woman must be drowned in a sack if she speak to a man? And for how many deaths would you then stand accountable? Certainly I went to church, and certainly I saw there your beauties Mrs. Lethulier and Batelier leering round to see where were you. *I* saw them out of the corner of my eye that see much more than you think. And for poor Mr. Pembleton this is your devilish jealousy that I have seen before, and it is more like a child than a man, when yourself gave me leave to learn to dance the coranto as a lady should . . .”

And so on and so on and Heaven knows in what storm it had ended sufficient to waken the dead, not to mention the Penns and their household so near at hand, when as luck would have it in walks Mrs. Knipp the actress, the most excellent mad-humoured thing in the world, and calls out for an evening of music and a bit of supper, her husband being gone into the country on business—and for very shame’s sake the quarrel must wait and Elizabeth smile in spite of herself, though she never liked the woman, and Mr. Pepys relax from his musty humour and all smooth itself over. They were indeed both thankful to her at the moment, for it gave a breathing space that might make for peace.

And so, all gaiety and archness, she sang her little song to the harpsichord in the panelled room, the song that Pepys could never resist—of “Barbry Allen” and her hard heart—and very sweetly she sang it, with little shapings of her mouth and gestures with her hands like a born actress. And for supper was some powdered beef and cheesecakes, both of the best, and after it she must strum the harpsichord to a dance tune and call upon her host and hostess to shake a foot to it and show what their dancing lessons had done for them, and they danced and sang until Ashwell the maid came in, and Pepys remembered it was the Lord’s Day and the neighbours apt to be scandalized if they should hear the music. Whereupon he saw Mrs. Knipp to a coach and kissed her on handing her in, and so back very demurely to find the three maids sitting in a row with the open Bible before them to read aloud a few comfortable words from the Acts of the Apostles before departing to bed.

Chapter Five

BUT though the rising and breakfast were not cordial next morning strife was not openly renewed, and indeed he had plenty of stuff to fill his mind otherwise, for affairs at the Navy Office had taken an anxious turn, and that must needs fall on him more than on the Commissioners, for if they were the stately ship with flags flying and guns firing for the edification of the public, he was the unseen rudder that guided them in their business for good or ill. And this for the reason that excepting my Lord Sandwich, and he only sometimes, there was not one of them that honestly applied himself to the business by which the country stood or fell. They drew their pay, which was more than could be said for the honest poor sailors that were half-starved aboard and pinched of their dues both afloat and ashore, and they dressed fine and lay soft, and when they came to the office yawned and drowsed in their big velvet chairs and looked at the clock, watching till they could get away with decency.

And still it was: “Now, worthy Mr. Pepys, you will attend to this matter,” or “You will have the accounts ready this day week to lay before his Royal Highness that he may see we are all diligent in our duties”; and every day he saw his own real consequence grow and theirs diminish, though that was little use to him as yet, for of all things it must not appear to either them or the public, but he must do the work and they have the glory, when glory was going. But it was anxious work with the public trembling at the Dutch naval successes and the King and his lords grumbling at the share the Navy took of public money and yet the service to be kept going somehow, anyhow, so that it could show some sort of a front to the enemy. Indeed Pepys was often in mighty fear and trouble when called before the committee to account for spendings in which they took no interest until the day of accounting came. His pay was small enough, the equivalent of £500 a year or so, but settled money is good, and there was always the recognized chance of making money, for like all the rest of the world he had sticky fingers, and a good bit stuck in the shape of presents and commissions for which not a soul would have blamed him, nor could, being in the same case from the King downward when they got a chance. A pleasant easy-going time for the Navy

Office unless something should happen to go wrong, and then all would descend in thunder on their heads and the public cry be for someone to hang. Knowing what interest would do in the background, Pepys who was conscious he had none but my Lord Sandwich's was always in dread that the victim would be himself, for that the higher officers were jealous of his knowledge and attainments, though profiting by them, he knew very well.

He had proof visible of both that morning for Captain Grove, skipper of one of the smaller ships, met and gave him good-day with even more heartiness than usual—

“And my grateful thanks, worthy Mr. Pepys, for the speedy victualling of my ship and all so neat and with so much despatch as does my heart good to see it. If we could have the same with the storage of sails I should have little left to wish for before leaving the dockyard, but I am in your good hands and hope for the best, for he that got me my office to take the ships to Tangier will see me in good case to carry it out as I should.”

With these words he slipped a fat and comfortable packet into the hand of the Clerk of the Acts, directed to him by name, and Pepys all smiles and cordiality responded:

“And a good voyage to you, Mr. Grove, and high luck and success in which my best wishes and help shall not be wanting. Count on supplies of the best.”

And so in with him to his office and there sat down to open the letter. Not a fortune, but worth having. Four pounds in silver and a fine gold carolus. He kept his private account of these accessions, for it was not desirable that Elizabeth should exactly understand his position, women being notoriously incapable of understanding the value of money. He added this little sum now to the rapidly growing list of such additions and then turned to see my Lord Sandwich, imposing in long curled periwig and sword, advancing to the Office.

His manner was still distant and his matter no pleasanter.

“Mr. Pepys, I desire to acquaint you as Clerk of the Acts that the Commissioners have seen the Chancellor and my Lord Treasurer and laid before them your account of the charge for the Navy and want of money. And they held up their hands crying: ‘Such accounts! Can they be rightly kept?’ as if charging it on you, and my Lord Treasurer says: ‘What means this Mr. Pepys? And why will not people lend their money for the Navy? And why will they not trust the King as they did Oliver Cromwell? And why do we make nothing of our prizes as formerly?’—I can tell you, it is a pretty

kettle of fish, and the sooner you make your answer to the Lord Treasurer and the Lord Chancellor the better!”

He had evidently a sort of surly pleasure in his errand, yet though Pepys understood this the news threw him into a great horror.

“What, my lord? I can prepare the accounts and answer every matter coming into my province as is but right I should, but it is for better men to speak before the Lord Treasurer and Lord Chancellor of England, and I am only a pen to record things as they stand.”

Lord Sandwich was not displeased by this humility. However choleric and hasty, he was not a man to keep up a steady grudge, and at this juncture in public affairs he also knew the man irreplaceable for, whatever his private affairs might be, his devotion to the Navy and its service none could question. Therefore he unbent a little on the next sentence.

“What I say I mean, and what I mean I say. Yourself knows as well as I that our business is to make bricks without straw, for the Navy is starved, men and ships, and yet we must be ready to show our teeth and bite as if we had the riches of the world at our backs. I would we had the worth of the jewels his Majesty heaps on my Lady Castlemaine to pay the poor sailormen that go about wanting food and cursing the press-gang and the King and ourselves that cannot help them. The Navy was better off in the days of Oliver Cromwell.”

This remark, however true, was such rank treason that Pepys felt himself half forgiven by the confidence. That it was true was a bitter thought to the men who had brought the Restoration. The iron Protector Oliver Cromwell, doggedly and piously devoted to the country’s service, had its naval affairs before him like all the rest and watched them with his own deadly efficiency, where the present King wasted and idled and played with his woman and demoralized all under him by his example. But this could scarcely be discussed in detail.

“Therefore prepare the accounts and yourself,” added my lord, “for there is a dark day coming for the Navy Office, and you have powerful enemies within it as well as without.”

He turned to the door to go to his own private room, but presently thrust in his head again:

“And let me recommend, Mr. Pepys, that you be very circumspect in both your duties and pleasures henceforth, for there are those on the watch that would be very glad to have a word to say to your disadvantage, especially if true.”

The door shut, and Pepys was left to his reflections in such a sweat of terror that his clothes clung to his back. That last hint! Was it only tit for tat, my lord taking a pleasure in warning him that he too was not immaculate and might have tales spread to his disadvantage—he who had none to defend him?—or could it be that anyone had thought it worth while to watch his comings and goings and the meetings he gave this pretty sinner and the other at the little secret haunts where he knew Elizabeth’s eye could not reach him. This was a most unpleasant reflection. It was true that manners and morals were lax, but the open display of laxity was only for those in high places, a kind of expensive decoration which the Clerk of the Acts could not wear to advantage. The first cry would certainly be that he was spending the public money on his private amusements and for all he knew the Tower and the block might stand at the end of that vista. He must mend his ways. Had not his vows already shown he knew the necessity? He must avoid Deptford Dockyard and Mrs. Bagwell’s luscious red lips—provoking as a fragrant ripe strawberry to a thirsty man. When Mrs. Turner coquettishly displayed in its nudity the best-turned leg in England to his admiration his prayer must be “Get thee behind me, Satan!”—and his resource, flight. Flight, for he knew that when such eyes looked into his and such legs flamed before them there was a traitor in the citadel who opened the door to the foe. And he must go easier with Elizabeth despite his yesterday’s resolutions. It could not create respect for a man if his wife and he lived in discord, and how could he know what gossip might pass between her and the women who came and went at the house?—not to mention the maids! And this with him who might presently have to appear before the Lord Treasurer and the Lord Chancellor to plead for his superiors and himself!

“Lord help me!” he groaned, sitting with his hands to his temples and near despair with anxiety.

It seemed religiously appropriate to the moment to get out his vows and read them over in a truly penitential spirit, and he did this, taking out his purse also and settling an account somewhat longer than usual by dropping the fine into the box provided.

“And may no woman ever come near this place and tempt me more, and if they should venture may I have the grace to send them hence with a flea in their ears.” A devout aspiration as the last coin clinked in the box. “And curious it is to see what a slave I am to beauty, but this must cease, for my honour lies a-bleeding.”

It was before he left to go home for dinner that a written message from my lord was handed to him directing him to go down to Deptford Dockyard and surprise the officials with a muster of their accounts. One began to be zealous with the Lord Chancellor and Lord Treasurer in prospect.—And Deptford! It was the very moment he would not have chosen. “Lead us not into temptation” is an excellent prayer for poor humanity, but when Providence graciously answered it by cutting off the supply Pepys generally walked into enough on his own account without troubling Divinity, and there was certainly no reason why on leaving the Office after so many good resolutions and but a step to his own house (where he knew an excellent lamprey pie awaited him) he should find Mrs. Bagwell waiting outside the Office—a dangerous place and one where she had no business—and have delayed to exchange a word with her. A mere smile would have been too much in view of the vows he had just renewed.

But there she was in a hood half-hiding the most roguish eyes in the world and the round of a velvet cheek, her lips pouted like a child’s half in doubt—half in delicious expectation of a child’s treat. It would have seemed to him the merest brutality to pass her by with a stiff greeting or none, a coolness which would have had the effect of frightening her away forevermore, as he had just devoutly wished and now did not wish at all.

After a furtive glance round he stopped because it was obviously necessary to tell her this must never happen again, and as he uttered the words a large tear formed in either eye and spilt itself silently down her cheeks, the full lower lip quivering helplessly.

“O good Mr. Pepys, forgive me, never, never again, I swear, and I did but think that for my husband’s sake—— I have indeed done very much amiss. I will go—I will.”

“No, no, Mrs. Bagwell. No offense meant and none taken. But I have no time—— If indeed——”

Had he no time? Was there not the dinner hour, and had it not often before been stretched to a little more leisure than the strict letter of the law admitted? A lamprey pie is well, but those rosy lips and doubting appealing eyes were better. Does the benevolent heart love to confer Joy, and if it gains a little in return should it be blameworthy? Yet he should have walked sternly on—he knew it. But a long established habit of yielding to the pleasure of the moment had so greased the downward path that slipping was the only natural process.

“There is a little cabaret where I eat sometimes. If you are not in haste, Mrs. Bagwell, and could do with a bit of dinner, why, so could I! What say

you to a good hog's harslet? They serve it gallantly there, and a dish I love.”

“And I too! And, O Mr. Pepys, what an honour and favour for a poor woman like me, and you with all the fine Court ladies crowding about you for a look and a smile. If I had known I'd have put on my best, be sure I would! and not these old duds. And you in your lovely jackanapes coat with silver buttons—so very great and grand!”

Here he could honestly reassure her. Her flowered linen gown suited her plump prettiness to perfection, and as to the Court ladies, he said—why, women would be women in all walks of life, and a man could not help it if they were somewhat pressing. Not but what he preferred a modester style of charms himself, and anyway— Here he broke off to call a hackney coach and so, bundling the smiling blushing creature into it, they drove off together, his arm about her and her head on his shoulder, and a very comfortable dinner they had, with as much caressing and folly for after-service as the average sensual man could wish for a day's amusement.

It could not have seemed less than providential to Mrs. Bagwell that the great man's business called him down to Deptford and that he could give her a cast downstream in the boat he hired at London Bridge, naturally putting her off at a secluded corner before arrival at the dockyard, where his arrival occasioned a tremendous stir and much running and bustling, the observance of which at a safe distance gave her the greatest satisfaction, as of one who had the private ear of a man so high that all the rest of the world must keep their distance. She hurried off to her husband with glad tidings of the morning's work and joyful prospects in store.

And Mr. Pepys, returning in the evening to his office after a well-spent day, made the following entry in cipher:

So I back again and to my office where I did with great content make a vow to mind my business and *laisser aller les femmes* for a month, and am with all my heart glad to find myself able to come to so good a resolution that thereby I may follow my business which, and my honour, thereby lies a-bleeding. So home to supper.

But not to find Elizabeth as receptive and cheerful as so excellent a resolution deserved! She was bitterly hurt and outraged by his jealousy with regard to Mr. Pembleton, and whereas her husband had arranged that the maid should comb his hair and wash his ears before he retired to bed, Elizabeth had prepared a very different entertainment for them. She began directly they were alone.

“If I had deserved this fool’s jealousy even by a little thing I could blame myself and take it patiently, but I that never looked at a man, but busied myself with washing and cooking for you like a very drudge until you gathered a bit to give us comfort—what should I do with the like follies? I have quite other fish to fry than amusing myself with gallantries, and that I would have you know.”

The truth of this put him in a difficulty from which a lie was the only way out.

“My dear, who talks of jealousy? I am forced to tell you the truth why I am so disturbed, though it is no woman’s business. I have had bad news from the Duke, and troublous times to come at the Navy Office, and this makes me that I scarce know how to eat or sleep any more than a hen on a hot griddle. This it is and no doubt of your honesty, though for my part, if a woman has a good manner and quick observation in watching others, I see not how she needs dancing lessons, and a penny saved is a penny gained and _____”

She tossed her head in high dudgeon:

“Yes, to waste on your new jackanapes coat or another! When do I see a spare penny? But I understand very well. It is jealousy makes you sick to see me alone with Pembleton—the which I never was. Ask the maids else!—and so you would have me break off the month’s lessons you allowed me! But I will not—no, not if you prayed me on bended knees. If I spied into your doings as you into mine what should I see to discontent me? I know more than I say. Take this for truth.”

This came so uncomfortably after his happy day with Mrs. Bagwell that Pepys dared not insist on her breaking off her lessons. There was a fire of scorn in her eye which was dashing to any audacity of control from him. It was as though she had suddenly gained a liberty of thought and action he had never known in her before, and whether it was that the lovely yielding girl of fifteen he had married was changed into the woman who saw her own ends in life and would have them, or whether she suspected certain things which gave her a hold on his fears, he could not tell, but she daunted him, and he was silent with a trouble very visible.

He rose and stood holding by his chair, remembering with fear that a man’s wife has it in her power to wreck his good name and therefore his success in life. He could not see her expression, only the clear beautiful profile which had first won his liking, then his desire. At last, and as if in doubt, he put out a hand and laid it on her shoulder, half expecting an outburst of wrath for his pains.

Suddenly and woman-like, the fire in her eyes was drowned in tears. Unknowingly he had done the right thing, and what he called her French fashion, the quick impulsive way which he could scarcely understand and answer, the imagination which foresaw and exaggerated all joys and goods alike, blew over in a black storm leaving lovely blue skies of kindness behind. She flung herself at his knees now and put her little thin golden arms about him, looking up in his face with eyes swimming in tears.

“O, my dear, these hard words! They break me; they spoil our peace and why do we endure them? What are we but fools? Do I not know you could not be faithless to me if even you tore my heart—and it is true you tear it by running about with women more beautiful than I! Still you would not wrong me in truth. You would always stop short and say, ‘My poor Bess—she is my wife. I might give another woman a gift or so, but wrong my Bess—no!’ I were a devil if I thought otherwise, and you also. O let us cease from this fighting. Let us make the peace and keep it and trust to the good God to help us.”

She clung against him sobbing, and the more French she became in her passion of love and grief the less he understood her. Not the words—that was easy enough—but the quick eager spirit that lay behind them, quick to passion and penitence and equally uncontrolled in both. There were times when she seemed scarcely more than a pretty petted animal to him, so instinctive were all her actions, and there he could best understand and answer her with sensual caresses which surely were all any woman could need. But perplexing! she wanted more, and what it was neither he nor she could tell. She called it fidelity in him to his marriage vows, but it was something shining through this like a light in alabaster that she desired almost savagely though as yet she could only divine its existence. She had been good stuff for moulding when he married her but he had never known how to mould her, and she must take her chance of alternate caresses and angers which excited the like in her and no more but blind anger with her hard luck.

He caressed the little dark head that lay where Mrs. Bagwell’s had lain, but almost mechanically, and considering how he could best use this mood to set himself straight in her eyes and so get rid of the hated Pembleton. And with his training, tinctured with Puritanism as it could not fail to be, came the vision of a jealous God looming awfully behind and above them who would not fail to punish him by the withdrawal of his worldly prosperity if he did not behave himself according to the rules laid down in such cases. Indeed Elizabeth was a problem!

“And still I doubt her,” he thought to himself as his hand went to and fro in her curls, “for which I deserve to be beaten if she does not serve me as I am fearful she will. Especially since God knows I do not find honesty enough in my own mind but that upon a small enough temptation I could be false to her and therefore should not expect more justice from her. God pardon my sin and folly, but shake it off I cannot.”

He could not. The infidelity in him made the same from her seem the necessary consequence, and Lady Sandwich’s words rankled like a hornet’s sting and kept him perpetually and jealously on the watch. She felt the dullness of his response, for presently she raised her head and dried her eyes.

“I talk folly,” she said. “I find I am still more of a child than I believed and things will be as they will. But on this I am resolved. I will send you a message to the Office when the man comes, and you may watch for yourself if I step over the bounds. Or, if you better like it, set the maid Ashwell, that you make so much of, to watch me and make report. But break off my lessons I will not and have it over the town that Mr. Pepys is so frightened for his honour that he dare not trust his wanton wife to a dancing lesson. So now, there’s for you! But you love me better than you think, and I you, which is one of the strange things with marriage, and we shall know this one day if not now. That’s the pity of it.”

She went slowly out of the room, and he heard the sound of a sob as the door closed. He would gladly have said more and the right word if he could but have hit upon it, but something in her manner forbade him to use the occasion to suit his own ends, and to his English roughness it seemed best to let the matter blow over without more words and take up friendly relations when they had been broken with an air of nothing having happened. Pepys believed little in dwelling on the feelings and emotions. He considered them French and foreign and that no woman understood reason nor ever would, and life was either comfortable or uncomfortable, and no more. Therefore he let her go, and missed an opportunity in its way irretrievable.

The next day of Mr. Pembleton’s coming she sent a message in writing to the office to tell him the hour and that it was fixed for a time when he could be present if he would.

And I have told Mr. Pembleton that you had a mind to learn *La Duchesse* yourself as being in the fashion, and therefore he will not think himself disobliged or watched. I beg you would come? that this displeasing matter may be ended.

But his eye, keen enough where himself was concerned, detected a cool scorn in this bidding which she did not intend, and his inward comment was, "I fear I go near to lose my command over her and nothing does it more than by giving her this occasion for dancing and other pleasures whereby her mind is taken away from her business and she finds other things sweeter than pleasing me. Indeed she begins to take no pleasure in me nor studies to please me as she did."

Alas, Elizabeth was growing up. Reason was at her ear instructing her that what is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander, and whereas Pepys hoped "with a little pains to bring her to her old wont," she knew in her heart that no pains in all the world would now bring her to take love and trust for granted as in the day when she was a married child and no more.

Still there were good days in between. Days of little pleasures and household interests, and she was all a Frenchwoman in that she set her husband and the house and family interests first and all else outside a locked door. But much was yet to develop for them both, and Pepys, seeing her swimming and curtsying through her dance with Pembleton, making awkward attempts himself to master its intricacies, watched with the jealousy of primitive man for any touch or look brushing his woman, or any response from under the dark long lashes she kept so resolutely dropped. He understood neither her strength nor her weakness, nor for that matter did she herself.

Chapter Six

IT was not very long before my Lord Sandwich recovered his good-humour with his faithful cousin and servitor, having the wit to see he had gained enormously by his withdrawal from Chelsea and observance of the conventionalities up to a certain point. No further, for he visited Chelsea, and the black-eyed young woman was still under his protection and modelling herself into such manners as would fit her for a higher flight when my lord's money was spent, and indeed he was known to be more often in than out of debt nowadays. These were grand times for a handsome young woman with ambitions and enough wit to keep her eye fixed on the goal. Look at pretty witty Nell Gwyn risen from the street dirt to the King's bed and successful rivalry with Lady Castlemaine, who would have torn her eyes out if she had dared. Look at Moll Davis, once a guttersnipe and now controlling his Majesty's whims with brazen audacity. Why should not a handsome woman like Rachel Becke hope for preferment and the lick-spittle flattery it would bring her? Heaven knows there were enough men better than my Lord Sandwich to be pleased with her beautiful company if she could but get the first hold on them!

There were many also who would beseech God's blessing on her success if they could hope it would give themselves a helping hand up the ladder of gold and power. Why at this very time there was a statesman, the Earl of Arlington, offering the lovely Frances Stuart his advice and allegiance on her attaining the exalted position of King's mistress—"To which it had pleased God and her own virtues to raise her."—Those were his words. It had not however pleased God as yet to raise her so high, for she had seen enough of the King's heartless ways with women to give her a preference for the solid marriage vows of the Duke of Richmond, choosing, as the Court women did, in the best market. But this choice left a corner vacant to be struggled for in the Court seraglio. And there were many women, including my Lord Sandwich's *belle amie*, who had their hungry eyes on it.

Rachel Becke gave much anxiety to Pepys at this time and later, as my lord grew more spendthrift and developed a careless habit of borrowing where he could. As Pepys's savings mounted—and they were mounting fast

now—he lived in terror lest my lord should attempt to borrow of him, which indeed he had already hinted at, placing his cousin and servitor in a most difficult position, and there were besides my Lady Sandwich’s anxieties to sharpen his own. He had a letter from her by messenger one morning—from Kensington village:

For certainly I know his debts are heavy [she wrote], and I heartily desire your company down here for a day in this village of Kensington where you can have the chance to see this woman and consider whether anything may be done with her, for my lord is besotted and acts more like a fool than a man in this respect though improved in others.

It was not for Pepys to refuse, and he was eager to survey the lady who was come to such promotion, but how it was brought about he could not imagine, for it was hard to suppose my lord had planted her among the trees and meadows of Kensington to favour his wife with her company. He mentioned this doubt to Elizabeth, who flashed the light of a woman’s perception upon it with the hardness of her French logic.

“Why, I can see very well, and very like her ladyship it is. She will try and make a friend of the woman and get at my lord through her. There are Englishwomen fools like that because the English are all sentiment and talk. A Frenchwoman would know that Becke must be her enemy and avoid her like the devil. We do not stand upon two worlds like the English.”

Pepys rebuked her gravely for using the word “devil.” His Satanic Majesty must not be lightly mentioned any more than his Stuart Majesty, and besides, comment was not Elizabeth’s business. She shrugged her shoulders and went on with the planning of her new paragon petticoat. Pepys, donning his new camlet suit and brushing his beaver, sent for a hackney coach and took himself and his shrewd inquisitive nose down to Kensington to spy out the land. He could have ridden, but a horse and he, though acquainted, were not the most intimate friends and met only when needful.

Lady Sandwich, placid and smiling, a large shady hat over her hood, met him in the garden of the little house in the fields my lord had taken for their recreation and because London of late had been sickly, and no one would have supposed she had a care on her shoulders.

“And very good of you to come this way, Cousin!” says she, giving him a hand which he kissed devoutly, “for we are to have company today and who should be amongst them but Mr. and Mrs. Becke of Chelsea and their daughter, and it was my lord’s wish I should invite them here to give the lie

to any talk about her, so I thought best to have you out to see what sort she is, for you know I prize your counsel.”

“But, Lord!—my lady, sure you should not put that constraint upon yourself to invite such a wench under your roof!” cries Pepys in astonishment at the news and the lady’s placidity. It however occurred to him that my lord was blest in his wife’s patience whatever else he lacked and that such patience should not be discouraged in any wife. She smiled amiably:

“Why, as to constraint, what the Queen endures I may endure also. It is better to deal with a woman you know than another. My children and I may yet be on our knees to ask her good offices if this goes on, and I never cast a look on the cupboard of plate in London but I think it may come to sale to help us out with our dinner. The woman may be bought off or made use of somehow if I know her—that’s my thought. It is an acquaintance I shall continue.”

So Bess was right! But for a great lady it seemed to him a poor pitiful step to take, though it might have done well enough with a portionless woman who had nothing to consider but keeping her husband in good humour. He ventured very cautiously on the thin ice.

“Why, my lady, there is none to match you for good sense, but I never yet knew the strumpet that had her hand either on man or money that would let them go. Sure the only hope is if she find a bigger goldfish and to convince my lord that so it is. I warrant he believes her heart his and his only.”

“All men are like that,” says my lady with more shrewdness than he supposed possible, “and I daresay even yourself, Cousin, supposes all the pretty Florindas and Dorimants are run mad for you. But for all that what you say is truth, and I have thought of late—” she hesitated, stooping to gather a clove carnation from the border and pressing it to her lips—“I have thought—it has been told me that the Duke of York is wearied of his bold slut Lady Chesterfield, and as to the other, Lady Denham, she grows sick and faded and there is great talk that the Duchess of York should poison her with powder of diamonds. But be it as it may, we all know he has his brother the King’s eye for a pretty face, and if this woman Becke is a likely jade—” she paused again and added with the corner of her eye on Pepys—“it is certain that my lord would never stand in the Duke’s way.”

Pepys was astonished to the very heels of his boots. Lord! to think that mild sweet-humoured woman should have the wit and the plotting heart to see so far and clear! Certainly if the Duke—the Lord High Admiral—the

man upon whom every one of my lord's hopes hung—should cast an eye on Rachel Becke my lord must stand off. What can the jackal do when the lion's paw is on the deer? But it sent a thrill of fear through him to think so mild and comparatively dull a woman should be as keen as this! What hidden and unsounded depth might there not be in Elizabeth's heart! What strange resolutions might not spring out of the many quarrels he had set aside so lazily and comfortably once they had blown over. He had never thought women difficult to understand—pretty caressable little animals to be bought or bought off at any time with a kiss and a flattery and a gift of jessamy gloves or a French silk petticoat in the newest mode. In this way a man might keep his house a comfortable harbourage and his wife a fort under whose guns he might retreat for protection when fair marauders threatened his respectability by taking more licence than he approved.—But my Lady Sandwich!—If this were possible he must use more caution with Elizabeth.

“But how to bring her to his Royal Highness's notice if so?” he asked cautiously. It was difficult to suppose that she herself would venture any remarks which might involve her with her husband and the Duke alike.

“Why, that is your part, Cousin!” she said handing him the carnation which he took mechanically. Her amiable smile at the moment almost stunned him.

“I?” he stammered. “I, madam? And how?”

“Why, I know very well, for my lord has told me that his Royal Highness is as friendly and open with you as heart can wish, and with his pleasant jokes here and there, I see nothing more easy than to lead the talk to the prettiest women in the town and commend Mrs. Rachel as one of the prettiest. That is, if so we find her today. And indeed, Cousin, it is most urgent, and all our hopes are bound up with it, and I will tell you why.”

They were pacing gently up and down now over the green sward in front of the house where the trees cast a pleasant shade and anyone looking from the windows might have thought the serene middle-aged lady was discussing her village charities and the anxious-faced gentleman beside her so handsomely dressed was considering the most righteous means of applying them. In reality their two minds were fixed on two different resolutions: his to keep out of such an unsavoury business which must inevitably embroil him with the two men who could make or mar his every fortune; hers to use him unsparingly as the only tool she had by her. And since her favour also was of the utmost importance to Pepys, it must be

owned the grey mare might prove to be the better horse on this occasion. And indeed she was to be pitied also. He knew that well.

“I will tell you, Cousin,” she went on in her gentle monotonous tones, “what I would not yet tell another. I have a notion in my heart of Philip Carteret, eldest son to the Treasurer of the Navy, for my eldest daughter Jem. That is to say his mother, my Lady Carteret, has dropped a hint to me. Now there is nothing more suitable or more to be wished. They are in great circumstances. The King dines with Sir George—and indeed owes him fifty thousand pounds lent to him in his troubles” (“Which will never be paid!” cries Pepys in his heart), “and altogether it is a most noble match if it can be brought to bear and above all if I find Mr. Philip has any settled estate in land himself. But this I know nothing of nor does my lord, and so I look to you, Cousin, to find out what he is worth to the last penny and bring me word before a single step is made in the business. But, if it comes to anything, a portion with her they will have, and Lord knows I see not why my pretty Jem and with such good blood needs it, the Carterets having enough and to spare.”

Astonishment kept Pepys silent for a moment. He saw the points of the match. He saw exactly now where pressure pinched Lady Sandwich into her determination concerning Rachel Becke, but he could not himself admire the plain nervous Lady Jem—a girl too shy almost to lift her eyelashes in a man’s presence, much less utter a word, and after all Sir George Carteret’s position was assured without my Lord Sandwich’s help. To his certain knowledge the young couple had only met twice in two years and as Philip Carteret was as timid and embarrassed with women as man could be, it was hard to see how they could be brought together in any comfort to themselves. He asked if Sir George had approved.

“That is not known as yet!” Lady Sandwich answered. “So far it is his wife’s hint only (and like enough she meant nothing by it) has set me and my lord on it. But when we have sifted out the young man’s money, then my lord and I would have you sound Sir George on the matter, Cousin, because your known discretion will set the ball a-rolling as we would have it and give us an open door for retreat if it come to nothing. But, hark, is not that coach-wheels on the road? The cook has a noble dinner prepared, and my lord comes with the Beckes.”

She hurried away and left him to walk up and down alone under the trees and meditate upon the duties thrust upon him. At first with pride and pleasure. Every day he was becoming more and more indispensable to the House of Montagu. It was not so far back that Lady Sandwich’s maid Mrs.

Ann had come to very high words with him about a flock bed he had sent instead of a feather-bed ordered at Lady Sandwich's instance, and the woman had treated him as a fellow servant and abused "the beggarly French pride" of his wife. None of that was possible now. Mrs. Ann curtseyed to the ground when he met her, and the lacqueys bowed at the door, and who but Mr. Pepys and madam! All this was sweet as sugar to his taste, but he knew very well that like sugar itself it must be paid for and that every fresh service put upon him would cost him something he might not desire to pay. How could he speak to the Duke about Lord Sandwich's trull? How would my lord take it? How would the Treasurer of the Navy receive an underling as ambassador for his son's marriage? If he liked the match, well and good! If not, it would do Pepys no service with him for it would make difficulties with Lord Sandwich. It was true he had worked up the notion of his own importance, doing it bit by bit with the utmost care not to offend the great men in doing so. When his uncle Robert Pepys died not long since, leaving about ninety pounds a year to Pepys's father for life, Pepys judged it sensible to give out to his friends great and little that his uncle had left him £200 a year in land besides moneys and this he had done because he "would put esteem upon himself." He was doubting however at this moment whether he had not overshot the mark a little there and in other such ways. He saw that people's expectations of him were rising to a point at which it might be difficult for him to live up to the standard he had himself set. Indeed, he began to fear that he was forming in himself a habit of belief in his prosperity and that the danger now was that he began to love spending like one born to the manner, instead of hoarding as he should.

But the coach was thundering to the gate, and the steps being let down, my lord and a stout old gentleman of florid aspect descended, Pepys hurrying to lend his hand. Next came a large old lady with a rolling eye who inspired Pepys's experience with instant distrust, reminding him of another old lady too well known to the bloods of the Court as "the Mother of the Maids" and conveying the impression that however much she might err it would not be on the side of scruples too delicate. She curtseyed three times to Lady Sandwich, each time sinking so low that her petticoats and hoops flattened on the path. Following her father and mother and handed down the steps by my lord came the surprise:

A tall young woman beautifully dressed in one of the new fashion silks of ash-colour patterned with black, bunched out very wide over the hips and short enough to disclose lovely little feet and ankles with high-heeled buckled shoes setting them off to exquisite advantage. Her bosom and very long throat were finely shaped, with the air and carriage of a swan's and its

whiteness, and so were in an odd way a pair of extremely long and narrow brown eyes with a trick of opening, enlarged and wide, upon a man that was arresting. Her complexion was of a singular snowy smoothness with no trace of colour except in the lips, which were beautifully cut and crimson in the pallor of her face. Yet otherwise by no means a raging beauty, and many men might miss the insidious charm. Pepys, unconsciously trained in the school of Elizabeth's arts and graces, was quicker to appraise her and reckon what guns she carried. He saw also with what dignity and modesty she moved, never committing her parents' mistake of servility but making her reverence to my lady with only the deferential courtesy due from a young woman to one of great position. It must have been a difficult meeting for both, and, of the two, she with all the odds against her bore herself the better. Indeed she met the situation with excellent composure.

She astonished him, and he watched her with the closest scrutiny he could venture, not knowing at all how to place her. She produced an impression which he could not formulate to himself of intellect taking its ease while coming to its conclusions. Yet nothing could have been more simple than the grace of her manner.

"Lord!" he thought. "I that have been ashamed to see my lord so grossly play the fool to the flinging off of all honour, friends and servants, carrying her abroad with him and playing on his lute under her window with fifty other sordid things, how can I believe it now I see her? And yet a woman to have her way with a man if ever I saw one, but sure never to encourage him in such ways! For a most modest woman she seems!"

He stood and marvelled. Not a flush touched her cheek, not a hesitation showed on the smooth surface of manner as she fell back curtseying to the young ladies who were watching her one and all with the extreme of sharp curiosity. Pepys knew in that minute as well as if it had been proclaimed that not all the family secrets were kept in locked cupboards. He watched her with what intentness was possible, and when a few other guests arrived from London, devoted himself to drawing her out. She would talk little, but by the way her eye lit when music was mentioned he knew there was fire beneath the ice in that direction if no more.

"I dare to swear you sing, Mrs. Rachel?" he said, escorting her to the house after a general tour of the garden. "When I hear a voice like a dove's cooing I know what to expect and only ask whether you accompany it with the lute or guitar and when my ears may hope to be favoured? Sweet music ravishes me, turns me indeed sick like a passion denied, and I can no more resist it than the beasts that crowded about Orpheus."

He began to hum the song:

*“Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tops that freeze
Bow themselves when he did sing.
In sweet music is such art . . .”*

She smiled with dropped eyelashes:

“Sir, I do sing a little, if singing it may be called, but should not dare to perform before so fine a musician as Mr. Pepys—I have heard of your noble song, ‘Beauty retire,’ and much more, and if I have an ambition it is to hear it.”

She said this so gravely that it bore every impress of truth, and it was of course obvious where she had heard this and flattering in a high degree. But when he made a jest to the effect that to bid beauty retire was by no means his way in daily life, where he much preferred to invite its advance, the sparkle in her eye was the brighter for the former gravity. He purred at last like a cat with its ears tickled and assured himself that my lord’s taste did him honour whatever might be said of his behaviour. This young woman with her fine appreciation of music and men did not grow on every bush. He felt that her presence made him happy as soft May sunshine on flowers. He did not realize that the sunshine sprang from her art in understanding and accommodating herself to men. Indeed she had no appearance of effort of any sort, but rather of exciting it in those who wished to please her. Her discretion was extraordinary. When Jem and Paulina joined them her talk was measured to the very inch of what was suited to young women of quality who must be amused but within limits, and when my lord led the way to dinner with Lady Penn, Pepys congratulated himself on having the fair Rachel for a table companion at the feast.

My lord nudged him with a whispered question as he passed to take up his place.

“A fine well-carriaged lady, Cousin Pepys! You who have as good a taste in women as in wines will agree with me, I know.”

“A handsome woman indeed, with a fine shape and mighty discreet and well spoken!” was all Pepys could whisper back as he escaped to his chair.

And indeed great wines flowed and the dinner was noble and enough with lobsters and marrow bones and a loin of veal and pullets and tarts and cream and God knows what all, heaped together in rich confusion, and hearts warmed until even the jealous Lady Penn unbent and praised Lady Jem’s beauty and condescended a word to Mrs. Rachel (though it had a flier

behind it) and bestowed on Pepys more than a hint that she had marked Mr. Pembleton's comings and goings at the house in Seething Lane.

“And I am sorry Mrs. Pepys hath such trouble with her maids, poor young lady, and the more because maids will always stay when they have comfort and are considered as they should be. I hear you have parted with your cook-maid Luce and there is a chance we may have her, for ours—Alice—is leaving.”

Pepys, red and angry, stuttered out something to the effect that others lost their maids as well as his wife and slipped back to the cool balm of Mrs. Rachel's company. Certainly if mentioning such an agreeable woman to the Duke of York could do her a good turn he would not be backward—why should he? If two excellent birds could be killed with one stone and my lady's mind eased, so much the better all round. But this was partly the courage given by wine. Behind it all he knew he would have doubts when the time came.

“And what was she like?” was Elizabeth's first question when he got back. She was simmering with interest on more grounds than one.

“Not a good feature in her face and yet a fine lady and no common slut and discoursed mighty finely to me and to the young ladies, and I perceive is a woman of such an air as I wonder the less at my lord and any other man she has a fancy to.”

But he did not mention the Duke of York, for he had not forgotten Lady Sandwich's remark about his Royal Highness's interest in Elizabeth, nor did he as yet say any word in relation to the Carteret match. Neither did he repeat Lady Penn's remark as to Mr. Pembleton and his visits. There were several reservations. Indeed there began to be more and more reservations almost daily in their companionship, blanks which either side filled up correctly or incorrectly, as the case might be.

He had invited Jem and Paulina Montagu for next day, and the dinner must be planned and his work arranged so that he could give time to their entertainment. It seemed that as they grew in prosperity all sorts of affairs and interests intervened between himself and Elizabeth and hindered their opening their minds to each other except upon contentious subjects—they were free enough there, and there were times when she, if not he, thought sadly enough that they had been better comrades in the nearly forgotten days when they lived in an attic and she dressed the odd scraps for their dinners and washed his clothes with her own little hands, mending, making, and contriving to make two very far apart ends meet. She did not wish for poverty again. Elizabeth liked pretty clothes and good living as well as

another, but she did wish, and sometimes now with tears, that into the new grand dinners they could carry the appetite of fun and love that never asks to be served on silver plate but brings a fine sauce with it to season a crust. She had not yet learnt the bitter lesson that you cannot eat your cake and have it.

But the next day was gay to her also. She liked the girls, who looked up to her as an established beauty and one who could talk French as glibly as the grand people at Court. Their innocent worship restored her confidence in herself.

And they all had a fine dinner of roasted chicken, peas, lobster, and strawberries, and after dinner took boat to Greenwich Palace down the Thames and there under the spreading trees played cards on the grass and sang glees, with Mr. Creed and Pepys for tenors and the clear trebles of the girls, and Elizabeth bore her part so well that it encouraged her to suggest singing lessons to Pepys, adroitly reminding him that his singing master was fifty and with a squint to frighten the crows. She knew she had no hope else.

Coming down to the river through the trees Pepys had a word with Lady Jem. He had known the girl almost from her cradle and felt he could go about the business with a better heart if he knew it did not frighten her.

“My Lady Jem, if your good parents wished you married, could you be willing?”

It was a little too sudden, and she flushed scarlet—a somewhat plain scarlet that invaded her neck as well as her cheeks.

“Lord, Mr. Pepys, what can you mean? Such a notion never crossed my mind.”

But all the same she looked *caught*, he thought, and what else should young maids think of?

“Why, nothing. But marriage comes sooner or later unless you are sworn to be a maid. For all I see you might be mighty merry with a handsome young husband.”

“I am mighty merry at home with my parents and sisters,” she answered and was silent a moment, brushing through the grasses with her little shoes. Then suddenly: “But my home is not so happy as it was, Mr. Pepys. If I had a good husband (but I know of none) I might some day be helpful to Paulina and Anne. Mr. Pepys, I liked not that woman of yesterday. I saw how she took stock of everything about us and watched and watched though she made herself sweet as sugar. *I saw*. What is she?”

It startled him. Was there no end to the observation of women, however young and uninstructed? He put her off, and realized that a daughter settled

in her own home might be useful to the House of Sandwich in more ways than one with so spendthrift a father, and so struck away from the subject instantly and talking mighty merrily heartened her up.

But their adventures were not over, for in the moonlight, battling up against tide and river in a wherry to Somerset House, the two girls were in such terror of death that both he and Elizabeth sat with their arms about each one of them, Lady Paulina nearly fainting. "Such a troublesome passage in regard of my Lady Paulina," said Pepys to Lord Sandwich next day, "that in all my life I never did see any poor wretch in that condition, and, Lord! when we even got in the coach to take them home, my lord, the fear that my Lady Paulina was in every step of the way! I trust in God she is well today. But indeed there are such rogues and villains along the roads after dark that I could not blame her and was afraid myself. Young maids are indeed very fearful creatures."

But my lord could pay no attention to his Paulina's idle fears so much was his mind set at the moment on Jem and her chance of marriage. He primed Pepys for an hour with his views on that important subject and engaged him to see Sir George Carteret at the earliest possible moment. On parting a thing happened very disturbing to his emissary's peace of mind.

Tall and florid in his fine gold-laced full-skirted cloth suit and leaning on the back of a chair, he spoke with such smiling suavity that he looked like an agreeable picture of himself by a fine master.

"I remember once, Cousin, that you asked me for some good opening where you could put out your money safely, and indeed in these dangerous times it is no easy thing to do, with all the kingdom going to rack and ruin with spending and waste. But if you had five hundred pounds and nowhere to put it I have need of that sum and would pay as good interest as any man living, and safer than the King's pledge, which indeed is not saying so much as I would wish. What do you say, Cousin?"

Pepys thanked heaven audibly later that this request and the title of "Cousin" new from my lord did not find him entirely unprepared, and though the words choked in his throat he answered readily enough:

"Why, my lord, there could be no such pleasure and security for me as yours and if I had it God knows I could be as willing a man as lives. But since my uncle left me land at Brampton it is nothing but spending and spending to enrich the land and keep it and the house going, so that as to saving I have put it out of my head for the present and live from hand to mouth as the saying is, not having more than ten pounds put by. But I thank you with all my grateful heart and do assure your lordship that as in duty

bound my best services will not be wanting with Sir George Carteret nor your honour nor Lady Jem's suffer at my hands."

He was easier when his legs were carrying him as quick as possible from the house, but the whole episode had made him uneasy and insecure. Two things were now steadily before him. A chance word with the Duke of York and the interview with Sir George Carteret. To these even his lurking grudge against Pembleton must be postponed.

As he went home that afternoon he observed two houses shut up and a watchman on guard desiring people to pass on the other side since there was dangerous sickness in both. It rushed on his mind there had been rumours of the plague in France and at Scheveningen and the sickly season in London might have paved the way before its dreadful feet.

"God preserve us all!" he said as he passed into the gateway of the Navy Office. It was as though the shadow of dusk *were* darker than usual on the city, which lay in a great quiet with the oncoming of night.

Chapter Seven

A FEW days later he betook himself to the chamber of Sir George Carteret, having unravelled the exact position of Mr. Philip to the satisfaction of Lady Sandwich. His mind was full of that business but not of that only, for in his pocket lay a polite, almost formal request from Mr. Becke of Chelsea that Mr. Pepys would do them the favour to visit their house where some music was to be performed by his daughter Mrs. Rachel and others, and if it were agreeable to himself it was hoped that Mr. Pepys would bring his “viollin” or his lute and take part in the concert.

There was of course no question as to who had inspired the invitation and he did nothing but question what lay behind it. Appearances are deceitful, and the woman might be a thorough-paced wanton—a tendril of her errant fancy might have blown about him for a moment, but though he could be as vain as most men and found the average woman by no means backward in coming forward he scarcely thought that was the explanation. To go or not to go—that was the question, but he must put it aside while he took charge of Lady Jem’s affairs. It would keep until he had sounded Lord Sandwich, where he must go with the utmost delicacy on this head.

Sir George received him with a majesty not lessened by an ample chamber robe of flowered silk and a perruque of dark curls falling nearly to his waist. He was suffering from an aristocratic attack of gout, a disease almost the certainty of men of his standing in late middle life, and a bandaged foot on a rest with a gold-handled crutch stick beside him completed what might have been labelled “Portrait of a Gentleman of the Seventeenth Century”—and taken as typical of a class. He bowed to Pepys with just the nicely measured shade of aloofness which befitted a Treasurer of the Navy receiving a Clerk of the Acts and motioning to a chair, requested him to be seated, saying:

“But if it be business of the Office, Mr. Pepys, I would have you note I am not best fitted for it at the moment, suffering from a pain in the foot only to be described as devilish in its nature, for sure the good God never so tortured a man. Therefore let us get to work.”

But for the moment Pepys preferred standing.

“It is not business of the Office for which I come, worshipful sir, but on a matter of itself so pleasing that I trust it shall set more than your foot at ease. Nor do I intrude my poor self, but am an ambassador from an honourable friend of yours, as I trust to set forth. I come from the Earl of Sandwich.”

It was evident that the Treasurer had not the least suspicion of the nature of the errand. He bowed and frowned as a sharp twitch ran through his foot.

“Open the business, Mr. Pepys,” he said with an effort.

“Sir, I will be brief,” Pepys answered in a little trepidation well concealed. “You have a son who is a very fine and promising gentleman—Mr. Philip Carteret. My lord hath a daughter—a beautiful and promising young lady. If he and she could be content to like one another, would it be as pleasing to you and my lady as to my honourable patrons, my Lord and Lady Sandwich?”

He judged it best to pause there and let the thought sink in, for it could be seen from Sir George’s start that it was sudden. But he recovered himself and said smiling:

“So honourable an ambassador, Mr. Pepys, cannot be allowed to stand. Pray be seated.”

He seated himself gravely and proceeded:

“Worshipful sir, my Lord and Lady Sandwich are of a mind to settle their daughter my Lady Jemima in marriage, and being in their eyes a rare and precious jewel they would have only the best for her. Need I say more than they are mightily concerned with the disposition, position, and advantages of Mr. Philip Carteret your son, and I am here as a most unworthy ambassador to ask your opinion on such an alliance could it be brought to bear and agreeable to the young couple?”

Sir George came erect in his chair with the joyful shock of this suggestion. To continue their line with the blood of the noble House of Montagu was beyond all his wife’s hopes and his, and whatever they had thought of for Mr. Philip it had not been that. It combined everything they most desired except a large fortune and that they might partly dispense with in view of the rest. Yet for all that one must not appear too eager. A Carteret was a Carteret! He spoke gravely:

“Worthy Mr. Pepys, these are grave matters and not lightly to be deliberated, yet I must say that my lord’s alliance is one that no gentleman in the land but must covet if all else is answerable. And if the young lady is

grown up according to her promise and trained by such a mother as my lady it seems she must be welcomed for herself as well as for her family. Yet, as I have said, such matters are to be carefully approached by the parents on both sides.”

Pepys bowed with an elegance modelled on the Duke of York’s.

“The young lady’s age, disposition, and high birth and breeding are so well known by you, worshipful sir, who have almost known her from the cradle, that I have the less to say on that head, and indeed there is not much left for me but merely as a mouthpiece to ask if you are willing to consider the matter and if so to return with the gladdening news to my lord and lady.”

“Sir, there is more to say. It gives me great and abiding contentment that my lord should have chosen an ambassador so much to my mind as the respected and worthy Mr. Pepys to whom I can open my mind in full confidence. Our association in the naval service of the country makes this choice highly agreeable to me.”

Pepys bowed and smiled, radiant with pleasure. Coming from his superior and a man so highly placed it tickled his most sensitive vanity. Climbing? Might he not be said to have climbed when a man in such a position met him in such a way? But he controlled any but the decorous show of polite gratification, having now learnt what he had known at the beginning of his career—how to behave when marks of respect were paid him. Sir George noted with a hidden touch of irony how well the upstart carried himself. He added fluently:

“The young lady is answerable to my highest imaginations, being all the fondest father could hope for his son. She overtops expectation. It is known to you, good Mr. Pepys, that my son is very well provided and will be better. There I am sure will be no hitch in our happiness. Do you know what my lord’s intentions are for the lady’s portion? Not that I value money where such a gem is concerned.”

He smiled with glee over his little pun on the lady’s name, and Pepys laughed as at a rare stroke of humour. He answered cautiously that he knew it could not be large and that Sir George himself was aware of my lord’s heavy expenses. But all that would be adjusted when matters advanced. Might he now retire and return tomorrow when Sir George and his lady had considered the proposal?

A little conversation followed and now a few pleasant allusions to the work at the Office, not as from superior to inferior, but of the sort that friends may brush in passing, Pepys letting drop that he had seen the Duke of York lately and that he had mentioned His Majesty’s full approval of the

late provision for naming the new ships. This passed extremely well and pleased both sides. Sir George charged himself with having conceded far too little notice to the valuable Mr. Pepys hitherto and resolved to be more circumspect in future. After all, in such topsy-turvy days any man might be worth conciliation.

It was agreed with many compliments that the proposal should be considered. As he rose to take leave Sir George took him by the hand cordially to say good-bye.

“And with all thanks for your pains, my good sir, let me beg you to take heed of yourself, for my doctor tells me this day that in Drury Lane are two or three houses marked with a large red cross on the door and ‘Lord have mercy upon us’ underwritten, which is a sad and dangerous sight, and therefore tell my Lord Sandwich from me that I could wish he would move himself and family down into the country for safety, it being my own intention to do the like when I am about again, for this will be the plague if I mistake not gravely.”

As he went out charged with his joyful news it struck Pepys that if the Treasurer and Lord Sandwich fled before the oncoming plague he certainly could not afford to do the same, however much he might desire it. In great anxiety, he still could not forbear to go out of his way and round by Drury Lane to gain assurance that the thing was so indeed. It was too true. As he stepped from the fresher air of the Strand into Drury Lane the heat lay like lead upon the houses and on the drowsy patches in the narrow street where it penetrated between them. A stale smell clogged the stagnant air, and he noticed the street was singularly empty of people—and the few there hurrying along as if to get away with all speed. At one point a little knot of people was grouped, a man in a tall crowned hat addressing them in a high nasal voice, and Pepys, putting on speed to pass them, suddenly perceived the reason of their gathering. There, three on one side of the street, one on the other as if the monster might pick and choose where he pleased, were the dreadful and dreaded houses, every window closed, every door barred, shutting the wretched inhabitants in with death and terror for companions and on the door the legend written imploring the mercy so seldom found. The man with the rest about him was denouncing woe and again woe on the wicked city.

“She has filled up the cup of her iniquities, and the Lord is at hand with flail and scourge. It shall spread among you like a consuming burning fire running before the wind. Repent, repent of your lechery and drunkenness, for the Day of the Lord is at hand.”

And so forth, to Pepys's confused mind suitable enough to the occasion, though his common sense could not commend the wisdom of that gathering where the hot sun must draw up every breath of infection from the miserable houses and spread it in the street. He went home, leaping into a hackney coach to get away quicker from the hateful street, and had not driven far before a new terror seized him, for the coach went slower and slower, and at last the coachman clambered down staggering from the box and coming to the window told him he was scarcely able to see, much less to drive, so sick was he with a sudden dimness of sight and pain in the bowels. It took Pepys but a moment to let himself out and into the next coach passing, with a sad heart for the poor man, and trouble for himself lest the unfortunate wretch should be sickening for the plague, and so home in great distress of mind saying softly, under his breath: "God have mercy upon us all!"

He met Elizabeth coming down the stairs with her hood to go pay my Lady Batten a visit of state, and she turned back with him not unwilling to let it slide. He gave her a hint first of the Carteret business to sweeten the black news that lay behind it and saw the blood drop from her face and leave her pale at the prospect of the disease in those crowded huddling houses almost toppling over the street to shut out the air and darken the sunlight. She had not a thought for Lady Jem and her lover.

"God knows it terrifies me!" she said shuddering. "But perhaps it will not spread. If so we must fly into the country—we cannot face it!"

He unconsciously swiggered a little in his reply:

"Lord! what silly discourse! And I with the Office on my hands, for be sure the great men will care for themselves! But I have considered it, and tomorrow I go to Woolwich to look out some pretty place where you and Mercer and one of the maids can be safe—trust me for that!"

"And you will stay here alone?" she asked half jealously, her fine dark brows drawing together. She had begun to grope at a certainty in the last two years that his life was not that of a monk deprived of all amusements when she went into the country for change of air as she had done more than once. Something in his face now made her sure of it—a look of release—and for a moment fear of the plague and a deeper fear contended in her.

"A wife should stay with her husband," she said, shuddering a little at the thought of the closed houses and the stark red crosses upon their doors. He put his hand out and pinched her ear gently and caressingly.

"My poor wretch!" he said smiling. "Would I risk my Bess in the plague? Not I! And now hear the news I have for you of my Lady Jem."

That caught her attention at once, and feeling safe now the matter was gone so far he told her as many ins and outs as he thought proper, she curling up to him and alive all over to hear.

“But is it not hard they don’t ask the young couple to discuss it first? They have never had a thought of each other that way, I dare swear, and my Lady Jem is as shy as a new-caught rabbit. Sure you think with me it will frighten her to death?” she asked presently, smoothing the back of his hand with soft fingers. “Maybe the parents know best—but you and I—we knew we must marry. You knew—I too. We had great love together—is it not true?”

The reference touched him as easily as any other appeal that caught his taste, pulling her to him a little roughly and with a taste of masterfulness to put her head on his shoulder. In that moment he was really sorry they must be apart—that she should go to Woolwich and he stay in London. He would be very lonely, and it was certainly a part of the conveniences which he respected so strongly that he should be. Pepys was no plotter. He simply took things as they came. A married man must be properly sorry when his wife must needs leave him, but, being a man, it was also certain that he would amuse himself as best he could. Why could not women understand both these facts and thus assure the peace of a well regulated English household? Seeing the life lived by other men about him, it did not seem overmuch to ask.

“I wish I might not go!” she said with wistfulness, and put her slender arm about his neck, kissing him on the lips. “I would not leave you if I could help it, dear.” There was a little pause, then she added slowly, with her mouth against his ear, in a small whispering voice: “I did never care for Pembleton that is a silly fop all said and done, and if I go to Woolwich—why then let us pay him off and have done with the dancing. Indeed I can dance well enough not to be put to shame before the great ladies. But do it kindly, my dear, I beg, that there may be no foolish talk, for he is a vain man. He comes in two days and I will send for you. You like it?”

He did like it. The spontaneous offer pleased him very greatly while at the same time it assured him that he need not have minded even if the lessons had gone on. Not that it convinced him Elizabeth would be safe with every man—only with Pembleton who did not happen to please her—and who could wonder, the man being the fop he was!

“And I must go see my father and mother before I go to Woolwich, so there is the less time,” she added.

That was touching another sore spot. They were so poor now and so hidden away in a poverty-stricken street that she would not even tell him where they lived, so that the nakedness of the land might not be spied out by his growing prosperity, but went herself regularly, making a little mystery about it and carrying them what she could spare of the household moneys without raising the accounts to a height that would displease her husband. She took also little baskets over her arm with a few good strengthening meats which would keep a warmer life in them, for they had but enough to stave off hunger. That was a duty which the French blood in her wholly forbade her to omit, and to do Pepys justice he owned it right enough, though it galled something in him that his wife should creep out to feed her beggarly parents, as he had called them more than once in a gust of passion. The whole thing was a painful page in her life and made it more difficult than it need have been, though she never resented it. Yet sometimes she watered it with tears, wishing above all she had a little fixed sum of money, if ever so little, on which she could count for such things. For indeed there had been at times words about the household spendings, with all her care, which left bitterness on both sides. Now, however, the concession of the dancing came to her aid.

“It is fitting my poor wretch should have something to content her before she goes!” he said, fumbling with the disengaged hand in his coat pocket and pulling out a shining gold piece. “Will you spend this on a new petticoat of paragon to be gallant among the fine ladies at pretty Woolwich, Bess, or how?”—his thought at the moment being—“I am not much troubled at it, though it will cost me near two pounds—she costing me but little compared with other wives, and I have not many occasions to spend on her.”

She held herself back for a moment, looking at him with shining eyes. “May I do what I will?”

“Freely.”

“Then you *know* what I would do,” she said, and putting both arms about his neck kissed and kissed him to her heart’s content and to his own, for this was as he would have it always, granted a little latitude abroad. She paid her visit to her parents with the gold piece in her pocket and not to Lady Batten, whom she disliked with true feminine cordiality. He went back next day to Sir George Carteret for his and his lady’s decision and was received by both with faces auspicious as a summer morning.

“And shall her dear little ladyship be my daughter!” cried Lady Carteret. “Sure under God we owe our happiness to her worthy parents and our good Mr. Pepys to whom my husband and I will never forget it! But I would have

you know and consider, sir, that my son is very backward and shamefaced with ladies, and since I know my Lady Jem is as modest as she is handsome I would be obliged eternally if you would give him a few lessons in carrying himself to her pleasure. The eye must be pleased, Mr. Pepys, as well as the heart, and you who know the world could give my lad a helping example.”

Pepys’s bow on this compliment was magnificent, he feeling in every vein what a standing this errand of my Lord Sandwich’s had given him with the Treasurer of the Navy. It was of the utmost consequence to him, and the blood flew to his face when Sir George took up the strain:

“Indeed, sir, since this marriage will make us cousins, you being cousin to my Lord Sandwich, I have the less scruple in being obliged to you, for I own Mr. Philip Carteret is much shyer than becomes a gentleman. Therefore take him in hand with plain speaking and I shall be the more indebted.”

Cousin to the Treasurer, cousin to my lord! He felt his fortune made, and indeed his manner was modelled on all the highest examples to be observed at Court as he requested an introduction to Mr. Philip on the spot. The enraptured parents agreed, and joy appeared to have frightened away the gout, so actively did Sir George raise himself in his chair as the young man entered, scarlet as a peony with confusion and the suddenness of a bride thrust upon him, and shuffling from one foot to the other in an agony of shyness as he stood face to face with the urbane and elegantly clothed Mr. Pepys.

“Lord, sir, I am very grateful for your pains!” he stuttered and could scarcely string the words together for embarrassment.

“Sure, Philip, you would wish Mr. Pepys to take a word to her ladyship on your behalf!” prompted Lady Carteret in the background. “Mr. Pepys is going to my Lord Sandwich at Whitehall and if I know him will gladly be your messenger and fix the time of meeting you long for.”

But not a word further could be extracted and least of all a word of longing. He had known Lady Jem as an awkward schoolgirl, so to speak, and to think of her as a wife was beyond his power. Nearer and nearer to the door he sidled, and opening it suddenly and swiftly fled, leaving the excuses to his parents.

Pepys could hardly choke his laughter down as he turned away after profound reverences and compliments to the Carterets, who were obviously a little ashamed of the manners of their heir. It was clear to him that it would be a case of mutual terror and that Lady Jem would have to do the best part of the wooing. He was cackling with laughter to himself all the way along the Strand to think of the ridiculous situations such bashfulness in a

bridegroom must lead to and had hardly time to assume the sober cheerfulness fitting the occasion before he was ushered into my Lord Sandwich's presence. He looked up from his writing with quick expectation as Pepys came in, rubbing his hands like a man with a good tale to tell.

"Why, my lord, I bring you the best of news. Sir George and my lady are so glad as that it seems they would buy the young lady at any price would we demand it! And scarce a word was said about her portion, and indeed I think a very reasonable sum will be taken and you need offer but what will be for Lady Jem's own comfort—she needing a bit of her own to handle."

My lord overflowed in the most profuse thanks. Never was a matter better carried out. Never did any man show more tact and discretion than his cousin Pepys.

"And I would wish to say now, Cousin, referring for the last time to a painful raw in my mind (but now healed), that I do think in the letter you wrote me that you did what was just and according to a friendly care for my family and interests. Wherefore I thank you and ask you would dismiss all anxiety henceforth, for I am come to see what a good friend and servant we have in you, and my lady loves you well."

This was a good hearing and gave Pepys a chance he took eagerly. He drew the Becke letter from his pocket.

"My lord, your condescension emboldens me, and I desire to say as an honest man should that I believe the lady in question little deserved the evil reports spread about, being as fine a modest and high-carriaged lady as eye could wish to see, so that I desire more intercourse with the family if occasion offered, especially as the gentlewoman spoke of music, which, as your lordship knows, is my chief lust and pleasure, so that I would give my ears, were they acceptable, to hear her perform."

My lord leaped, as it were, to meet this feeler. Evidently the praise of Mrs. Rachel was balm to his self-esteem. It formed an excuse for his attachment which he was most willing to take.

"Why, Cousin, you could do no better than visit the family, and fine excellent people they are as any man could wish to know, and Mrs. Becke, the mother, a cook beyond description and in the management of a house beyond all. As for Mrs. Rachel, she sings like a linnet, her voice being most sweet and her hand on the harpsichord an enchantment. And I hope you will take my word for it that you will be welcomed as you should."

Excellent, and just what Pepys desired. He laid the open letter in my lord's hand.

“Why, my lord, I had this and desired of all things to accept, but she being your friend I would be answerable to your pleasure.”

There was no question as to Lord Sandwich’s wish in the matter. His motive was clear as crystal. Mrs. Rachel was to be cleared of scandal and his intrigue to continue with the blessing of his friends and even of his wife. After all, a woman must expect her husband’s amusements, and he might waste his substance amongst lewd women very different from Mrs. Rachel. He knew the influence Pepys had over my lady’s mind as a confidential friend and believed he could in future count on his good offices there. It had certainly not occurred to him that Lady Sandwich might already have opened her mind in that direction and won Pepys over to the opposing interest.

Pepys prepared to go about his business, having cleared the way for acquaintance with Mrs. Rachel to his perfect satisfaction, but before he went, slid in a word as to Mr. Philip’s embarrassing bashfulness. Lord Sandwich roared with laughter.

“To think a young man should be such a ninny! At his age he should be able to reckon a dozen girls on a string. And however modestly Jem may carry herself she will think the worse of him and so a bad beginning. The women like a roaring gallant, pretend what they will. Stir him up, Cousin Pepys, and laugh him out of his nonsense before the wedding. You know the women well enough and may polish him bright with your knowledge. I will see Sir George Carteret and my lady tomorrow.”

Pepys promised to do his best and bowed, but was recalled at the door.

“And, Cousin, the plague grows on us and I think all things promise a mighty sickly season. I wish with all my heart we could get you out of London, for you are too precious a piece of goods to risk, but as Sir George and myself and likely indeed the other heads all are like to go from London and the wedding will take us to the country anyhow, it seems you must even stay and see it out. The Navy business cannot stay for the plague or anything else.”

“Lord!” said Pepys to himself, descending the stairs, “to see what a fuss these great men will make with a man while he can serve them, but how little it’s all worth when it comes to saving their own lives and leaving him to his chance. But since I knew it must be so and would not leave my work to go adrift anyhow, I care the less. But the Lord have mercy upon us, for the Bills of Mortality mount steadily!”

They did indeed. Having established its advance guard in Drury Lane the deadly disease began to sow itself here and there and everywhere, without

any more apparent rule or reason than the flying seeds of the dandelion borne on every breeze. A light shudder crept along his flesh in considering the horror of it.

But this had been a day of varied excitements, and he was glad after supper to compose his mind by singing a psalm or two with Mercer, Elizabeth's woman, and his lad Will Hewer, which pleased him mightily as being the thing suited to the circumstances and agreeable to his sense of harmony. And Mercer was a born actress and singer and her presence in the house too good to last, since it was to be supposed Elizabeth would soon see his pleasure in it and her jealousy leap awake unless their departing to Woolwich should delay the trouble for a while. He took her with the two maids down there next day, and thought himself fortunate, foreseeing the rush from London that would follow unless the monster were muzzled. Returning he found two houses shut up in Fenchurch Street close to Seething Lane, with the fatal red cross on their doors and the death bell tolling hollowly, a mournful voice to hear.

Part Two

Chapter Eight

THREE weeks later much water had run under the bridge and three or four seemingly small but definite changes in his life had established themselves. Some he had recorded in his diary with the precaution of utmost secrecy. Some he regarded as too important even for that relief. For a relief it was. His ingrained distrust of a woman's good sense would have always prevented his trusting Elizabeth even if a good deal of the record had not made it impossible. And his singular case was that with all his geniality and merriment he was a man fighting for his own hand, distrustful and suspicious when matters were an inch below the surface, and with not a friend so intimate that to him he could really open his mind on the things which concerned him personally, as well as on those which no man willingly tells to another. He was sensitive to a degree on those points, nervously frightened lest others should get inside his guard, and more than a little ashamed into the bargain that any traces of "the tailor's son" should show themselves to the jealous eye of enviers. His family might be well connected, but had gone down, and there was always his father's profession to be thrown in his teeth if anyone wanted a missile, so that this defensive attitude reacted upon his self-consciousness and put him in the position of more or less playing a part and ranging the points carefully that would best bear inspection. His goods were all in the shop window, as the saying is, and he was uncommonly careful that no one should look behind them and spy the empty shelves. Happily he was free of that fear where the naval work was concerned, for he could point with just pride to results. Others knew this also, and he might boast to himself that the heads of the Office, including the Duke, must speak for his character in any presence from the King's down. It comforted him to enter these matters in the diary which was the true reflection of his life, for to none else could he speak freely. Its use was that he should go at night into the silent deserted office where he mostly kept it and there quietly enter all the events of the day, chewing the cud of them, as it were, relishing them—gossiping, sensuous, mean, ridiculous, generous, compassionate—just as they passed through his brain. There he

could be himself, and it was a part of the drama that life always presented to him in which he was alike actor and spectator.

It also amused him immensely when he turned back to past years and saw the little struggles and disappointments meaning now so little, by which he could estimate his progress in money and consideration, an interest which no one living could wholly share with him—no, not even Elizabeth, for how could he trust her expectations of spending if she knew all? The charm of it was its deepest secrecy. He could even leave a volume lying in the house, secure that the door was barred against its inspection not only by the cipher but by placing the lascivious entries in mixed and garbled foreign words which also none could ever unravel. Of all his friends the diary only knew him for what he was.

It interested him to speculate sometimes on what this person or that would say if they could read. His friend, the stately Mr. Evelyn! Would he throw up shocked hands Heavenward—or understand? After all, Pepys could rarely feel himself to be a miserable sinner, though he made that admission in church with his eye on the prettiest woman at hand. If God had made man so open to temptation and heaped it in his way—could He not pardon a slip now and then and take a lenient view in summing up? He had created women so damnably pretty for one thing—so ready to share the mischief and its enjoyment. They all took his approaches with blushing and laughter and just so much fear of being found out as added piquancy to the adventure without a single touch of tragedy. Then what wrong was done to anybody so long as Elizabeth and a few husbands knew nothing about it? If God were extreme to mark what was done amiss, sure he never could be prospering and his monthly balance increasing as it was doing. Except in his work he had no ideals, but it was alive and had a kind of urgent beauty impossible to analyze but enthralling, which made him willing to face the plague or any other danger sooner than let it slip. Outside it things were comparatively trifling but highly amusing and he could not see that they moulded events and made changes in him.

The plague strengthened its fearful clutch daily, steadily approaching Seething Lane, but he came and went as usual, heartening the underlings and keeping all straight as best he could—and Elizabeth was safe at Woolwich. He knew this was an advantage to himself, for the great men had fled for their own safety and were compelled to do honour to his courage, and indeed it made quite a little noise among those who knew anything of the Navy—his Royal Highness the Duke of York for one. Still, he would have done it in any case.

But he was disturbed. He and Elizabeth had never lived apart and it was disconcerting to find how easy it grew, how the separation set up a fence of a hundred little differing interests between them, so that they met with a kind of strangeness instead of the increased need and fondness promised by the saw "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." If they could do without each other so easily, why then—— But he never followed that thought to its conclusion. He dared not.

Meanwhile it was necessary that he should keep his spirits up somehow if he could not leave London, and Mrs. Rachel's invitation was due and filled him with the insatiable curiosity which prompted so many of his adventures. How did the Beckes live? What would be the setting of this jewel of my Lord Sandwich's? He went off to Chelsea bent on making the exactly right impression, that of the man who had arrived and could give a helping hand to others who had the sense to trust him; a person of importance by all means to be conciliated.

The first impression he took was delighting to ear and eye.

Chelsea was a charming village, trees bowing its quiet and deeply hedged lanes with wide meadows and placidly grazing cattle. Houses little and big stood in their own gardens, overbrimmed with homely fragrant flowers such as sweet pinks, carnations, lads' love, love-in-a-mist, sops in wine, and many more. They made an almost visible cloud of perfume in the air with laden bees humming drowsily through it, and for a moment Pepys felt his fine gentleman's London clothes a little out of place and dreamed of lying on a haycock in breathing shade with his flageolet to his lips and a carnation-lipped Phyllis, who would take the shape of Mrs. Bagwell try how he would to change it, beside him to praise his flutings. The fears and ambitions of evil-smelling plague-stricken London seemed far away as an echo returning faint and aërial from a hillside in blue distance.

He came slowly down the lane leading his horse and thinking it must all be little changed since the great Sir Thomas More walked in his stately garden by the river with bluff King Harry the Eighth's arm thrown about the neck he was so soon to sever. Even as the thought crossed his mind he saw a long low house with dormer windows and a green lawn where it stood sleepy and meditative as a cow knee-deep in grass. One might argue from the position that it owned a garden on the other side also, running down to sparkling Thames, and that that outlook would be even fairer than this.

Instinctively pleased with the look of the place he stopped, thinking he would like to have such a retreat to come down to from London and ruralize when the fit took him, and called to ask whose house it was of a pretty lass

who came tripping down the lane with a basket on her arm, and wondering blue eyes as if all the world should know of the important folk of Chelsea village without question asked.

“Why, sir, it is Mr. Becke’s house, so it is, and you may smell his flowers all over the village!” she answered with a curtsy to the fine trimmings on his coat and the lace cravat. “And he has fine friends today, sir, and pastry and a great pie gone in from Mrs. Harmer’s at the baker’s.” She added a cherry-lipped smile to her news.

He forgot even to chuck her under the chin to acknowledge the parting curtsy so did this astonish him. How could it be possible that Mr. Becke should own such a goodly old house standing in so sweet a garden, and if it were so, why should Mrs. Becke be so hungry to plunder my lord for what her father could give her without harm done? The answer crossed his mind hard on the tail of the question. Why, this was Lord Sandwich’s little retreat, standing in Mr. Becke’s name and a visible sign of the great leakage of money in the Sandwich exchequer in London. Poor Lady Jem’s portion might well be larger than it was likely to be but for those sweet lawns and the honeysuckle and roses clothing the house in queen’s raiment. From that instant his eyes were sharp-set to note the cost of everything and pick up what useful knowledge he could.

A pretty maid in flying cap opened the door and ushered him with the greatest respect through a low long hall to a door at the other end where six persons were assembled besides the family, all sitting under the trees and a most lovely prospect of the river running before them under green banks with loosestrife, meadowsweet, and forget-me-nots growing in abundance in the little reaches, and water ouzels darting about it—a pretty sight as ever man could wish to see!

The host and hostess came forward to welcome him, with their daughter behind them, smiling more with eyes than mouth, and the rest of the company rose to greet him as was but proper. And so he was led to a cushioned seat under a beech tree and the Spanish wine called tent was served all round. Pepys could guess very well from what cellar that came, having procured a tierce of it himself at the same opportunity, his cellar now being more handsomely stored than that of any other of his name, and a great feather in his cap.

“And indeed I have a vow against drinking wine, madam, but am fain to allow myself a cup of good liquor now that the plague is about, for my doctor is dead and cannot advise me, so that I do and must advise myself.”

He was watching all the time for a quiet word with Mrs. Rachel, who was more attractive to his mind than he had before seen her, a fine pallor in her complexion and lips as luscious as red strawberries, though always a reserve that gave a man to think of what might be behind. Curiosity so roused served her turn better than a blaze of beauty without wit behind it might do another woman.

But dinner was called for and they all trooped into a room handsomely panelled and good casement windows to light it and there as full a dinner as any man need wish to taste, and cakes so good that, as Lord Sandwich had said of all Mrs. Becke's providing, they were fine enough to be served to my Lady Castlemaine herself.

Then, full and light-hearted, all out into the garden again and music called for, and all the company except the hostess took their lutes, theorbos, and one a viol and Pepys his violin and so to a concert, some in solos and some in duets and the like, with very fine singing of glees and madrigals in which Pepys exerted himself to catch Mrs. Rachel's voice apart and could not, so well were all mingled. This music and quiet by the river were in truth sweeter to him than all the mad merriment of London when Mrs. Knipp and la belle Pierce giggled in men's clothes and leered at him with every glance a practised invitation, and he himself let go the sensual man inside him, never far from the surface yet most strangely blended with the man never merry in hearing sweet music (as Shakespeare most truly says), and drawn by it to higher spheres in which he groped blindfolded for want of understanding what fine air he breathed.

But presently a greater treat awaited him, for Mrs. Rachel, called for to sing and accompanied by a gentleman accomplished on the lute, gave his song of "Beauty, retire," and that in a voice so dulcet (not high and clear as a lark's but deep and mellow as an autumn dove's) that he sat ravished and could have listened forever and ever as the blessed souls are said to do in Paradise. She sang it twice at the general entreaty, and compliments paid to the composer equalled those heaped on the singer.

It was after this, wandering about the garden, that he paired himself with her and opened the discourse with much talk of music, in which she showed as much affection for it as he himself, and so growing more familiar he led up to lamenting the secluded life she had where such fine looks and talents were wasted and in the dark, whereas if more generally known she might be a most triumphant beauty as any at Court. He shot a glance at her under his hat-brim saying this, to see how she would take it.

“For indeed, Mrs. Rachel, even if I shock your modesty I must say that neither my Lady Denham nor Lady Chesterfield nor any other could vie with you, for though they are fine women yet neither has your air and carriage, and above all they are extremely silly and no more notion of music than a hen.”

“But why do you name those two ladies, Mr. Pepys?” she asked demurely with her eyes on a rose she was pulling to pieces and putting the handful of petals to her nose to smell.

“For a good reason. Because my business throwing me much with the Duke of York I hear more of his amours than of others and so far as a man may with honesty I am a reader in the book of love. I know also how generous he is in giving, even to a fault, when a woman pleases him, but tired now of all the Court beauties, like the King who occupies himself with Nell Gwyn and Moll Davis, the pretty comedians, and leaves my Lady Castlemaine and others to wear the willow. So much so that my Lady Castlemaine is not now at Hampton Court where the royal people and courtiers are all fled from the plague.”

“Is this really so?” she asked with interest, but still pulling at the rose. “We hear so little in this rustic place, and none of us going to London owing to the plague, that scarcely a word reaches us to interest a woman.”

“And does not my lord bring word?” asked Pepys archly and with a sideways dart of his eye at her. “But he is not by way of going often to Court now they are moved out of London on the other side, and Lord! to see what a fool a man would be to put notions into a pretty woman’s head that he would keep to himself!”

He was prepared with an instant retreat in case she took this amiss, for he would not for all he was worth embroil himself with my lord, and could honestly tell himself he was acting as much for his good as man could do. But she did not take it amiss. She flung the rose into the river by which they were now standing, and giving it a moment to sail away on the lazy current asked him a question strange and unforeseen:

“Mr. Pepys, are you my friend or enemy?”

He answered smiling, like a man who jests:

“Lord, madam! was I ever the enemy of a pretty woman?—and you don’t need to look in the glass for assurance when I say I talk now with one of the most disturbing to a man’s heart. I speak not alone of fine features but a something seductive that cannot be told in words any more than why one setting of a song ravishes a man so that he cannot get it out of his head and

another to the same words leaves him unmoved. You have the tune, madam, to which men must needs dance. But why do I speak so to one who has everything she will and is perfectly contented with it, and no wonder, in this sweet garden watered by the river?"

"I have no mind to the garden. I hate the river. I die of the dull tedious days that run by like the river and will never cease. I have a mind to London and a particular inward friendship with men that the world speaks of. I would have them know I am no mean woman but one that can live in the world and have something of her own."

Pepys at once saw he might speak much more freely, yet still with a relish of caution.

"But my lord, madam—he is a man that the world talks of and will talk yet more, and to speak plain truth—have you not drawn him after you? I do but say what the world knows."

"I could—I did!" she answered with bitterness, "and I might have gone far. But who stepped in between us? Yourself. Did you think he could keep a secret from me? He did not give me your letter, but I had a mind to see it and I did. So you must call me a wanton, must you? Well, I could forgive you this, for a wanton I am and will be, if to bend men to my will is to be so. But yet, Mr. Pepys, I would have you know what I think you cannot understand, that a woman may rule a man by the pleasures he loves and yet make him a better man than she found him, and I have more in my brain than my Lord Sandwich can take from me. I want a man that would be in the world's eye by doing a decent life's work in it, and did I know such a man I could play my part, that am not one of those beggarly fools of quality that will suck a man dry and see nothing in him but a mine of gold and jewels."

She stopped suddenly, having spoken with a bitter emphasis that he had never seen in any woman and yet so clearly and with such a fine ample gesture of her hand as backed what she had said with a most convincing testimony. He stood completely astonished, for the first time face to face with the mind of a man in a most winning woman's body—a sight he had never thought to see. Yet he had no difficulty in believing that he saw it now, and was at a complete loss how to meet it. While he was silent, staring at the flowing river, she added hurriedly:

"You are not to think what money my lord wasted on me is my will—I cared little enough for that. What I relished in him was that men called him a great sailor and he would do this and that and what not with the ships. The King made him a Knight of the Garter, and all was at his feet if he knew how to pick it up and use it, but he does not, not he! and so he is not for me

if I could find a better. I care not for the ships; not I! But as well that as another thing if a man will rise. O Mr. Pepys——” She stopped suddenly short again, and he could have sworn there was a trace of a sob in her voice, though a woman more unlikely for tears he could scarcely imagine. At all events, she now stood so far committed by her candour that he knew himself free to speak to the very limit of safety.

“Why, madam, I see your drift, but think you undervalue my lord, who is as able a man as any. But he is also a man bound mightily to his wife and family, and to the Navy, which is the mainstay of the country, and with you he would go as far as money and dalliance—but, I think, no further.”

“I know it! I know it!” she interrupted sharply. “More than once he let drop a thing or two of the way he played like a child with matters that would carry him to the top if he did but know how to use them. Were you apt to believe it was I that kept him from Court, that set him to drinking more than he should, playing his lute under my window like a boy with other sordid tricks and disgracing himself and me? Not I! No, Mr. Pepys, you thought yourself my enemy, and were because you meant so to be, but were my friend if the man had it not in him to be anything. Well, if I had any power to drag him up you have broken it. Will you find me a better if I send my lord about his business? You are to know I see in you one that minds the way the cat jumps to take advantage of it and that also struggles against my lord’s carelessness in work, and that of other men that look as big as the frog that swelled like an ox and yet are nothing. Therefore this and your letter is the reason why I speak to you as never yet to man or woman.”

He was silent with astonishment. It was so utterly unlike any woman to turn to him because he had had the wit to spoil her game with a man. And like a man was the way she disregarded the offense given for the sake of her end in view. For a moment, having his own vanities and cause for them, he thought he might himself be the stalking horse to her mind. But her cool eye and speech speedily made such a notion folly, and he saw instead one who comprehended his own position and difficulties and who if he could trust her and she gain her point might be as useful an ally to him as woman can be to man, which might be saying more than he could understand as yet. Her curious frankness won upon him as something singular and apart and brought the hidden man in him to the surface—a man keen and apt in his work with more love of his country than he knew himself, more ready to sacrifice himself there than any would believe who knew how much he laboured over and under ground to fill his purse. With her next words she looked him full in the face.

“Do you think, sir, I forget that you stand by your work, facing the plague when my lord and all the others that should do the same bolt into the country like rabbits before the dogs? I admire you for this and think it wisdom, and if you and I were friends and you could drag me out of this slough and put me where I would be you should not lack for payment, I promise you.”

He could not throw caution aside, for it was bound up in the very essence of a man of his quality, but, given the man, he ventured very far. He saw the aptitude for success in her blent with the charm of long eyes and shadowing lashes and a dove’s note to win a man’s heart, and on these he was willing to gamble. He spoke with deference now.

“Madam, I will be your friend very gladly if you will prove your sincerity by leaving my lord and the more because you do not find him apt for your purpose. I know he is mighty careful on the outside of things now, for he is one that minds what the world says—but to be honest I know he is still besotted on you and perhaps the more so.”

“Certainly the more,” she interrupted with delicate disdain. “But I have no use for it if I could better myself.”

“True. But his money is wanted for his family, and I have a respect for my lady and the family that makes me wish to see them have their dues. Shall I speak to you as one man speaks to another?”

“With all my heart!” Her long eyes opened at him so earnestly that for the first time he fully understood their brilliance and marvelled how they blotted out the rest of her face so that she seemed all eyes and soul and most compelling. Lord!—if Elizabeth had been so, would he have strayed? He had never seen such a woman.

“Then, madam, I am told the Duke of York is weary of the Court beauties, and I can answer of my own knowledge that he is a man full of spirit and courage and would, I honestly think, give his heart to serve the Navy (which is England itself) if he had one soul in the world behind him that cared to see him at it. I am a humble enough man at the Office, but because he has a confidence that I have the work at heart he shows friendship for me, and if this seems a boast, yet so it is. But what help has he? All the world knows the Duchess is in love with her Master of the Horse, and of the women that yield to him he knows it is but to have their hands in his pockets and——”

“But what like is the Duke? I have never seen him,” she put in earnestly.

So far was Pepys in earnest now that he dropped the form of “madam” and spoke as plain as to a man and with no grimace whatever.

“Sure you have seen his picture? He resembles his father, Charles, and his mother in the days when she was the handsomest princess in Europe. A brown man with dark curling hair and a look of melancholy that all that family hath when not laughing, and fine-cut features very noble and highbred. For the rest, no man can speak for what will please a woman, but, in my own thought, a man to be loved and with nothing base or ignoble. See how he married Nan Hyde when all men and women bid him give her the go-by, and see how she has served him! What wonder he looks for others!”

She met his frankness with the same.

“I would I could meet him, Mr. Pepys. He might despise me, for say what you will I know myself scarcely well-looking. Now I will tell you something. He has spoken to my lord of your wife as hearing she is a great beauty. Would this be more agreeable to you than the other? I think not!”

This was an exceeding high touch of fine art, for it set Pepys in her game in right earnest. Possibly she might have heard from my lord that he was a husband very eager to keep his eye on his wife, though very certainly my lord would not let her know that his own eye had strayed that way, however slightly. Anyway, she might well think the prospect would not attract him. His face flamed scarlet at the hint. So that was true—then he had a double reason for acting as he did. It fixed his resolution and he would have said more, but she would not have it.

“Many things may turn on this talk, and I would like to consider and you no doubt the same, Mr. Pepys. But I thank you and will believe you a friend who used the surgeon’s knife for my good though you did not know it. I am willing to give up my lord and will at once begin on that line, but you are to understand I have my father and mother to consider, and they will be angry if I let one provision slide without another in view. Therefore I must work slowly unless things move more quickly than can be hoped. Meanwhile do what you judge best.”

They were so far hidden by a willow that she could venture to stretch her hand to him and he to kiss it, which he did with the strangest mingled feelings. As a woman she did not attract him nor stir one sensuous pulse in his body. Otherwise he liked her, thought her to be trusted if it were her own interest also, and knew her to be a most valuable ally if she had her chance. All his greed was awake and stirring.

After another concert of music he rode slowly back to London pondering much on what had been said, half fearful of the consequences, for he could

never wholly lay the coward in him, half hopefully expectant, as one who sees an opportunity beyond hope.

And coming to his home through the tolling of bells and constant dismal passing of funerals with weeping trembling men and women walking after them, remembering their doom might be upon them at any moment, he found a letter from the Duke of York himself, brief and not the first so received, to order his attendance the very next day at Greenwich because the King and he were coming up on business from Hampton Court and desired his attendance with certain papers specified.

It could not but seem the finger of God to Pepys though in an extremely odd pie. So, solacing himself with a good glass of burnt brandy he wrote up his diary, omitting all these matters as too grave to be entrusted to the most secret cipher, and so to bed.

Chapter Nine

HE rose well and alert next morning with all the talk of yesterday fresh in his mind and giving him much to think of. A man might know the Court much less than Pepys and yet be assured that a woman could do her friends more good there than any man, provided she would say a word in the ear of the King or Duke or one or two of the high ministers of state. If kissing went by favour it was certainly true also that favours came by kissing, and he viewed the prospect of a few coming his own way with considerable satisfaction. They would be doubly agreeable as coming from the Duke of York, more so than by any other man living, because he was at the head of the service Pepys loved, and where he could honestly feel his deservings were so great that none could say with truth that recognition came amiss.

Furthermore he had occasion that morning to remember how much the Montagu family needed to be free from the incubus, for a letter was brought him by mounted messenger from my Lady Sandwich speaking with anxiety of the cost of the approaching wedding and the buying she must needs do for my Lady Jem and desiring that Pepys would if possible speak with her lord on the subject of providing a sum which she could have to hand.

And where the money goes I may guess [she wrote], and have more than a notion to open my mind to Mrs. Rachel herself and—but in truth I know not what I say for such things are impossible, and yet the money is so needed as I cannot express. Pray, Cousin, do your possible to ensure this money. My love and service to Bess, for I dare to say you are daily at Woolwich. I have word she is prettier than ever and learns to sing and trill like a lark at dawn. Pray come yourself with our bridegroom who is to visit my daughter Jem in form on the 15th July, for he paid his respect to me the other day (she being with my sister Wright at Dagenhams) and I did truly think he would have died at my feet being the most bashful, cold young man that ever my eyes beheld. Thank God the like was never my bridegroom and my lord was not in *that* way. For Heaven's sake instruct him so that he make some kind of approach to her or they will never come together day or night.

With this letter in his pocket and dressed in his new silk camelotte suit he set off to Greenwich, taking boat on the far side of London Bridge because of his fear of shooting it, which was indeed very dangerous with the strong current against the piers. Dismissing all other affairs from his mind he seated himself in the stern, and considered deeply how he should speak to the Duke. The King's brother, a future king if the barren Queen should bear no child, there was no greater man in England except the King himself, and Pepys had good reason to know he had won his liking. Was it worth while to risk it for the sake of freeing my Lord Sandwich? Certainly not! Or for the chance of putting Mrs. Rachel up so high that with a woman's caprice she might when she pleased kick him down the ladder by which she had climbed? Again, certainly not. Or for diverting the Duke's idle fancy from Elizabeth, a pretty woman he had never seen and possibly never might see if the thing were well managed? Again, no. But all three motives combined with hope were strong, and he resolved to feel his way but always with such caution that he could draw back at a breath and tell Mrs. Rachel he had done his best and in vain. Yet he hoped for success. He had that strange confidence in her powers that he believed she would find her own way if he failed and then he would be left behind indeed, for she would owe him no gratitude.

So he walked up from the water to the Palace and, giving his name with the trepidation of a man not to the manner born which always clawed him when about to enter grand company, was shown into the handsome panelled room in which the Duke received them when naval affairs were discussed. As he bowed at the door until his hat feathers swept the ground the Duke turned from the window to meet him. He was laughing with a man half hidden by the curtain, and Pepys shooting an eye-glance under his third bow saw the King.

It startled him so that he dropped his hat and retrieved it in some confusion. He had never expected such a check to his hoped-for confidences with the Duke, for if Charles ever attended the naval council he lounged in late and went off in an hour to one or other of his women. Today it looked as if for once he had taken a turn for business. He lounged forward now, smiling all over his queer saturnine face, with his body loosely and carelessly held, his majesty in the relaxation in which it was generally to be found. He had been too long an out-of-work monarch to have acquired the habit of dignity like his father—the perfect king to the eye.

Pepys bowed far too profoundly to look up into his ugly humorous face—far too humorous to win the love of women. It is a rare woman who is not on her guard against humour in a man. Humour frightens the ordinary. She

can expect no empire, and conscious of swimming like a bright goldfish in a glass globe under observation, she knows that love is not in the bargain and never can be. Indeed he had never loved a woman, though he had lusted for many and was a true cynic in his easy liking and good-natured contempt for his harem. They dominated him in trifles, and to him all things were trifles except his ease and listless enjoyment and amusement, and yielding was therefore easier than resistance, but not one—neither the Castlemaine nor the lovely Stuart, the fascinating cold coquette who never surrendered her virtue though the white flag was always on the verge of fluttering to the masthead—could win a vestige of attachment, a rag of fidelity, a shred of compassion or honour from their master. Perhaps they would not have known what to do with any one of these things, and after all it had this advantage—there were no tragedies at Court. The King amused himself for a while with the Stuart, but the Castlemaine hired no bravos to murder her. She spat a few foul words, counted over her own jewels, and waited for his return. He would come, for it would be an easier way than breaking with her in form. Nell Gwyn shook her fist in Moll Davis's face when the royal handkerchief was thrown in that direction, but her wrath evaporated in a few plain-spoken epithets.

Spite makes comedies, not tragedies. Castlemaine would gain a peerage for her brat by threatening to throw him out of the window if the King did not order the patent of nobility, but she would never have a rival's throat cut to order. They all had the loose manners and easiness of the harem which takes a man's lust for granted and does not seriously contest the domain of any of the sultanas.

That was what Charles preferred, and what Pepys could not understand in his master. He had no heart to spare himself, but plenty of jealousy dashed with romance, and chose the game to be played with enough of advance and retreat to give a man a little of the excitement of breaking down resistance. There is a subtle flattering in this which is lacking in instant capitulation. Things must not be too difficult but difficult enough.

He stole a glance at the King thinking that if his kingship dropped off the victories would follow it. It was not so with the Duke of York, tall, singularly handsome, with dark curls falling to his shoulders and the peculiar fascination of the Stuart melancholy appealing for devotion, until he smiled and it disappeared in sunshine.

“Good-morrow, Mr. Pepys!” said the King tendering his hand to be kissed and shaking Pepys by the hand afterwards with careless geniality.

“Here we have the Navy in little, for I know well enough what brain guides it.”

Pepys smiled and coloured and bowed in an ecstatic confusion.

“Yes—and what business today? The old cry for money, and God knows where it is to come from! Answer me that, Mr. Pepys, and I knight you on the spot!”

The Duke smiled at the King’s elbow.

“If I know Mr. Pepys he would keep the knowledge to himself sooner than incur that penalty, your Majesty, Mr. Pepys is a sensible man. Look how seldom he comes to Court!”

Pepys interposed in as much hurry as he dared show in such company.

“Why, your Royal Highness, Court is not for the likes of a small inconsiderable man like me that must follow his business from morning to night, but sure the sight of his Majesty and all the brave doings is salve for sore eyes when business takes me there.”

“And the pretty ladies!” said Charles laughing and yawning after. “But I am told, Mr. Pepys, that you have one of the prettiest ladies in London shut up behind closed doors. Bring madam, I beg, next time you come to see the show.”

Pepys, bowing again, saw the Duke’s handsome agate eyes narrow slightly with a quick glitter of interest. But his Royal Highness moved toward the table and began arranging his papers as Lord Sandwich, Sir George Carteret, and Sir William Batten entered and bows were exchanged all round. The King slouched carelessly to his chair at the top and threw himself back on the cushions, stretching his long legs, dangling his hand over the arm to play with the little silken spaniel that had followed him, and but half attending to the business. Having invited those gentlemen present to sit he straightened himself presently to ask a few questions about the naval strengthening of Tangier, a part of his Queen’s troublesome dowry, and listened with scarcely disguised lack of interest to the dispiriting report. It was Pepys’s special province, for everyone else fought shy of what was likely to bring them so little credit, and he spoke clearly and to the point, and the King began to listen with more attention, hoisting the little spaniel on his knees and stroking its silken ears, but yet listening with a certain degree of interest while Pepys spoke. Once or twice he even put in a word of approval. But when that subject was ended he began to yawn, and presently rose, all following his example.

“I thank you, gentlemen, I am well content indeed to see my Navy and interests in such hands, and, Mr. Pepys, I do give you thanks for your good service all this year, and I assure you I am very sensible of it. James, you are fitter for this than I, and I leave you to it, requesting that my lord, Sir George Carteret, and Sir William Batten will join us at dinner.”

Headed by the Duke all attended him to the door, Pepys an inch taller for the commendation, though indeed he would have valued it much more from the Duke, who really knew what he was talking of, but that too was to come, for when they sat down again to serious business the Duke of York led off by turning directly to Pepys.

“I have read over your papers on pursers and their duties and thieveries, sir, and I would have it ordered your way, for it is a thing not suitable to be borne with us at present. I thank you.”

It was a fine day indeed for Pepys, but he would not allow a twinkle of satisfaction to escape him in the presence of his own masters. He bowed gravely and applied himself to his usual duty of elucidating and making the way clear for my lord and the rest that they might make a good show before their master, as was but right. But it was balm to his soul to observe Sir William Batten’s jealous eye and pursed lips as he bent over the papers. Sir George Carteret had ventured to applaud gently with his hands and my lord had smiled approval, but old Batten was a jealous toad, all said and done!

The council done, Sir George Carteret approached Pepys not a little impressed by these royal commendations, and doubly flattered by the part Pepys had played in the approaching marriage.

“I trust we see you on the 15th, worthy Mr. Pepys, and that you will carry my son along with you to his happy meeting with our fair Lady Jem. He has set his heart on your kind company. And I take this chance to say my lady and I know how to value it and be grateful for such good offices, and so I pray you to have a care of your health, for there is great sickness in the City and for all our sakes you should not venture yourself rashly.”

This was very agreeable to Pepys, and it was still more so that when my Lord Sandwich and the others bowed themselves out to reappear at dinner-time the Duke continued his attendance. James had quite enough wit to know where the real brains of the Navy lay, and the only relief from the tedium of Court dissipations being in that service he had more value for Pepys than for the dull figureheads in wigs and ruffles. The man was a born sailor if he had had his chance.

“Come out and we will take a stroll under the trees, Mr. Pepys. I get more from you in private than in public and would have your opinion now

on the victualling of the ships and the building of the *Katharine*.”

Pepys followed him with a feeling of real affection. He could appreciate that care, for he shared it.

“How the Duke do give himself to business and how like a noble prince in it all!” was his thought as he followed obsequiously at the royal heels, hat under his arm and peeping eagerly to see what the passers-by might think of his grandeur in a tête-à-tête with the heir to the Crown. Men did indeed turn heads curiously to see as they passed on their occasions.

They strolled up and down under the limes—the Duke having commended Pepys’s hat to its right use, and, keeping a shade behind the royal shoulder to express his deference, he was at his best in explaining and illuminating in brief trenchant sentences what his master desired to understand.

This done, the Duke spoke seriously:

“Mr. Pepys, I thank you again and desire to express my good opinion of your service and love and friendship. I trust it is known in the Navy what they owe you, for it should and must be.”

Pepys bowed in becoming modesty but with an air that showed his pleasure. The Duke continued:

“And now, business ended, let me give a hint for your welfare. It is not the first time his Majesty has spoke a word of your coming to Court, and I think indeed you would do well to show yourself somewhat more. Out of sight, out of mind, Mr. Pepys! And why not bring your pretty madam? Has she no taste to see the French fashions?”

“Neither the taste nor the means to feed it, your Royal Highness,” said Pepys in a kind of inward trembling now the desired moment was upon him.

“Well, but I hear she is as pretty as the prettiest and a French beauty into the bargain. What says the poet—

*“Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired.
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be admired—*

eh, Mr. Pepys?—A handsome woman makes her husband’s way in the world as well as her own, and no harm done!”

“Why, yes, your Royal Highness, if a woman has a taste that way, but my wife is a house-mouse and mighty shy in keeping to herself. Her face is the best part of her, the rest being very rustic.”

“And what more do we ask of a pretty woman than her beauty?” said the Duke merrily. He turned and smiling looked his follower in the face, taking off his hat to catch the fine breeze breathing under the limes. Standing so, the light and shade on his face, he seemed a noble subject for Vandyke’s brush—had he been by—an extremely highbred gentleman, and Pepys could not, in accordance with his fears, forbear thinking that he was a man but too well calculated to catch and hold a woman’s fancy. He had dignity and a kind of reserve mingled with the melancholy that the King entirely lacked. The King could be familiar, too easy, too open to rejoinders which came not seldom from the wits of his Court. Rochester and Sedley, not to mention others, would mock him to his face, jeering openly, and he forgiving it for the sake of the laugh. Men and women had their jest with him as he with them. But none ever took a liberty with the Duke, and when he disapproved he was at no pains to hide it, drawing himself apart with a cool stateliness very disconcerting to those who had mistaken their mark.

He had also that singularly rare possession—a heart. It was true he had ruined Anne Hyde’s reputation, and with all the world waiting jeering to see him cast her off he had married her, and true also he had been faithless to her, as she to him, but then the man who steered clear of women and their wiles in the stews of his brother’s Court must have been more angel than human. Yet he had kept some notion of decency, to say no more, and where the King was no prize to win save for what he could give, a woman noticed by the Duke might pride herself a little higher on the conquest.

“But indeed there are mighty handsome women nowadays, whether it be the French fashions or not, your Royal Highness,” said Pepys with careful carelessness. “Though if a man ask more than their fine looks and giddiness to back it they are far and few between.”

“A woman with reason is a thing I have never seen,” said the Duke with serene and perfect conviction. “The nature of woman is infinitely little, and they are blown this way and that like a feather on a breeze.”

“Sir, I would willingly agree with your Royal Highness as in duty bound, but do affirm that yesterday I talked with a lady mighty graceful, so much so indeed as she might be a fool with it and yet pass. But a most divine singer, and her mind as strong and full of reason and quiet as a philosopher, but all with such womanliness as took the senses captive.”

“A black swan,” said the Duke with delicate disdain. “I will wager she is fifty years old at the least and so crammed with wise maxims as to set a man yawning. They do not collect wisdom under half a century, and we have then no use for them.”

Pepys smiled as if to himself, the smile which provokes curiosity and questions. The Duke's eye was on him, he knew.

"Why, sir, I dare take your Royal Highness's wager on that. The lady is not two and twenty and indeed one of the finest women I ever beheld in my life, having a noble manner of speaking I never saw equalled. But I dare be no voucher for her having the Court graces, for there I am without knowledge."

"The Court graces!" The Duke hesitated a moment. It was perhaps not advisable to utter his free opinion of his brother's Court even to his trusted Pepys. He took another line.

"Your mistress, Mr. Pepys? Such praises are those of a lover?"

"Your Royal Highness, no, in truth. These sports are not for a sober married man that must mind his business. But I dare to say a woman a man might entertain as a friend, and I hope for the lady's favour so far and no farther."

"And virtuous?" the Duke asked, switching at a dandelion with the gold-mounted cane he carried. Pepys shrugged his shoulders with a gesture copied from his French Elizabeth and useful on occasions.

"Why, as to that, sir—Heaven forbid I should pronounce that have not tried! But I hear it said the lady is not too severe—but yet proud and hard to conquer. In truth I do not know but have heard rumours."

"And where does the paragon live?" the Duke asked carelessly, not noticing Pepys's instant of hesitation. He covered it quickly and mentioned the name and the house in Chelsea, reflecting that if by any chance the Duke should meet my Lord Sandwich there it could lead to no difficulty for himself. "Lord Sandwich would never stand in his master's way nor dare to question how he got there.

"But," he added, "I take shame for this fool's gossip of mine and beg your Royal Highness would forget it and me, for my footing in it is delicate, and I did but jest as a man will. There is nothing more to it than so."

"That is understood," said the Duke smiling, "and now I know she is not your mistress. A man does not show a thief the way to his own treasure house. Here we must turn back for dinner, and good luck to the lady!"

They walked back slowly, talking of naval matters again, and there as always the Duke was at his best, for no particular was beneath him, and in this respect Pepys was more at his ease with him than with the lower officials, knowing that what he said would receive the consideration that results in action. Had it not been that his pleasures turned him aside often

enough he would have accomplished great things where most needed, and as he listened Pepys hoped and believed within himself that a woman like Mrs. Rachel might keep him steady to the mark, indeed that the fair virago might make a man of the Duke. His motive in showing forth her praises before him might not be high but were at least seasoned with shrewd common sense.

The day had been so full of favours that he ventured to hope he might attain an honour never yet his and be bid to dinner at the King's table in a kind of informal way which would make such an honour admissible. But it was not to be.

He went with the Duke to the door of the withdrawing room and saw the King within surrounded by the others and all in high talk, but had no invitation to enter, the Duke passing carelessly in while he stood outside in hope of their noticing him as they passed out again and into the room where a handsome dinner was laid, the smell of which already assailed Pepys's nostrils most poignantly. But as they passed none noticed him bowing in his corner.

"God forgive me for my pride!" he said to himself, turning downcast away. "I could not in modesty expect to be invited, yet I am sorry I came in, that Sir William Batten should say he could sit down where I could not. Though this is folly, he having climbed higher and having twenty times more reason than I!"

Nevertheless the experience fanned a little censoriousness generally absent from his opinions on royalty, for when, dinner finished, the King came out with the Duke and offered him a lift down to Woolwich and back in the royal barge, he sat silent listening to the royal talk and finding it extremely ordinary.

"God forgive me!" he thought, "though I admire them with all the duty possible, the more a man considers and observes them the less he finds of difference between them and other men, though, blessed be God, they are both princes of great nobleness and spirits."

He reflected that it had been easier to admire in Oliver Cromwell's iron days, though there were not so many pickings and fair ladies had nothing to say to the management of public business. Still, it was pleasant that his wife and others should see him arriving in the King's barge, and he could be very sure that that little fact would be bruited far and wide. It made it doubly pleasant that he should have worn his suit of fine camelotte and the new feather in his hat. The importance of the latter consideration resolved him to grant himself some extraordinary expense in clothes, realizing as he did so the importance of the handsome dressing in putting him on an equality with

some, and superiority with others, in consequence of the confidence it gave him to go nobly dressed and like himself in the good company to which he had now attained. And so home, feeling a satisfaction with the day to be described as without alloy if it had not been his exclusion from the royal dinner.

“Yet to that too I may hope to come,” he mused as he sat in the stern of the little boat which conveyed him up from Greenwich, “for who could have said that one of the Pepys family—a family by no means in itself considerable—should walk with princes and partake their counsels? And it is to be observed that the Duke this day had a suit with closed knees which became him well, and having so many with the loose knees I may very well have this also to my new clothes. God send I may please myself in the colour!”

He felt also completely satisfied with the seed sown in regard to Mrs. Rachel. It had been enough to set the ball a-rolling, yet not too much to retreat from as an idle jest if mischief arose. And he had earned her gratitude and friendship. Refreshed in spirit by all these considerations he made an excellent supper, to the unpleasant accompaniment of the tolling of the church bells about the town for those dead of the plague.

He had scarcely eaten the last bite, when his boy, charged with the importance of bad news, came rushing in to tell him that the fatal red cross with its legend of “God have mercy upon us” had appeared close at hand, and where should it be but on the house of his good friend and neighbour, Dr. Burnett in Fenchurch Street! He stood a moment regretting this without any selfish fears, and then sat down to consider with the shrewdest good sense how best to put his house and possessions in order in case the disease should strike him as suddenly while his wife was at Woolwich. He did not believe it would. He could not fail to observe that it had spared people of importance in a quite remarkable manner which appeared to indicate that those valuable to the nation would probably be preserved by an overruling Providence.

“But I would have all ready,” he thought, “in case it should please God to call me away, which God dispose of to his glory.”

This done, he resolved on a visit to the Deptford Dockyard next day. It would hasten business. It would declare abroad and to all concerned that the Clerk of the Acts carried his duties on immovably in spite of the terrors about him, and it would gain him a pleasant hour with pretty little adoring Mrs. Bagwell, to which he felt himself entitled as a cordial among so many grave affairs.

And so to bed.

Chapter Ten

HE went, resolving to pay a duty in going to Woolwich to see Elizabeth, reflecting how little he cared to do it. The happenings of her day, the difficulties with her maids, the question of whether Ashwell had told a lie or kissed the cook-maid's sweetheart, really mattered only as trifles and from the point of view of expense. It had been much more poignant when they lived together and his personal comfort was at stake. Now he could shape his life to suit himself and liked the freedom amazingly. The wonder recurred more often as to why he had committed himself to marriage, and while owning that he would probably have been happier with no other woman he was still certain that women are only the sweets of the banquet of life, pretty little kickshaws, and therefore the easiest to dispense with except in the marauding way, as when a boy steals jam from the cupboard and proves the proverb that stolen fruit is sweetest. Had she been another man's wife how great the merriment of visiting her, of seeing the love-light glow in her eyes and the furtive glance of fear at her husband! But how dull the assured and open kiss of marriage, the household questions and replies, the recognized legal endearments. A wife knows a man too well, he thought, and therefore no flattery goes with her favours for she has forgotten the charm which enchants the strange woman in every assault.

He went down to Deptford with all this in his mind and found little Mrs. Bagwell with her flowered calico gown and black-lashed eyes fluttering, humble, grateful for any crumb of notice he let fall, the perfection of the Eastern slave attending her sultan. Following a sign with her hand he sent Bagwell off on some contrived errand about the Yard, and enjoyed himself to his heart's content in her company, snatching greedily at the last crumb of sensual enjoyment, wringing it out to the uttermost until all was gone and only a cold and rather sickening revulsion left. He saw her coarse and common then—a thing to be ashamed of, no handsome amour that a man could make something of if it were found out, that other men would envy him if they knew, but the common backstairs order of thing that any man could carry through if he would. He pushed her angrily from him to her utter bewilderment when she proffered her ripe cheek for a last kiss.

“It would beseem you much better, Mrs. Bagwell, if you paid attention to your husband and kept yourself an honest woman rather than flinging yourself in every man’s way till he must needs notice you. But I shall come no more to Deptford.”

With this injustice two large tears trembled in her eyes and spilt helplessly down the rosy bloom of her cheeks. After all, if she had been forward Mr. Pepys had not been backward, and she had laid out every little art she possessed to give him delight and thought she had succeeded. Her trembling quivering lips and the look of mute appeal annoyed him still further.

“If Tom knew, sir——” she began.

“There is nothing he or any man might not know so far as I am concerned. But a wise woman does not spoil her own nest. And now, good-morning to you, Mrs. Bagwell, and if I advise you to more discretion it is to your own interest.”

She broke down then in a sob which speeded him out of the door. But knowing little of men and nothing of gentlemen it seemed hard enough to her that a man lying on her breast twenty minutes back should chide her like this for the pleasure she had given him. She could not know that forgiveness would recur with the need of her and that the outraged Elizabeth loomed pale and angry in his vision. She would have loomed terrible if she had known the facts. His very jealousies and much else had confirmed her in the notion that mischief was on foot of which she knew nothing. This being so she had set herself to win Will Hewer, his young clerk, utterly. A very few graces sufficed for this, for Elizabeth had a way with her that would win a bird off a bough if so she chose. A little consideration about his suppers, seeing that the maids mended his clothes as they should, a touch of personal interest in all he did, a few kindly words, and his goose was cooked; he was at her service.

Gradually she strengthened her empire and then had fits of sadness which filled his heart with anxiety. So dear were the pair to him, so all he knew of home, that he could imagine no life apart from Seething Lane, nor any interest but Pepys’s kindly orders and the soft background of smiles and solitudes from Elizabeth. Therefore the storms and quarrels filled him with anxiety. It struck at the root of hope. But one day—

“Will,” she said, drooping in her chair, “I am often unhappy. Have you seen it?”

“Madam, yes, but not understood. All is so peaceable in this dear house, except a word now and again that I deserve but too well from the master.

And if——”

“Ah!” She sighed to melt the heart of a stone. “All is not as it seems, Will. Because I don’t tell all I feel for his good, it’s not that I don’t feel it.”

“Surely not! But is the master ill, madam?”

“Not ill. No. But there are things not for his good that concern me very greatly. If a man wants care and comfort he tells all to his wife. But Mr. Pepys is not so—I wish he were, and not knowing I cannot apply the medicine.”

“Debt?” Will asked, his young eyes rounding with horror. Knowing nothing of Pepys’s resources he had wondered a little himself sometimes at the prodigality of his spending on matters that took his fancy. He had followed the Pepys fortunes from very lowly beginnings and was so accustomed to sparing that he thought it must continue.

“Why, as to debt——” hesitated Elizabeth, a little ashamed of herself but still determined on her end—“I cannot tell! But, O, Will, I have fears, heavy fears! If I could know where he goes, who he sees, what he does, I could be on the watch and hinder follies. You see, Will? O, understand me without more words said!”

But the lad had the stupidity of callow youth.

“Then ask him, dearest madam! What would he keep from you? Very often have I known him silent on a matter which had you asked he had told straight out.”

She caught at that, and indeed he was like wax in her hands.

“What sort of matters, Will?”

“O, madam, how do I know? When perhaps he has lingered at the Swan with Two Necks with a friend or perhaps wasted a half hour with Mrs. Pierce, or——”

“Will,” she said, with great and sudden earnestness, “when you grow older you will know this truth—for O most true it is!—when a man does not tell his wife a thing it is because it is a something so bad for him that she would wean him from it if she could. Very gently, but still for his good. Some day you may yourself be married and then you will know this.”

“But I would tell her all myself, madam. Indeed I would!” poor Will protested, almost with tears in his eyes, and indeed Elizabeth at the moment, her lovely dark curls bound with a blue ribbon, her slim body in a hooped flowered dress of blue, looked gentle and sweet as to invite any confidence any husband, including her own, might breathe in her small ear. Her

expression of earnest gentleness was grave and winning beyond compare as she replied:

“No, Will, you would not. Or perhaps you might, for you have wisdom beyond your years. But most men regard their wife as a marplot, one that stands in the way of lawful pleasures and would pin them to her apron string night and day. I am not so foolish—not I!”

“No, indeed, madam!” Will replied warmly, “for I know the master goes where he will and does as he pleases.”

“But I should know—I should know!” she said very seriously. “If too much money were spent, Will—if these strange women caused it—— Will, do you love the master?”

His voice choked in his young throat.

“Love him, madam? And you? Who else have I to love who owe you all?”

“Then, Will, you won’t breathe to any living soul what I tell you now. It is because you are growing and like a man in good sense and wisdom that I trust you. But if I thought it went further——”

“Further, madam? I will die sooner! And anything for his good—— And are you frightened for him?”

“Sometimes frightened. But I can trust you, Will, for if you help me we can pull things straight without his knowledge. Will—why does he go so often to Deptford? Once with the tail of my eye I saw a bold-faced huzzy, full and broad like a woman of the town, meet him coming out of the Office, and I feared—O, Will, I have very great fears!”

Indeed there was a tear in her eye, very genuine. She had half persuaded herself it was anxiety for Pepys that speeded her, and wholly persuaded Will Hewer.

“Do these sluts come to such a place as the Office?” she said sadly. He had not yet reached the age which admitted him to the arch-confraternity of men, sworn to keep all their secrets from all women bad or good. Deeply concerned and with a flutter of self-importance to be so useful, he replied earnestly:

“Why, madam, not much to speak of! There is Mrs. Bagwell from Deptford has come three times about her husband’s promotion which she takes very urgently, and I have known her wait for the master and to dine with him at some eating place. But I cannot think a woman for spending, her husband being only a carpenter in the Yard, and herself one to be satisfied with a knot of ribbons from the fair or a pair of jessamy gloves at best.”

“What is she like?” Elizabeth asked with gentle sadness.

“Why, a young woman with round rosy cheeks and big dark eyes and a full moist mouth. The clerks say handsome, but I think not so.”

“And he goes to Deptford Yard often? I know he takes you with him to carry his books and cloak, Will?”

“Yes—madam. But not to say very often. But he goes sometimes to Bagwell’s house, for it is convenient to leave his things there.”

“Doubtless very convenient and no harm done,” she said smiling faintly. “What other women have we to fear for expense, Will?”

“Why, none that I know of, madam, except when he has a Valentine, and then you know there must be a gift. But sometimes he will visit Mrs. Martin at Westminster Hall and stay a long while, I cooling my heels, and sometimes pretty Mrs. Betty Michell and sometimes Mrs. Knipp which he keeps company with a good deal and——”

He halted. It was clear to Elizabeth that she had discovered a source of the utmost value and that its preservation would demand the utmost care in handling.

She said primly:

“It is not me to look into my husband’s business further than as it concerns his good, and you know well, Will, that I have never asked question nor thrust my nose into any of his affairs. But I tell you plainly that if you love your master and desire his good you would let me know these things that I may be watchful and guard our substance. And I swear to you, Will, that never in this world or the next will I reveal what you have told me and what I never would have asked lest you might think me a prying woman, which I detest. But we would not have ill come to him—no, not for all the world.”

If this turn was a little unexpected to Will he was yet much too simple to resent or see through it and promised warmly and with grateful thanks for her silence that she should know all he knew, and much good might it do! And from that time forth she had her gazette most simply told and might make of it what she could, Pepys having such confidence in Will’s youth, inexperience, and fidelity that he had become very careless as to what the boy might see or understand. It is true there was much he could not see and nothing definite which could be stated in so many words, but she had enough to set her suspicions raging and to destroy her peace.

On the occasions when Samuel came to her at Woolwich she would put leading questions and compare answers with what she could glean from

Will, and if it differed, heaven help her! Nothing was too great an enormity for belief, especially now that he was in London and she in Woolwich. She might have considered that London was no city for light enjoyments now with the gloomy shut-up houses, and the constant tolling of death bells, and passengers hurrying through the grass-grown streets with white scared faces as the Bills of Mortality mounted by thousands, and it was here today and the body flung like garbage in the death cart rumbling slowly round the town next day. But none the less rumours spread (and were true enough) that many were driven by sheer terror into excesses of vice. Men and women alike brutalized themselves to deaden terror, and though that was not Samuel's way and she knew he pursued his business sedately with what was a very fine courage, she also knew from Will that many of the women she dreaded were still in London and that he saw them from time to time. Several times she made a motion to return herself—to leave the maids at Woolwich and get some old seasoned hag to help her in the house. She could not reconcile it to herself, she said, to stay away with her husband in hourly danger. The very energy with which he repelled the motion fed the flame still more. One day she called Will, when he came down with his master from London, and opened a new subject.

“Will, I have found you so true and faithful as that if you were a hundred years in this world you could not have more wisdom. I have blessed the day I opened my mind to you, for much good is come of it already. Many is the little word I have let drop that keeps the master watchful as to the avoidance of follies. So this gives me heart and leisure to improve my understanding that I may be your rival and his. And it is my intention, good Will, to keep a diary wherein I shall set down my hopes and fears and faults, with little goodly recipes for the cooking of foods of which I have a great store lying about here and there likely to be lost. But because I will not have anyone to read my thoughts it shall be kept in a close cipher, and none shall read it until much is done.”

Will stared at her round-eyed. He knew well that his master kept a diary which probably contained important matters relating to the Navy Office and the State matter connected, with it. But why a lovely lady should care to chronicle the little daily happenings he could not understand. She saw the doubt in his eye and met it swiftly.

“Why, Will, a woman has her thoughts too, and when I am old and gray I will take out my book and see what I thought when I was young, and the dresses I wore—all shall be told, and the dinners—every dish set forth and the company, and I shall laugh and cry when I read it because it is all gone like a dream. But no one shall read it but me, therefore find me a man to

teach me a cipher, and, Will, on your life, say nothing to no one—and especially to the master, because I will not be laughed at for a fool. Promise me, good Will—promise!”

She caught his hand, laughing until her eyes ran over with mirth at her pretty fancy, like a child with a new toy, and how was Will Hewer to guess what lay behind it? Delighted to help her and be in the secret, his face reflected the mirth in hers. To him she meant much of the joy of life, like a bird’s singing or the shooting of the sun’s arrows at dawn on a bright May morning.

“Tell it, madam? Not for all the wealth in the world or out of it. But there are several ciphers. Which will you have?”

She had a vague memory of hearing Pepys speak of some cipher with a friend.

“Which is the master’s, Will?”

“Mr. Shelton’s Swift Writing. But very difficult. There are others, madam.”

“Well—the easiest for me, if not beyond a woman’s wit, but I shall learn only a little suited to a little brain, for it is likely I find it too hard and give it up first lesson.”

She laughed like a chime of silver bells, and Will laughed with her, anticipating the day when her book should be proudly produced with its little mistakes and faults and the things no man would have thought to chronicle. To him it was much as if her dog with the ribbon about his neck had set himself the duties of a mastiff, but the sight was so pretty and her bright long-lashed eyes so sparkling with pleasure that he was delighted to be a party to the charming plot. What would he have thought if he could have seen into the passionately warring instincts rather than thoughts under those concealing eyes? She was saying desperately to herself:

“I will read. I will know. If it were an honest writing would he need to keep it hidden from his wife? He leaves the book about sometimes because he knows I cannot read. But if I could—if I could!”

Women are changeable, however, as all the world knows, and when some days later the faithful Will brought her the name of a man who could teach the mysteries of cipher to a willing pupil, she drew back. She had changed her mind, she said. After all, what good was it for a woman? She had no secrets. She could as well keep her little thoughts, recipes, and what not, in honest round-hand and save herself the trouble.

“For it is something of a holiday here at Woolwich, and why waste it in learned stuff to pucker my forehead and blear my eyes? No, Will. Good thanks for your trouble, but there an end.”

She showed him a little book with a recipe written for “Marmalett of Quinces” and a note of the day’s doings, and there it dropped. How could he guess that having gained the name of the cipher from him she went daily to learn it from a skilled scrivener at Woolwich; that sheets of paper covered with signs and symbols like magic charms were carefully destroyed, and that with her swift wits, amounting often to intuition, she made rapid progress in an art he thought as far beyond her comprehension as the stars. It was not for nothing she was her father’s daughter, that quick-brained unpractical starving inventor so much before his time, so crammed with brilliant projects incapable of realization then. *He* could have turned Elizabeth off a new cipher as soon as look at her if that would have served her turn, but since it would not he could at least be plundered of the knowledge of where a man lived to whom all ciphers were as the King’s English and had further supplied his girl with such a painstaking brain of her own that it was no more trouble to her to learn than to sew the lace on her new paduasoy sack and make it outshine my Lady Sandwich’s by ten pounds and better.

Certainly this was the last thing Pepys could have suspected. He brought down his diary one week-end and sat writing it up with a green shade to the candle, for his overworked eyes often pained him so that he could scarcely see to write. She noticed what he was doing and asked him some careless question about it, darting a glance unseen through arrowy lashes.

“My diary, and, Lord help me!—the arrears it has got into. And pretty to see what a sorry despatch these great men give to business that it delays every man that has to do with them. I have two weeks I must write up—no less!”

She yawned a little, delicately, like a cat after a meal of cream.

“But why trouble to set it all down in that writing that hurts your eyes till they all but bleed? Otherwise I would write it for you when you had need. I am a good clerk enough and set down my father’s project for curing smoky chimneys, and much more.”

He reached over and gave her a light kiss on the cheek, laughing for thanks:

“I do know well my poor wretch would help me in more than that if she could, as in days gone by, but it would go against me to set her such a task. And kept in cipher it needs must be, for there is great store of matters of State in it which if known would break me with the Commissioners, and the

Duke never pardon. But this is stuff for the Office, and I have what will please you more. My Lady Carteret do say that the ladies are shortly to go into a new fashion—what think you of that?—It is to wear short coats above their ankles, which she and I do not like but conclude the train to be mighty graceful. And, Lord! how she cries out at the vices of the Court, and that my Lady Castlemaine has taken a new lover—a player fellow—to be even with the King for pretty Nelly, and do hide him in her room when the King comes!”

This deflected the talk but not Elizabeth’s thoughts as she set to work on the green hangings for the best bedroom on her return to London. He at the other side of the table wrote swiftly:

I to my barber Jervas and there had a little opportunity of speaking with my Jane alone. Thence to the Swan and there did sport a good while with Herbert’s young kinswoman. Then to the Hall and there with Mrs. Martin and to her lodgings; poor things yet she thinks them pretty and so they are for her condition, I believe, good enough. Having spent two shillings upon her in cake and wine I away, sick of her impudence, and to my Lord Brouncker’s where I occasioned much mirth with a ballad I brought with me, made from the seamen at sea to their ladies in town. Here a most noble French dinner. Very late home where, thinking to be merry, was vexed with my wife having looked out a letter in Sir Philip Sidney about jealousy for me to read, which she industriously and maliciously caused me to do, and the truth is my conscience told me it was most proper for me and therefore was touched at it, but took no notice but read it out most frankly, but it stuck in my stomach.

Yes, it had stuck there for many days. In the last few months there had been a change in Elizabeth—a suggestion that she would not put herself in the wrong to his advantage. Indeed, the trouble was that she was now so often and confoundedly in the right. It would have made him circumspect if only the women would have helped him. But unluckily they liked a frolic as well as himself, and when he remembered the excellent reasons against frolics it was too late and Elizabeth’s divining eye upon him. Thank Heaven she could not read the diary—his only confidant! He took up his pen again and began another day:

Then to Jervas’s, my mind, God forgive me! running too much after some folly, but *elle* not being within I away by coach to the ‘Change and thence home to dinner. And, finding Mrs. Bagwell

waiting at the office, away she and I to a cabaret where she and I have eat before. So to my office in a little and to Jervas's again, thinking to have met Jane, but she not there. So home to supper and to bed.

He wrote without compunction and to the accompaniment of a little song Elizabeth was humming as she worked. The atmosphere was one of domestic peace, and she asked him presently what he meant to wear at the Sandwich-Carteret wedding which was to take place very soon.

“Why, my new coloured silk suit and——”

“I did not know you had one!” said she sweetly. “What is the colour and trimming?”

He looked a little abashed, but after all, as well sooner as later, since it must be known.

“Why, a rich violet and gold lace—very noble, and not possible for me to spare on it because of the wedding and other great doings where I must make a good show. And I would indeed, Bess, you were to come too, for it will be merry doings.”

“My lady asked me, but I have not a dress. It must be new for a wedding and handsome for your wife, and I have it not.” She did not add that my lord had himself come to see her and press her coming and that in such terms that apart from the dress she judged it best to keep away. But there was no reproach in her tone. She stated a fact as simply as if it had been the time of day and so left it. All the same, it stung Pepys a little, and she knew it, for he knew if she did not what the violet silk had cost. But it was better not to raise the question, and he passed on hurriedly:

“Mr. Carteret is to visit my Lady Jem again tomorrow, and I to go with him because my Lady Wright and her friends there are strange to him. So this was well accepted. But Lord! to see how kind my Lady Carteret is to her! sends her most rich jewels and provides bedding and all sorts of things most richly for her which makes my Lady Sandwich and me out of our wits almost to see the kindness she treats us all with, as if they would buy the young lady. A wonderful show indeed!”

He talked in his old familiar way but had a sense of strangeness in Elizabeth as if he could not tell what she would be at. It must be, he thought, because of their living apart, owing to the cursed plague. She did not fly out so easily and that was so much to be thankful for, yet it was so much more difficult to penetrate her silence and placid reserve that he began to feel as if the old, impulsive, violently affectionate or angry girl he knew had departed,

and a very new Elizabeth grown up in her place. It was pleasant, for it ensured domestic quiet, but—was he sure it was as safe?

“Young Carteret is a fool with his lady,” he went on. “Lord! He has not the spirit to snatch a kiss, nor so much as to take her by the hand!”

“And is she content with him? Poor little Lady Jem!” says Elizabeth her head on one side over her work. “Has anyone troubled to take her opinion?”

“Why, yes. Last time I went down to Dagenhams, after instructing Mr. Carteret to distribute handsome money presents among the servants, I took my Lady Jem apart and would know how she liked this gentleman and whether she was under any difficulty concerning him? As I had asked before.”

“As if she would tell you! Surely her mother should ask her, one would think! If I had a daughter——” said Elizabeth and paused—that was a point on which none but God and herself knew her mind.

“Why, as to that it went very well!” said he, seeing nothing. “She blushed and hid her face a while, but at last I forced her to tell me. She answered then that she could readily obey what her father and mother had done, which was all she could say or I expect. And after that no more time and I back to London, but Sir William Coventry commending me for facing the plague there, which indeed grows very violent, I answered that where he was ready to face the sword the least I could do was to face the plague in my turn, which was well received.”

“It should be,” said Elizabeth. “It is a heavy risk.”

After dinner he kissed her and bid farewell to the maids and so returned to London with Will in tow, carrying his diary with him. Hers lay innocently open on the table, and he had glanced at it laughing, saying she never would continue it. He knew her better!

When he had gone she put on her hood and went off to her teacher carrying with her the exercises she had done in her new art. They were of such excellence that he could only commend her swift wits with astonishment, little expecting such application from a young and beautiful woman. Her story was that she hoped to aid her father Monsieur de St. Michel in his projects which indeed required much writing. For this reason she requested secrecy and obtained it. As to Will, he never gave the matter another thought.

Chapter Eleven

A FEW days later, very conscious of his freedom now Elizabeth was safely bestowed at Woolwich, Pepys decided on a visit to Chelsea and Mrs. Rachel. He did not imagine that anything would have come of his talk with the Duke of York as yet, if it were to come at all, but he was anxious she should know he had done his part. He knew my Lord Sandwich had been engaged far otherwise in a quarrel with the Lord Chancellor which had filled Pepys with terror for his own interests, for though the King might be all powerful in name his Lord Chancellor was so in actuality. Something done by the Navy Board had offended his Mightiness, and Pepys had crawled before him with more than Oriental servility. He was his poor creature, the unhappy Pepys, his servant who did but live to serve him, and so he had won forgiveness while the great man, crippled with gout, hobbled beside him in the garden.

Now he felt he might indulge himself with a little holiday and leave my Lord Sandwich to make his own peace with what honour he could. And things were indeed very troublous with the Sandwich family now. His debts grew heavier and heavier. Pepys frankly admitted to himself and his diary that he really dreaded a summons to meet the head of the House of Montagu, for it generally ended with a request for a loan of money most difficult to evade, and hampered as Pepys was with gratitude for past services he felt it was most important he should know to the full how matters stood and that Rachel Becke might be able to illuminate them.

But the episode had proved to him how little service to the country mattered compared with the pleasing of the four or five great men who ruled the kingdom while the King amused himself. It had not been so in the spacious days of the great Cromwell, and though he and his works were dead and gone Pepys was tinctured for life with the colour of them. There was always the Puritan conscience in him to protest the Restoration licence even when he gave way to it. Now in the Duke he recognized a spice of conscience too in spite of his addiction to women; a kind of passion for what he conceived to be right and his duty to the great position he held, and this being so and in its way a wonder considering the life or the Court it never occurred to Pepys that this fanaticism of belief might one day drive him

along a way very disastrous to himself and the country. Not foreseeing the future, he beheld only a fine serious man who desired to do his best and who, since like other men he toyed with women, must be fitted with one who would draw him away from the costly frivolities which were ruining Charles in the people's esteem.

So on the appointed day he went down to Chelsea, carrying a barrel of oysters with him as an agreeable gift of friendship to her parents. The sound of a lute in the garden drew him from the parlour where the maid left him, and opening a door he followed it through the trees and came upon a sight pleasant enough in any man's eyes. Somehow one did not think of Rachel as a girl nor use the word in speaking of her. She was a young woman—one who could gaze at you with gravely levelled eyes and carry her head royally, looking other women down into instant inferiority which for a moment gave them the air of bright inconsequent insects. Pepys could do with the latter type well enough and considered it all that was necessary for the uses of life, yet with his curiously sensitive nature, sensitive to all the joys and sorrows of life with the sole exception of humour, he found himself in quite another atmosphere with this young woman and realized it as something quite strange but not wholly displeasing.

She was sitting now under a sweeping beech tree whose great boughs formed a green gloom about her pale face. She wore a dark blue gown which set off her red lips and great eyes, and had a chain of intricately wrought gold about her neck which Pepys recognized instantly as a present to my Lord Sandwich from a sea captain from Bombay who had his own interest to make in the Dockyard. It suited her unusual appearance and heightened the effect as of something almost foreign. She rose and met Pepys and his low bow with a curtsy beautifully swept—indeed it seemed that her every motion was graceful, and motioned him to a chair set ready before her with a rustic table between.

“And indeed I am very content to see my good Mr. Pepys and to thank him for much service performed in the bond between us.”

Pepys, conscious of his new summer bombazine suit of black set off artistically with white, slid into the chair and answered earnestly:

“Lord, madam! I had been here before and long since but what with business—for you know all the heads are gone from the Navy Office but myself. I have but little time for my pleasures. The plague increases daily and is doleful work—it looks as if we may see the City a desert—and the hindrance to business unbelievable. You send for a man and, Lord! he died that morning. And so goes the world.”

“All the more credit to Mr. Pepys that nothing drives from his duty any more than the soldier from his gun. And I dare to tell you, sir, that I hear such commendations as would bring the red to your cheek. It is known and noticed, and day by day men say the Navy’s dependence is Mr. Pepys.”

She said it sweetly, drooping her eyes, but with a gravity so unlike a young woman that, looking to the subject, he gazed at her in astonishment. It was a new experience for him to be in confidential relations with a woman yet without a touch of passion. Doubly strange, considering her history, for inquiry had convinced him that Lord Sandwich had not been the first to taste the peculiar charm she exhaled. It reminded him of the aromatic perfume of a carved box from India which had once come his way, and made all the flowery scents seem fit for children’s use. She was like herself and no one else, and it was a singular thing also that this impelled him to a courtesy not common in his dealings with women and suitable to the greatest of ladies had they been within his sphere.

Seeing her now, fair and calm as an ivory image in the green shade, he hesitated over his next question.

“Why, madam, there are those who would have taken my absence for licence to absent themselves. But may I ask whose commendation I have earned?”

She said quite simply:

“The Duke of York’s,”—plucking a light note or two on her lute, and so startled Pepys that for the moment he could scarcely find voice to continue. Still, she might have heard of this through Lord Sandwich—this would doubtless be the solution.

She saw the amazement in his eyes and answered it with her own smiling reserve. He was sure that she dealt out what she would say in exactly measured quantity and not a word to spare.

“Mr. Pepys, I think it a part of our alliance that I should be open with you. Ten days ago the Duke came here in pursuit of my singing which he said you had commended. I was notified his Highness would do me this condescension and received him here as you see me now, and the water and shade very pleasant. He spoke of you as one that loves music and seeks the best, and from that diverged to your attendance at the Navy Office, saying those with more high-sounding names forsook it and fled but you were faithful. And he said, ‘I have that esteem for Mr. Pepys that were he to commend man or woman I would make it my business to acquaint myself with them, for the Navy is the backbone of this country and he its right hand

and nobody but he taking any care herein.’—So he said and so I take pleasure to tell you.”

Pepys was overcome with joy and surprise. The calm directness of her gaze and the evident pleasure it gave her to speak touched his easily moved nature almost to a spasm of gratitude. He caught her hand as it lay on her lap and kissed it devoutly, noting with his all-seeing eyes as he did so that a ring with a diamond of the bigness of a small hazel nut graced it with blinding sparkles.

“Madam—madam!” he stuttered, and could say no more.

She hesitated a moment and then with the prettiest kind of doubtfulness added:

“And would you hear of my affairs also, but in the strictest confidence, sir? Since then the Duke has come twice, and since he finds this little heaven by the river and the garden and trees please him, he is urgent to buy it from my Lord Sandwich, and the matter is now in treaty between them.”

Pepys felt that a feather might have knocked him down. So it had all come about as if by magic—and only a word from him! It seemed that of all events in his life this was the best of its kind and the fullest of honour and content to him that had ever befallen and that he could not easily have so good again. It did not surprise him that Lord Sandwich had said nothing of the house to him. There had always been a *delicateresse* (as Elizabeth would have called it) since the famous letter he had written, and besides my lord in his zest for borrowing from Pepys might easily prefer that he should not know of other sums falling in. His easy good-nature took a great deal as granted from Pepys in view of their family connection and services rendered on either side. But all this was little compared to the fact that this young woman had conquered. He knew the Duke quite well enough to understand that her quiet and ivory pallor would have the charm of moonlight for him after the hectic painted beauties of the Court who had hitherto made his world. But a further shock was in store for him which he must meet as best he could.

“Mr. Pepys, I foretell a friendship between myself and the Duke, all unworthy though I be, and be sure when I promised you gratitude if it should so fall out I did not oversay my heart, for I think the Duke is not to be resembled to other men but in beauty and wisdom much surpasses them, and may be a great king one day if it so fall out. And there is this between us—but this you shall keep entirely secret for reasons easy to be told—I too am a Catholic and may understand his Highness better than another.”

He had been listening in perfect pleasure, but on the last sentence his jaw dropped and he stared like one aghast. He knew well enough, as all the world knew, the Duke's religious belief, and he also knew the disadvantage at which it put him and the King, and the wild rumours that, rising from no one knew where, would fly through town and country of the devilish devices of the Papists. Only a few days since the story had taken way that they had devised a great and bloody massacre of all the Protestants in London, and Pepys himself, half laughing, half quaking, had gone gingerly until the day was safely past. And now, God help him!—had he put a Papist about the Duke to strengthen his fatal fancy instead of one that would woo him from it with smiles and kisses? She saw the consternation in his face and was silent. With the sense that he ventured on crumbling ice with a lady now become of such consequence he stammered out:

“But, Lord! madam—sure your worthy parents——”

“Are Protestants!” she finished the sentence smiling gently.

“And yet you, madam—their daughter—— Not that I would say a word against a faith held by many worthy persons, but in these combustible times ——”

“I am a very new convert but trust to do no dishonour to my opinions! And the Duke's priests have favoured me with much gracious kindness,” she said with an angelic smile.

Pepys had always held a strong opinion of this young woman's brain and charm, but as her meaning flashed upon him the words almost choked in his throat for fear and admiration. So that was how she had conquered so swiftly! He knew how a sympathetic word on that head, a merest glimpse of understanding, brought the blood to the Duke's cheek and the sparkle to his eye. How could he resist the charm of a young woman whose soul set on heavenly things by no means divided her fair body from earthly delights? He could see her leading the Duke to his favourite topic and listening with seraphic quiet and earnestness while he enlarged thereon, and actually a kind of fear of the skill and power concealed under that slender frame seized Pepys. He began to perceive that it does not always seek its abode in the swearing damning ruffling shouting of men, but may glide and insinuate like a delicate Italian stiletto damascened with gold, inserted between a man's ribs so finely that he will not know he has his death wound until the heart stops for good. His first conscious thought was the hope that as the lady was strong, so she might be merciful to him. That question, though unspoken also, she readily answered.

“Mr. Pepys, I am not altogether like my sex in more matters than one, and this you will find—I forget neither a benefit nor injury and am a fast friend and a shrewd foe. To you I owe a heavy debt of gratitude and it shall be repaid with interest. I see my way clear before me now in the great world and shall understand so to carry myself that I make my mark, but secretly as beseems me. And it is the more easy for me to serve you because there his Highness and I are at one in admiration of your faithful service. Now I will tell you this also for your information—my Lord Sandwich’s affairs do go from bad to worse, and he is very near up to his ears in debt. I solicit you as a friend to advance him no money on any security but plate or the like—being something solid—or you will never see return of your money. And I will tell you more. For the last two years my lord has endeavoured to make love to your wife.”

A cry like an explosion burst from Pepys. His face in a moment was purple—the veins corded on his temples. She glided on as smoothly as if she had observed nothing:

“And I can tell you for fact that she has repelled him so firmly as to destroy all hope in any but a blockhead, but so wisely as to make no mischief for you in the family, taking it all as a jest and so putting it by. And I speak what I know in saying you have a treasure of honesty in your wife, for a sparkling beauty like her will have the wasps about her like a ripe peach. Furthermore, his lordship’s son, my Lord Hinchinbroke, has cast sheep’s eyes in the same direction, and the sooner the lad is married to that plain piece, Lord Burlington’s daughter, the better, for when my lord’s affairs come to be more known there will be small market for his children. For which reason hasten also my Lady Jem’s marriage with young Carteret. And now, Mr. Pepys, I have done my part until we meet again, till when and always I am your very true friend.”

She rose as if to end the audience, and he rose too, but driven from his moorings and tossed on a sea of unreasoning anger.

“The wench—the wretch! She should have told me. To keep such goings and comings from her husband—I should have been the first to hear——”

“And to what end?” asked Rachel Becke calmly. “To make mischief for you with men you are obliged to and must meet daily and on whose good will your promotion depends? You should not seem to know it. No, Mr. Pepys, use reason and see that you have a wise woman to your wife and one that can steer a difficult course with honour and skill. What I may marvel at is that never in a moment of anger she has flashed the truth at you as women will, but doubtless you have given her no provocation.”

That direct thrust, whether intended as a threat or said in pure innocence, covered Pepys with confusion. He knew better than another what daily provocation known and unknown to her Elizabeth had had from him. Why, only the time before last he had gone down to Woolwich he had found her dressed out delightfully in the latest mode in a perruque of fair hair, an ashen blonde chosen to perfection to throw up her delicately drawn black eyebrows and the long agate eyes beneath. It changed her completely—giving her a totally different manner of loveliness, and surely such a quaint piece in her new rose brocaded French sac from Paris, very bunched over the hips and shortened to show slender ankles and feet, was never seen! She had raised one of the curtains which divided the parlour into two and stood there with a lifted arm disclosing herself and awaiting his commendation, and what was her reward? He was so mad with rage and in so horrid an anger at what he chose to consider her conceit of herself and folly that he would not vouchsafe one word and was ready to burst with fury which could find no vent because a friend of hers dressed in the like fashion was with her. But when they were alone, flourishing his clenched fist, swearing by God that he would not endure her fashions and whimsies, he had let himself loose with a vengeance, while she, cowering like a partridge in a brake, stunned with grief and shame, made no answer, a look in her eyes that should reproach him for many a long day if he had the heart to remember it. This rushed into his mind now, and her quiet almost dull manner the last time he had seen her. To do him justice shame was mingled with his sense of fear. He collected himself however as best he could and asked an important question.

“Lord, madam, we have our ups and downs like other married folk and no harm meant, but since you have the condescension to befriend me, tell me why you make this known to me that my wife had hidden.”

She held him with her steady eyes.

“Because, Mr. Pepys, I wish you well, and you should know servants gossip and tales spread and grow in the spreading, and my Lady Batten and the Penn family are stuffed with stories of how you have struck your wife and given her black eyes, wrung her by the nose and I know not what all, which is doubtless lies but none the less mischievous. It need make no mischief with my Lord Sandwich that you hear this from me, for you know how to keep a still tongue in your head, but had your wife complained it had been another pair of shoes. Further, I will tell you that the talk of how little store you set by your wife’s beauty reached so high as the Duke, and I think truly if she had laid herself out she could have caught his eye, which is now secured elsewhere. A word to the wise and so adieu. I know nothing of the

lady and, to be frank, care nothing, but will not see my ally hurt himself for my own sake as well as his. You are young and with the best of life before you.”

She gave him one of her incomprehensible smiles in ending, and left him in the most extraordinary confusion of mind, half proud of his wife’s troublesome beauty, half angry at it, pretty well convinced that not one woman in a thousand would have acted with her discretion, but with an uneasy conscience-stricken sense that if she could be so silent in one way she might very well in another that would please him less if he could but search it out.

He overwhelmed Rachel Becke with thanks which she received with quiet grace, doubly impressive now that she had reached the position to which God and her virtue had raised her, as was said of the lady supposed to be the King’s harlot. He felt that he did not understand her, but believed completely in powers which she would probably use wisely.

“The Lord send she leave her Papistry, for that will never serve the Duke,” he said to himself as London loomed up before him dark and forbidding after the clear air of Chelsea. He wondered if the Duke would even mention her to him. He might, for men made no secrets of such connections now, and he must be prepared. Pepys, however, in spite of his astuteness, did not fathom the most subtle stroke in Rachel Becke’s conversion, nor in spite of her delicate hint of the priests’ approval reflect how they would encourage the influence of the Catholic mistress nor how she would be trusted to the uttermost with the Duke’s secrets. She could guide him away from his most dangerous fanaticisms as no Protestant woman could do. Her deepest plans were entirely beyond his scope, man of the world as he thought himself.

As to Elizabeth, he must go more cautiously. He was crammed with good resolutions. It would be well to give her a fixed allowance for the trifles which please women, and he must above all keep himself from personal roughness and from careless infidelities or flirtations which would put him in the wrong. And it should not be difficult. After all, what was she but a little soft-winged French moth that he could crush between his fingers? He did not call her that but had a welling sense of tenderness in his heart when he recalled the lonely London house with its echoing rooms, and only patient Will Hewer to sit opposite him for their supper of such cold meats as could be prepared with least trouble. She would be practising her singing now to please him, eagerly learning to trill with her poor little defective ear which could never guide her to strike a note straight and true in the middle.

Somehow that defect touched him more tonight than perfection could have done.

“My poor wife—we are lost for want of her, Will,” he said seriously, draining his last glass of ale. “The house is not itself, nor we either.”

Will nodded agreement.

“There are few like,” he said with brevity.

Pepys looked at him shrewdly—and saw him as a young man steady daily who talked little and thought much, in a way a dreamer.

“Why so, Will? Your thoughts please me.”

Will hesitated. What he felt most keenly his master would not understand. Therefore he compromised:

“Why, for patience and behaviour and passing over her troubles. Madam does not cry out till she must however she ails. And she ails often.”

“Troubles? I trust none such come her way,” said Pepys hastily, his self-love and fear alight in a moment.

Will went on munching his beef and said no more, but possibly his words underlined some of Rachel’s, for Pepys began that night to consider the possibility of the long-discussed pearl necklace he had half promised long ago. But he had much else on his mind. He spent the whole of next afternoon with my Lady Sandwich planning all means to hasten the Carteret marriage, a movement very much to her taste. They settled for the earliest date possible, and he took himself off to get through the advance work which two days’ festivities would impose on him. Not a custom, not a merry-making would he scant as master of the ceremonies, and he sat up late writing, rushing through accounts, and preparing for an orgy of pleasure and himself in the character of the beneficent matchmaker.

His last thought was for Elizabeth sleeping far away at Woolwich and, as a wife should, dreaming of him and her home. As a matter of fact she was not sleeping but sitting in the alcoved window, head propped on one hand, patiently making signs and figures he would have very well recognized. His own final entry for the day in his diary ran thus:

Something put my last night’s dream into my head which I think is the best that ever was dreamed, which was that I had my Lady Castlemaine in my arms and at my pleasure, and then dreamed that this could not be awake but that it was only a dream. But that since it was a dream and I took such real pleasure in it what a happy thing it would be if when we are in our graves (as

Shakespeare resembles it) we could but dream such dreams as this and that then we need not to be so fearful of death as we are this plague time. It was dark before I could get home and so landed at Churchyard Stairs where to my great trouble I met a dead corpse of the plague just bringing down a pair of stairs. I shall beware of being late abroad again.

He went off to bed hoping for the same sensuous dream and had instead a very uncomfortable one that Elizabeth lay dead, her cheeks fresh with May-dew just gathered in the Woolwich meadows, charmingly patched, and crowned with the blonde hair he so roundly resented. Rachel stood above her looking down and smiling inscrutably. Elizabeth was as pretty as a picture, and he knelt beside her raining tears with a dream sense that all would be well presently and she would spring up and laugh roundly at him for his pains. However, it made him sleep ill and was perhaps the result of the powdered beef and three glasses of strong ale.

In considering the new convert who was so much in his mind very little did he realize what a strong antagonist the Duke's priests would have in the lamb they had welcomed to the fold. Mrs. Rachel was not troubled by his ignorance. She needed very little help from man or woman.

Chapter Twelve

HE was to meet Elizabeth next day at Sir George Carteret's where she had spent the night before, and after a day's hard work at the Office left Will Hewer to wind up, and dressing himself in a fine suit of dove-grey fine-cloth laced with silver and in his opinion the perfection of taste, betook himself to the riverside and tried to hail a boat to scull him down to Deptford, to Sir George Carteret's official house as Treasurer of the Navy. So many were taking their pleasure on the river that none was available excepting one with a gentleman already in the stern who beckoned in a friendly way that he would share with him. The two set off downstream with much pleasure, for presently the stranger broke into song in a full rich baritone in Sir Philip Sidney's famous canon "My true love has my heart and I have his," and Pepys immediately joined in with his light tenor without a word said, the two voices following and interlacing each other to such advantage that many boats slackened oars to hear, and at shouted entreaties they repeated it, such to Pepys's delight, whom the little adventure pleased to his very marrow. They followed it with one or two more old madrigals sung as duos, such as "Turn thine eyes this way, sweetheart," and concluding with the utmost spirit with "Go and be hanged; that's good-bye!" so that there was a little storm of hand-clapping from far and near, and the two song-companions bade one another adieu with many promises to renew their water-music at some convenient time. He went on his way to the Carterets' rejoicing and humming a song of his own with the utmost satisfaction.

Indeed life seemed a very pleasant affair to him as he landed at the steps and walked up to the handsome Carteret dwelling. It gave him pleasure that Elizabeth should be received there as a friend of the family and treated with due honour. It gave him much delight to mention to Mrs. Pierce, Jane Turner, and other ladies of his following and connections that his wife was a guest of the Carterets, and happily he could always be confident that the French ease and assured elegance of her carriage would do him honour, and that Sir George's gouty legs precluded pursuit on his part of any nymph, however charming. There she was safely and happily bestowed.

It was moreover a very charming nymph who met him in the large official drawing room with the somewhat grim portraits of Carteret ancestors majestically panelling the walls. Elizabeth wore her new suit of ash-colour silk flowered with pale pink roses which threw up her delicate dark beauty, a little shadowed under the eyes, but coral-lipped and with the smile that disclosed the tips of pearly teeth and pointed a sweet dimple at either side of her mouth. That was her great charm, that and her swan-throat and the long-lashed beauty of her eyes. Perhaps Pepys looked at her with new sight as a result of Rachel Becke's talk, but certainly he knew perfectly well that it was a beautiful woman and in the style of highest elegance who stood waiting for him.

She came slowly to meet him, and not with the tripping run he could remember long ago, but smiling and asking how he did, as a wife should.

“And does Jane keep a good table for you and Will? She is a stupid wench at best, and you should tell her her duty and rate her for a slut if she does it not. And has the tailor sent home your new suit for the wedding?”—She had a forced air of trying to illuminate their meeting with the sunlight of home.

He answered eagerly, and they sat on the big settee near the tall window with its draping velvet curtains, and he put his arm about her and drew her head to his shoulder, all in the proper fashion when husband and wife meet after a parting. But he was conscious that any warmth in the interview came from him and that even with him it was a little urged and affected. Time and distance were doing their usual work and the grass of disusage growing up between them. She would not care to hear of his Pierces and Knipps, and not many subjects of interest occurred to him at the moment, though he cudgelled his brains. He did not even know the names of most of her new acquaintances at Woolwich.

“We should not be so long apart, sweetheart!” he said with his lips against her ear. “The Lord will have husband and wife together as reason is!”

“The Lord?” she asked carelessly. “And what lord? Not many nowadays give it a thought.”

“The Lord of Heaven!” said Pepys with a kind of rebuking solemnity. He had thought that in spite of Rachel's suggestion he might perhaps mention the Sandwich episode, but was sure now that this would not be a well chosen occasion, and that in any case her manner did not encourage confidences. He could not lay a finger on anything blameworthy but was a trifle uneasy. Presently she disengaged herself and asked him to stand that

she might see the new suit from all points of view and so stepped back to have a good look, with her head on one side, and told him it set him off to perfection and threw all else he possessed into the shade, she concurring with him that the blue-grey ferrandin had not been altogether a success. And then the Carterets came in and the private talk ended.

But the Carterets! They were blossoming with enjoyment of the bridal status of the family and the charms and sweetness of the bride. They really did all the love-making, for Mr. Philip remained cold, reserved, and more than a little timid of approaches to the dangerous mystery of woman. The visit must be paid to the bride at Dagenhams next day, and he had simply but decidedly refused to undertake it unless supported by Mr. Pepys.

“For,” as he said, coming up to them now, pale and resolute, “I am not accustomed to the manners of young ladies and the sugared nothings that must be offered them, and it is very likely that my Lady Jem may take a disgust to me which I would be loath for as disappointing my good parents and hers.”

“Lord save us, Mr. Philip,” said Pepys, rallying him, “did any man ever hear the like, and you so handsome and well set a figure of a man that her young ladyship would die with love if you would but let her!”

“Why, and so I tell him, Mr. Pepys,” his mother interposed eagerly. “Look at his carriage and the way he holds up his head and tell me if any woman could resist him if he would be a little forthcoming. I ask you, Mrs. Pepys, that are a good judge, I am certain sure!”

Elizabeth thought it intensely comic to see a man so afraid, and if she could have run away behind the curtains would have laughed her heart out like a girl to see the tall stiff gawk in his smart clothes standing there like a ramrod and Pepys trying to butt him on from behind. It made the situation the more ridiculous that she did not consider Pepys’s own manners with women by any means perfect—after all, what could one expect from a family like the Pepys’ that had never climbed of late into good society until Samuel set forth to adventure! He was a little too florid in his compliments, she thought, and his familiarity was not inviting; it takes a gentleman for intimacies! She was certain that if she could get the young lout alone she could give him a hint or two worth all her Samuel’s posturings, but she only smiled with a wise kindness in her eyes at Lady Carteret.

“Indeed, Mr. Philip is very sure of his interest in my Lady Jem’s heart when she comes to know him. But I know well it is hard to go among so many strangers as my Lord Crew and my Lady Wright and what not, and it is most natural Mr. Philip should desire a friend with him.”

Pepys, even while dinner was progressing, was beginning his jokes, some quite as broad as they were long, about the advances expected of a bridegroom, and at each Philip Carteret flushed and stiffened into closer reserve. He had a good deal of young as well as natural dignity for which Pepys could make little allowance, and it galled him to the soul to hear these private affairs alluded to before the very servants carrying in the dishes and doubtless ready with their own jests outside the door. But his youth made him a helpless prey in Pepys's hands, and he grew more miserable and silent as the meal progressed, Elizabeth seeing and wincing at Pepys's broad good-humour and self-satisfaction as the friend of the family chosen to induct the heir into the mysteries of the marriage bower. To him it was so easy to attack a willing woman, so natural to take advantage of any weakness in the defense of the citadel that in his heart he despised the lad for a poor gawk at the game, not in the least comprehending his respect for the shyness and possible unwillingness of the girl he was to marry and of whose love he had no reason to be sure.

His own parents did not understand it either, but Elizabeth, catching a glimpse of misery under the rallying, began at last to pierce beneath the surface and pity him. After dinner she got him away while Pepys was engaged in professional talk with the Treasurer of the Navy on the costs of the new mole at Tangier, and so drew him into the shadow of the curtains.

“Mr. Philip, they tease you beyond what they should on what is really a very simple matter. Do not let them trouble you. My Lady Jem is most sweet and simple, and being a young maid she is most terribly afraid, for in your hand is all her hope. I beseech you to be good and merciful to her, for I have known her from a child and she deserves happiness.”

Now this was true art. It was a new point of view to the lad, it put him in his right place. It placed a gift in his hand for the giving. A flush that was not painful rose in his cheek, and he leaned forward eagerly where he had hitherto shrunk sensitively.

“Madam, I am but an unshaped lout, very backward to acquire manners, and I know little of how to take a lady by the hand and make my bow, but I swear to you I could as soon spit in the communion cup as affront my Lady Jem or do her modesty the least unkindness, and though I value Mr. Pepys's kindness and acquaintance with the world I do think I might do better alone had I but the courage—but to go alone among all those strangers makes me that I am like a caught rabbit in a snare.”

It touched in her a quality that life had not yet drawn on in her. She felt maternal pity for something in him as young and clean as childhood, and

this gave her beautiful eyes sweetness and her manner a gentle grace as she touched his velvet sleeve with light finger-tips.

“Dear Mr. Philip, I understand you very well, and believe me I who am a woman know the way to a woman’s confidence far better than those who so instruct you. Let me say a word. There is the bold sort that will have men come ruffling and swaggering and so take possession, and there is the other that looks for finikin airs and graces and thinks nothing of the heart beneath. And there is the shy sort that looks for nothing but fear and shame but can very well understand what is better. My Lady Jem is but a child, all said and done, and it is the look of kindness and protection she seeks in your eye now. The rest will follow. For my part I would have you put on no airs and graces but approach her simply as boy and maid together.”

Something in her own speech moved her with great surprise at herself. Memory, that sad artist, painted a picture of her one-time belief that hand in hand with a young lover she had entered the Spring season of love that would open into summer but never know autumn or winter. And now—the best she could hope was that amid coarse jangling they could somehow hold together by means of the respites between and fill the place of those dead paradisaical joys with such withering pleasures as the world offers. They grew rich now and mounted with confidence among great persons, but all the time anger and jealousy ambushed them. Was not she herself just stealing a march upon her husband which should put him at her mercy?—a heavy thought though she believed it needful. Two heavy tears brimmed in her eyes, and young Carteret, thinking it pure sympathy, caught her kind hand and kissed it as he had never kissed a woman’s hand yet.

“Madam, you are goodness itself, and believe me neither I nor my wife will forget. Will you do me the favour to glide into Mr. Pepys’s ear that I have disowned and forbid all the coarse wedding merriment that most folks choose, such as putting the bride to bed with a rabble rout of mirth and jests, and I have wrote to my Lord Sandwich to that effect.”

She promised, seeing his agony, and her good taste fully approving him.

“You have the right notions, Mr. Philip, and be sure of my Lady Jem’s gratitude, and indeed very soon it will be only the coarse sort who have not the manner of high company that will support such loose behaviour.”

She spoke warmly, and his eyes adored her with all a boy’s gratitude. Presently she got Pepys alone under the shadow of the curtains.

“That boy Philip is at the end of his patience. Go easily with him,” she said hurriedly. “He has no taste for ribaldry and grossness——”

“Ribaldry and grossness!” Pepys’s temper was up in a moment. “Lord help us if a man must be so squeamish that he must run to the women and whine for a little hearty wedding joke that would rise most men’s spirits! He is a mighty modest man. If all the maids were as backward God knows there would be no weddings at all! But for all that, I own he has a good nature and pretty understanding.”

“That is all I would say,” said Elizabeth touching a point with artful finger that Pepys could seldom resist. “I am told in the great families there is now coming in a fashion to have all very modest and reserved with weddings, and a kind of decency—I would not have our doings remarked as not being in the mode. It serves us very ill.”

Young Philip was left in peace for the evening, and he shot a look of thanks at Elizabeth.

The next day after dinner at the Carterets’ Pepys set off to Dagenhams with his pupil, in the position of bear-leader, and blossomed forth into many theories of love-making based more on guesswork than experience, for his own adventures had been with a class of women who took him at his own face-value and required little enough wooing. Tall Mr. Philip, brown-eyed and golden-haired, listened with his own reservations which would have surprised his instructor.

“You should not be backward to kiss her, Mr. Carteret; you should have her lips on arrival. The young lady will expect that, and an arm about her middle. A man should have the appearance that he is swept away almost beyond manners by her beauty and so presses forward to the prize. She thinks herself despised otherwise.”

“And all women to be treated alike, Mr. Pepys?” he inquired dryly.

“In matters of love all women are alike, sir. They are creatures of conquest and ask but to be dragged at the wheels of the victor. Some will ask more manners than others, and my Lady Jem, coming of a high family, will expect a flourish and a bow, and you should take her by the hand with an air of possession (the right hand always) and flourishing a laced handkerchief in the other. But first a bow, with your hand thrust in the bosom of your coat as if you were somebody indeed. As much as to say, ‘Lord, madam, I am your slave but a master elsewhere!’ You follow me?”

“Yes—but supposing madam does not take it that way but reads me for a long-eared ass?” inquired the pupil gravely.

“Lord! was ever a young man so awkward! Sure Lady Jem has no luck in lovers!” thought Pepys to himself, almost in despair and ignorant of all

the violent thoughts behind the fixed young eyes.

“Sure, you know the way to take a lady by the hand and lead her, and if not done what is she to think?”

“I believe for my part it is extremely difficult to know what a lady may think,” said the lover doggedly. “Are you sure you know it, Mr. Pepys?”

A little staggered, Pepys protested:

“I am not without my experiences, Mr. Carteret, else could not venture an opinion, but if you think you know better——”

“I think nothing. I do not know!” he answered, in what Pepys swore inwardly was the dullest, most insipid manner he had ever heard, and the rest of the way they rode in silence or discoursing of indifferent subjects such as Mr. Carteret’s late adventures on board Lord Sandwich’s ship in the fight with the Dutch, and Pepys was obliged to own he gave an excellent good account of himself, speaking like a young man of spirit and modesty who had given his proofs in danger and distress, though there too he spoke reservedly as if with a fear of boasting. It was dusk when the great house of Dagenhams loomed up before them in its trim and stately gardens, and Pepys’s heart warmed to see the wide door flung hospitably open and the group of gorgeously liveried servants waiting to receive them with all due and awful respect. Then indeed he glowed to think that he who had been so poor a clerk should come to such honour that not only the lacqueys, but my Lord Crew and all the fine company should flock out to receive him. His profusion of bows and smiles was overwhelming. He thrust his hand into his bosom and flourished his handkerchief as he saluted the ladies here and there and everywhere, bowing low.

Mr. Philip, to the manner born, made nothing of the servants and greeted the company as a shy lad will, but anyone watching might see how his eyes sought the little seventeen-year bride standing shyly back in the corner by the great mantelpiece in the hall, white against the dark oak panelling. Their looks met. She dropped a stiff little curtsy, looking down; he a stiff bow—no more—but each in that moment knew a something of the other that set two hearts beating in the same measure. Lady Jem looked to him like a little pink garden rose, small and sweet and nothing at all to fear. “But I will—it will be when we are alone,” beat Mr. Philip’s heart, and hers answered: “When we are alone—alone!”

Pepys was disgusted by the way the lad drew back. He really apologized for it to Lord Sandwich and was almost hurt by the jovial answer that a man who could look into a cannon’s mouth could not always face a pretty girl, and his lordship added carelessly:

“By the way, Cousin—I have made up my mind to sell the house at Chelsea. I have no use for it now my health’s recovered, and it is a useless cost. These are times when a man should not be hampered with houses more than he has use for.”

“By no means. And has your lordship found a purchaser?” Pepys was pricking up his ears with interest.

“Why, as to that I believe I have! But not to be spoke of until concluded. And now after dinner let us leave the young couple to their love-making that have never yet had a word alone together. Do as you would be done by is a good motto in love as elsewhere.”

But Pepys protested. No—no. His pupil was far too shy, and the lady would be far too much surprised. Let all go gently for fear of risks. He would ask how the bridegroom had liked the look of her. He did, invading his bedroom to do it, and got but a cold answer.

“I liked her.”

The truth was that Philip Carteret could have smote this “jiggling smirking clerk” (as he called him in his outraged young soul) to the earth. Not a rag of satisfaction should he wring from him!

“Lord!—the dull insipid fool! How can any woman bear with him!” thought the inquisitor, getting out of the chamber to more congenial company. He had not happened to catch the look in my Lady Jem’s eyes as the tall golden-haired young bridegroom bowed stiffly and silently before her. She had heard from her father of his knightly behaviour in the Dutch war and had taken him into her house of dreams.

But next day again Pepys pounced upon his victim, fussing over his clothes and the set of his hair, and dictating the compliments he must make to the bride and her elders, and getting but a stiff acknowledgment of his officious offices in return. And so to the village church by coaches, where a notorious evil-liver made his unpleasant confession in public to the edification of all who listened and the giggling of the younger rustics who heard the Church’s censure delivered pompously through the nose of the county vicar, very conscious of the great persons gracing his congregation. And all the while my Lady Jem’s head bent low like a blushing flower.

Philip Carteret had not led his lady by the hand as directed. He had only looked at her, and had the corner of a small smile with dropped eyes in answer. But after dinner, with much fussing and whispering and importance Pepys shepherded the elders and guests out of the long gallery and left the young people in a corner, the others laughing and jesting outside. He would

have given much to have been master of the ceremonies behind the door, with a salacious curiosity and a more than sneaking fear that his pupil might disgrace him.

As a matter of fact, when the door closed Mr. Philip had marched up tall and pale and stood before the little bride who rose instinctively. His arms hung by his side, and his expression was set as when the Dutch cannon roared at sea. Yet a girl might read something behind it.

“My lady, that buzzing busybody that means well, but I would were at the bottom of the sea, tells me I have no manners to please a lady. But this I say for truth: I have known you a child and then forgot your sweetness. I have seen your fair face again and I am your man to love and serve and honour you while I live. If this will please you, take me, for I am yours.”

Possibly Lady Jem should have expected more. Yet she found this enough. He stretched out his arms in answer to her look, and she came into them and laid her cheek upon his breast. And presently, she sitting on his knee, his lips to hers, they rested in a great hope and passionate content beyond Mr. Pepys’s imagining, and sweet was the interchange of love and promises, sweet beyond all dreaming but of two young unsullied souls. But when they emerged, though Love had kindled his fire in my Lady Jem’s cheeks and eyes, Mr. Philip was cold and apart as ever. Pepys buzzed about her for information as to her liking of the bridegroom now they had met in truth, and she answered shyly also that she still could be content with her parents’ disposition of her.

“Which God knows do surprise me, he being so cold as never to touch her!” related Pepys later to Lady Sandwich at Deptford. Philip and he departed next day to meet again for the wedding, and Philip thanked his instructor for pains taken, as they returned. But it was much on Pepys’s mind, and he had a talk with Elizabeth as he conveyed her down to Woolwich before returning to London and his work.

“A greater fool with women does not walk this earth. Sure a machine and no man and as dull and tasteless as white of egg unsalted. For my part I pity my young lady with all my heart.”

Elizabeth sighed. She was aware that Philip’s opinion of her husband would be surprising to him if obtainable, but said nothing.

“And Lord, to see how frightened all the great folk were for their skins of anything that comes out of London because of the plague! I was forced to tell them, winking upon my Lord Sandwich, that I live entirely at Woolwich, else they would all have given me the go-by!”

She sighed again. Life stung her here and there in unexpected places—so oddly mixed was her husband’s nature that when she could have loved him most he most repelled her, and that in little ways intangible as air.

“It will be better when I can return and we can live together again!” she said. Then after a pause: “Lady Sandwich tells me she thinks my lord is broken for good and all with Mrs. Rachel Becke and that the Chelsea house is up for sale. But she thinks also he has some doubt or sorrow in his mind about it that she does not understand. For my part I could like that young woman. She has an air and carriage—I have not seen one like her. I would like to know what comes her way now she is rid of my lord. Do you hear anything?”

“Nothing—how should I?” said Pepys, lying easily. That was a matter he could not commit even to his diary. But it annoyed him that she should ask even innocently. He had grown so free during those weeks of the plague that it did not please him to feel a hint of the whip, and he had found a trace of suspicion in her tone.

Elizabeth said no more. At Woolwich they parted with a kiss not of the warmest, and he returned to London, which had now grown to seem a castle of freedom, though he still sighed sometimes for the comfort of his home.

Chapter Thirteen

THE day of Lady Jem's wedding dawned bright and glad with sunshine, and so eager was Pepys for the gaiety and importance of the occasion that jealousy passed from his mind like a mist at dawn. But as he looked at his fine clothes the thought struck him forcibly, as indeed it was doing constantly nowadays, what a fool he had been to marry and hamper his vagabond freedom with a wife's prohibitions.

"If I was to do it she is as well as another, but best of all it is to be a man at large and none to say him nay," he thought as he busied himself in pleating the folds of the fine lace cravat which was to deck his throat. Certainly marriage was part of the natural order of things, and sooner or later a man must come to it if he needed security for his comforts in old age, though men lived at large with loose women at any age. The tradesman class to which his family was reduced had left its mark upon him in a hampering sense of decency which troubled neither the class above him nor yet that below and he could not altogether regret that he had chosen the path of respectability tempered by secret indulgences. It would be detrimental if it could be said of him that he was a loose liver, especially with the almost certain consequence that it would be believed he was plundering the Navy for his pleasures—a thing much advanced already against the heads of his departments.

No—perhaps all was for the best, and his enjoyments must be a pathetic surrender to the weakness of the flesh and in secret. Elizabeth was well enough if he could have waited for her until the fire of youth was out and he could sit soberly by the hearth and play on the flageolet and solace himself with his books and a dutiful wife knitting opposite in her chair.

He got out piece after piece of his rich clothing, brushing it with scrupulous nicety and singing scraps and snatches from his songs—"Gaze not on swans" and "At dead low ebb"—with a warm and thrilling sense of their beauty and his own powers, and this in spite of the deep tolling of the bell of St. Olave's for some poor soul gone to a tortured death in the plague. That was fate and might be his own next day, but it did not disturb him now.

He had the kind of sensuous fatalism which, calling it the will of God, finds sorrow and pain in others a dark background for the heightening of selfish pleasures to be snatched, as it were, in its despite.

When he was dressed he pulled the glass to the best advantage for the light and contemplated himself with pride. It was a very rich suit of purple silk loose at the knees and finished there with deep ruffles of silk and lace. The coat was long, falling almost to the end of his breeches and sumptuously trimmed with broad gold lace down the front and about the wide sleeves with gold cord and buttons very rich and fine. His beaver hat also sported a gold lace gathered into the new-fashioned French cockade at one side. It did not please him to think of the cost for though he knew he could pay for it the soul in him still had the thriftiness of a narrow bringing up, but it gave him the keenest pleasure to know that alone and unaided he had achieved the position which made it a suitable garment to be worn in the high company for which he was bound that day. Such a man might certainly indulge himself here and there if it could be done with safety! A little confusion in the street—four men carrying out a long stiff bundle wrapped in coarse sheets hurriedly tied together, and the distant slowly nearing rumble of the “dead cart”—startled but did not damp his spirits, though he interrupted “At dead low ebb” to utter a pious aspiration while he pulled out the knot of his cockade, and then stood back to take a final view in the glass, standing on a chair to command the fall of his breeches. It really was a radiant picture in the glass, and the colour suited his dapper little figure to perfection, if the gold somewhat overweighted it.

“It is mighty rich and fine!” he thought to himself gravely, “and there will be none there to overpass it, be the second what it may!”

It was scarcely past dawn when he made his way down the almost empty street, but with great gazing from those who had the happiness to meet the brilliant apparition on its way to the boat. He had a cloak to wrap about him if needful, for who can trust the English climate? but it was already so warm that he carried it slung on his arm and really illuminated the narrow streets leading to the waterside, carrying with him the licence and wedding ring, and feeling himself the backbone of the whole proceeding.

There with the most gracious condescension to the watermen he took boat and so down to Deptford, where pretty Mrs. Bagwell, having been advised of his coming, was at gaze at a point of vantage to see him go by in his wedding garment. It would not have been Pepys if he had not enjoyed the tribute of hands flung to Heaven in admiration—“For indeed the King’s self could never be more splendid and not so set off by (God forgive me for

disloyalty!) his clothes!” was her cry as she stood gasping with admiration. There was no time for more than a kiss or two and a hasty promise to meet and make much of her next week, so carelessly given as to make her realize how little place a woman of the people could have in the gorgeous world where gentlemen wore purple and gold as a part of their habit, and then he shot on to his meeting with the happy parents of the bridegroom—Sir George and Lady Carteret each equally splendid in their own austerer way and ready to take boat to the ferry.

“Good-morrow, Mr. Pepys—that was the occasion and making of this happy day!” cried Sir George, loud and rubicund with pleasure, and my lady’s smile and curtsy could scarcely have been more gracious if the Duke himself had been in question. But, Lord bless me! with what anxiety did they perceive the tide out and a long delay in prospect before the horse-boat could bring the coach and horses to their rescue! Even Pepys’s jokes were exhausted, and a very serious question of how the ring and licence were to be forwarded came next. He declined to ride hard lest it should ruffle his fine feathers, but a horseman was secured and sent forward at full gallop to Dagenhams with ring and licence in his pocket while the coach and six jumbled along after him, Pepys talking intimately with the Carterets.

He was inclined to think the least Sir George would do would be to present him with a handsome piece of plate in recognition of his services and at the very moment Sir George was turning over in his mind the articles he could best spare and resolving on a pair of candlesticks he and my lady had never really liked.

The six horses they had engaged did their best but Pepys was anxiously reflecting into what miserable pitfalls the bridegroom would slide without his connivance, little guessing with what exultation the ring and licence were received by Mr. Philip with the news that Mr. Pepys was speeding as fast as six horses could carry him but would undoubtedly be late. Such time and tide as wedding hours delay for no man, and when the sweating horses galloped up the Dagenhams drive the house was empty and the wedding party at church.

“I said it. I knew it!” sobbed Lady Carteret. “It was not for nothing I spilt the salt last night! O, Mr. Pepys, my son! How will he have borne himself without your support? He will have been most grievously troubled! And my little bride!”

“God send all is well!” responded Pepys with gravely puckered brow. “God send the licence did not fail. Hi!—what comes here!”

It was a coach and four with favours rolling up the drive, with a noise of following wheels, and Pepys darting nimbly to the door flung it open.

“It is done, your ladyship! Mr. Philip, is all well?”

The bridegroom dismounted gravely, handing out a very serious little bride. They had resolved together in the coach, half in a spirit of mischief like two naughty children, half in real annoyance at his interference, to damp Mr. Pepys’s ardour in every possible way, and my Lady Jem in her white brocade was as downcast and grave as a little piece of dainty porcelain set apart from all its companions on a mantelpiece, and viewing them all a little sourly in consequence.

All crowded about her for the lucky kiss, but her frozen look so intimidated Pepys that he hung back glimmering in all his golden splendour until Lady Sandwich hailed him:

“What, Cousin—not kiss my little Jem when ’twas yourself made this happy marriage? Make way, everyone, for Mr. Pepys!”

It reassured him, but Lady Jem’s coldly tendered cheek held him in such check that even at dinner when the wine and toasts went round and he himself was called for to speak he thought it safer with Mr. Philip’s bright still eye on him to omit one or two of the jokes he had specially prepared. It might be the newest fashion in such circles to be modest, and quick as a chameleon to assume the tone of his company he turned to my Lady Carteret.

“I was obliged for my sins to attend an able citizen’s wedding t’other day in Gracious Street, your ladyship, and Lord! how the familiarity and licence of speech disgusted me, but all this is so seemly and sober as does my heart good to see!”

“It was my son’s wish and the bride’s that all should be done in the ordinary way even to cards and prayers,” responded Lady Carteret, “and so it must be, though myself I think a little laughter not amiss. See how she looks up at him, Mr. Pepys! I think they will do well.”

It was certainly a surprise to him after the great banquet which would lend itself so well to retailing in his London circles, to find himself on his knees facing his chair in the family circle while the family chaplain implored a blessing on the King, the Queen, the Duke and Duchess of York, the country, the people, with special clauses for the plague and the wedding. It was so long that only my Lady Castlemaine seemed to be omitted of all possible chances of intercession. And so after prayers soberly to bed; only Mr. Pepys insinuated himself into the bridegroom’s unlocked dressing room

and there was very merry after his wont with jests which very nearly compelled Philip Carteret to put him to the door several times. He was then called to the bride's chamber where the company were assembled in full dress, the bride in a most fascinating negligee after the French mode (brought over by Will Hewer from Paris), and into bed they went with all the solemnity due to the occasion. Pepys, making himself the last to file out of the room, darted back and kissed the flushed bride on her pillows, and very nearly received Mr. Philip's fist in his eye for his pains. But this he could not know and had the pleasure, standing by, to see the parents on both sides draw the heavy curtains gravely, when all retired, and the first word the bridegroom uttered to the bride was "Thank God!"

It is needless to say Pepys was the earliest in their room next morning with his congratulations, Lord Sandwich and Sir George Carteret having gone abroad for a walk in the dewy garden. The bridegroom darted into his dressing-closet at the noise of his coming, but on second thoughts returned instantly sooner than leave the shrinking bride alone to stand the fusillade of Mr. Pepys's congratulations. Both flushed in the face, he noted, and well enough pleased with each other. But not with him.

"We will never admit that jackanapes to our house, sweetheart!" said Mr. Philip returning from escorting the visitor to the door. "'Tis my marvel he did not keep us company all night."

But Pepys, perfectly satisfied with himself, was already out and away in the garden to overtake the two grandees from whose talk he could not bear to be parted, and wishing them a brace of hearty grandsons in nine months he joined their walk and was happily rewarded, for my Lord Sandwich addressed him with becoming gravity.

"Mr. Pepys; Cousin; I have reserved it till this morning in the presence of Sir George Carteret, your good friend and mine, to tell you you are chosen to a great and signal honour (yet well deserved). It is that his Highness the Duke of York has desired that you may ever present our naval information to him, and furthermore that you are made at his instance Surveyor General of the victualling business of the Navy, which I need not tell you is a position of great worth, not so much for the salary, though that cannot be despised, as from what may be honourably made by purchases and presents, so that you may hope to be a man well able to look the world in the face in a very short time. And I take pleasure in thinking the fair Mrs. Pepys that is fit to grace any company will find herself with her coach and diamonds before we know where we are!"

Sir George Carteret added a few hearty words of congratulation, and Pepys, almost stunned by his good luck which he had long longed for and indeed none knew better than he that this was one of the most profitable posts in the gift of the Commissioners, bowed and smiled and bowed, preserving the perfect distance which would please the two bewigged and laced grandees. He had the tact which comes from shrewdest observation and would never be out of his place except with a boy like Philip Carteret.

Even wedding jollities must end, and as he stepped into the Carteret coach to drive with them to Deptford, greeted by rows of bowing servants, he could not but feel that this business had been a very profitable one for him. Indeed, what with his own gains and the intervention of Rachel Becke, whose hand he thought he might clearly discern in the Duke of York's action, he saw his fortunes mounting so steadily that it seemed there was scarcely any height to which he might not look. It was while Sir George Carteret, half overcome by the good wines, was snoring in the coach and her ladyship gently nodding beside him, with a less thunderous note, that the notion of becoming a Parliament man took life in his brain. His own career in the Navy Office had taught him what interest a member could command, and what pleasant evidences of power came his way.

Joined with his naval position and each playing into the hands of the other, it would mean a steady hand-over-hand climb through all the stages of good fortune to riches, and in a way perfectly inoffensive and usual in days when people winked more than a little at the shifts with which public men lined their pockets. He himself was full of good wine also, but the brilliance of this prospect banished all drowsiness, and he sat staring out of the window at the passing trees and hedges, jumbling along in the ruts, jolting over stones and feeling nothing of it all so was his mind preoccupied with visions of ascent. He must not be too hasty but must balance himself securely on the step gained before looking higher still. On this he might drop a hint to Rachel's calm good sense and safely leave it to work in such hands as hers.

Years ago he had said to Elizabeth, little knowing the value of money at the time:

“If I were worth two thousand pounds I would and I could be a knight and keep my coach.” He had long over-passed that humble mark in money, and knew the coach and knighthood must still be viewed down a long perspective;—but it was coming—coming! The chief point of consideration was—how much of his hope could be trusted to Elizabeth?

Would it turn her pretty head?—He thought fondly at the moment of how silky were the black waves of hair and how attractive the look in her eyes under upcurled lashes when he drew her to him and kissed her on the lips. But also he knew by bitter experience, as he considered it, how capable she was of dashing out without word said and possessing herself of any pair of gimcrack earrings which might catch her fancy and leaving him to settle the bill! If women could only be as biddable as beautiful, but, Lord! from the King (with his Lady Castlemaine) down, they took advantage of any man fool enough to show he valued them.

True, Elizabeth could be daunted into tears and momentary submission, but only after a battle-royal which left the victor tattered and torn. Perhaps, he reflected, it would be better if she were not quite so pretty. No doubt a beautiful wife is a feather in a man's cap but to be a comfort also she must have the pliable disposition which he cultivated in vain in her. Had she not called him "pricklouse"?—dreadful word!—Had she not once hissed at him that he was a devil, before her companion Ashwell! True, it was after he had pulled her by the nose on some little quick answer which displeased him, but should any decent wife retort in such foul terms in any circumstances? He could not think it dutiful. No. He would go very easily until his income was perfectly assured, then enlarge gradually, and at all times keep the facts of his gettings to himself.

So wrapped in pleasant reflections, the wine overcame him also, and sliding into sleep he added his trombone to the duet already proceeding in the coach, and they jogged along to Deptford, where all were roused, and yawning he there took leave of the pair with just the touch of respectful geniality which pleased them both, thanking Sir George for his "pleasant humour" which had been the illumination of the whole ceremony.

So home to the Office and his house where with anxious folding away of the splendours of his wedding garment he tumbled into bed, resolving to see Rachel Becke as soon as possible with a gift that would please her rather difficult taste. He had the perfect present at hand and without any cost to himself, for a handsome diamond ring had come his way a few days before, being a present given him by Mr. Dick Vines's brother on Pepys getting him the place of purser on board one of the King's ships;—a comfortable little bit of jobbering agreeable to both sides and no harm to anyone. And Rachel Becke would value the grateful heart that had gone to such cost to please her. True, he had intended it for Elizabeth, but——

He would have gone about this business next day (and indeed had the ring in his pocket) but for work at the Office and a dinner at Sir William

Batten's where he spent the afternoon, drinking with a merry party whose roaring jests contrasted oddly enough with the empty streets outside, where a passing footfall echoed now and then as if some man were fleeing silently before the frightful Death at his shoulder.

Even among the jests intruded grisly tales of the plague and the swishing of the scythe of the Great Reaper. The Mortality Bills had mounted horribly. Sir William let drop that poor Will, the ale-seller at the Westminster Hall door, a harmless fellow whom they all knew, was dead with his wife and three children all in the same day, and Pepys looking out into the narrow streets with their curdled heaped garbage and the clouds of flies buzzing above it almost resolved that he would risk the City no more, but transact his business so far as possible from his lodgings at Greenwich, where at least there were green grass and trees and open water to gaze on, though it was not wholly innocent of the plague.

"You would do wisely!" said Sir William carelessly, when he hinted at this notion. "If this goes on they will keep a girdle of fires about the City and ring the doomed wretches in from harming others. A man may as well order his coffin before he goes in and out there. And they are now fain to bury the corpses by day as well as night, for the number can no longer be kept secret, and all hale men are ordered to keep indoors after nine at night that the sick may take the air. It may be said the stench of it is thick in the streets."

This resolved Pepys that he would write to my Lord Arlington to move the King for the transference of the Navy Office to Greenwich. He had given his proofs of courage but no man need court certain death. He did it instantly on leaving and went down to Woolwich next day to see Elizabeth and give her news of the wedding.

She had never looked prettier and fresher than when sitting by the window in the comfortable little parlour of the rooms at Woolwich, and the air breathed sweet as flowers after the close suffocation of the London streets. It felt like home, like a refuge after the anxieties of Seething Lane, and as she pulled a low stool beside him and sat leaning her arm on his knee and looking up half doubtful, half affectionate, with the look in a child's eye when it loves but is not quite assured of its reception, it occurred to him that there might be a better way than that of holding himself apart from her if the King should agree to the transference of the Navy Office to Greenwich. He told her of the frightful increase in the plague and went on smoothing back the mist of dark curls about her white brows.

“And what if I stayed here, Bess, for good and all, and went over to Greenwich on my business, keeping on my rooms there for special occasions? The great parlour is a neat room for dancing if we had a little good company in now and again and you turned your mind that way. I would sleep here, and go over daily to Greenwich for business, except nights I must be late there.”

She clapped her hands eagerly:

“Good, good! O, I have been so afeard lest any infection get you, and indeed any day you might be forbid to come here from the plaguey City, and then where are we? You have written already to the King?”

“Already, and look for his answer tomorrow. Well, the sooner the better, and I will send down the boy with my things. Lord, Bess, I must put on my new fine silk suit and new periwig tomorrow, and I swear I am half afraid to wear the hair, for they are talking how none dare wear a periwig after the plague for fear it is got cheap off the heads of the dead corpses.”

“O, don’t wear it, don’t wear it!” she shuddered. “Don’t bring it here. Throw it in the river and wear your own hair, and come away quick—quick! Mercer’s brother writes her the people will come in crowds with the corpses to see them buried, and, Lord! to consider their madness in doing it! I shall never have the heart for London again. And even at Greenwich, at Coombe Farm, young Mercer tells that about twenty-one people died of the plague in three or four days, and he saw a dead corpse in a coffin lie in the Close unburied. O, be careful, for the plague makes men as cruel and careless beasts to one another, so care for yourself and me!”

The tears stood in her eyes and drowned her smile, and something in her expression and the trouble she showed so moved him that with a motion very different from what he had intended he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the little box secured with folds of twine and wax but fortunately not addressed. After all, it would please her to the very heart and no doubt some present for the lady of importance would turn up in a few days, for now he was climbing so fast it seemed that all the world would give him a shove up. Only the day before had come a noble silver warming pan fit to warm my Lady Castlemaine’s own bed if need were. The next gift might be better still.

But unfortunately he could not resist improving the occasion to Elizabeth. The ring must not go for nothing.

“If my Bess thinks of me I think of her in my heart of hearts; here is proof positive of no straying fancy as she is too apt to flout me with on small

trivial occasions that no wise woman would raise, but of a fixed passion worthy to be trusted through thick and thin!"

She took the box eagerly, but the words got her a little on the edge, though she would not show it yet, but smiled wickedly with a glint in dark eyes and dropped lashes.

"Which is thick and which is thin?" she asked demurely. "We may take Mrs. Knipp for thick, for she weighs a good ten stone if I mistake not. And who for thin? Mrs. Lane—the seamstress in Westminster Hall—the painted Maypole? No—don't frown. I'll trust you with either, for sure no man with an eye in his head would look at such wenches twice."

He frowned and sullenly. The first name was no surprise, but what did she know of the second? The fool he had been to ask her opinion long since on the beauty of the pretty seamstress who sold her wares at the stall in Westminster Hall! He made a snatch at the box, but she clutched it in one hand with dancing eyes and flung the other arm about his neck.

"And was it cross, and did it think its Bess—— No, no. I was joking to fright you. If you knew, I am as proud as proud that you stayed in London while the rest ran away. A woman likes her man to do the like. And as to this pretty present—if it is worth twopence or two pounds I will like it well because you thought to bring it. Here is six kisses in payment, one on each eye, one on each ear, one on each cheek. And one, overpaid, on the mouth."

Clouds vanished. He could not resist her in that mood, or with more effort than he was inclined for at the moment. She took her scissors and cut the knots and prized the little lid open, and there wrapped in silk was the diamond ring, a sparkler indeed, and her first. Did the thought cross her mind of what glittering toys she might have had from other givers if she had chosen? If so, certainly with no regret. Her eyes outshone the jewels of Golconda as she let fly a second shower of kisses after the first.

"But, dearly beloved, you must put it on my finger for a second wedding ring. Here—over the gold ring. And say—yes, say, 'With this ring I thee wed, with my body thee I worship, and with all my worldly goods——' No, I care nothing for that, but love the rest. Dear, why do we ever quarrel? For my life I cannot tell. Can you? There is no need."

He repeated the little formula and kissed the finger and both sat admiring the brilliance of the gem as she flashed it here and there to catch the sunbeams. But he could not honestly say to himself that he saw no reason why they ever quarrelled. He saw several, without knowing how they could be ended. He considered her a born coquette. What had she been doing just now but tantalizing and coquetting with him and so coaxing the ring out of

him which he never meant her to have? And if a woman thinks it worth while to coquette with her bounden husband, on whom will she try her hand next? The cursed Pembleton? And if my lord and Lord Hinchingbroke and others had ventured to make love to her must it not have been because of that manner of speaking and looking which he could not dislike when applied to himself but thought indefensible when others took a share?—"He comes too near who comes to be denied!" was an old true saying. Why—even Will Hewer!—He had begun to think Will made excuses far too frequent for little trips to Woolwich. Could it be—— Perhaps not her fault at all. Almost certainly not—but green lads are fools! Good Lord—women! Why had he ever married?

That question was becoming an echo to many thoughts—and even as it crossed his mind she looked up at him, laughing and shaping her lips for a kiss, and he caught her to him, the sweet tormenting nuisance, and kissed her, and laid his face against her until she cried out that the shaven chin scratched her smoothness, and kissed her again on the word, and so they made much of each other and had their brief moment of barbed content. But as she disengaged herself he asked carelessly if Will had been down again yesterday, and when she answered, No, with surprised eyes adding, Had he sent him on any errand? he half guessed evasion in them and knew himself a fool for his pains. O, the difficult business of marriage! He would and would not live at peace, longed to and was tripped up by little obstacles none could foresee.

Yet that evening was quiet bliss, for she and Barker fell to singing, which pleased him pretty well, Elizabeth taking mighty pains and proud she should come to trill—and O! the flush in her cheek and sparkle when in spite of her still defective ear he admitted himself mighty pleased with her improvement. She would give it time or anything, she declared, if only he could like to listen. She did not say that rivalry with pert Mrs. Knipp whose singing he found so fascinating was the spur. He must guess that if he could.

She listened with delight to his flageolet, and when he took the guitar, an instrument he was coming to like as an accompaniment, she called Mercer in to hear him sing "At dead low ebb," and led the applause until he thought himself the Grand Bashaw and she the chief favourite of the harem. And afterwards, his eyes aching, she read aloud to him, that being one of her accomplishments, Mr. Boyle's discourse upon the style of the Scripture, stifling a yawn now and then while he admired the stilted splendour of the periods.

“A very fine piece and excellently well read!” he said when they turned to their cold powdered beef before bed.

A happy evening—if it could always be like that and no intruders, she thought. What, *what* was it that made men mad to run after strange women that would strip and plunder them of all, even to their happiness at home?

So in great joy and content to bed, and she fell asleep with the ring on her hand like a child, and her head on her husband’s breast like a woman. Both elements were oddly enough mixed in her.

Chapter Fourteen

IT so happened that Pepys going to Deptford Dockyard on business which all the world might know and pleasure which none must guess, met with Mr. Evelyn, that most polished scholar and gentleman, walking along a country lane, meditating and in perfect content with solitude, a thing very astonishing to Pepys, who was never happy alone except for a short interval with a book. How little could either guess that each was to write an undying record of the events of daily life and yet so different in spirit that none could believe they sprang from the same planet! But men who know each other well may inhabit very different worlds. Pepys like all England venerated Mr. Evelyn and would have chosen his good opinion before any other as carrying more weight and value. Of Pepys Mr. Evelyn knew nothing. The Pepys he sought and respected did not entirely exist at present, whatever he might do in years to come. This ideal Pepys was a young man of amiable cheerfulness, much to be admired for a grave morality and strong sense of the lack of decency exhibited in Court life and public affairs, a young man of delightful eagerness to be instructed in all news of research and all advances in science; one, in short (to use a merry phrase of Pepys's own) with child to see or hear any admirable novelty.

All this gave Evelyn a warm liking for the man, for he himself enjoyed nothing more than pouring out instruction from bottomless cisterns upon a docile hearer. He little knew what an unsuspected critic lay hidden behind the admirer in Pepys, and it is impossible to say what his reflections would have been had he known that the merry witch Mrs. Bagwell had whipped behind a haystack just before the meeting when he and the Clerk of the Acts had swept off their hats to each other. Indeed even with the evidence of his eyes he could scarcely have credited it, so serious, so anxious and sympathetic were all the Pepys references to the deplorable gallantries of the Court and the ascendancy of women whom a plain Biblical epithet would serve better than their Court titles.

“Well met, Mr. Pepys!” he cried, “and whither away from your duty work in the Dockyard? Are you from a visit to Sir George Carteret? I hear

he and my Lord Sandwich are in great accord since the marriage. A good piece of work, for they were always by the ears before!”

“Great satisfaction and honest merriment,” Pepys responded, falling into step beside him. “May all differences be as pleasantly ended! But where are you for, Mr. Evelyn? I protest my jaws do ache still from laughter at the verses you composed swift as lightning on “may” and “can” last time we met! Such banish the mustiest humour in the world, and I marvel why God will give so much wit to one man and so little to another!”

“A trifle!—a trifle!” said Mr. Evelyn with a touch of superiority as one who makes little of other men’s marvelling. “But if you will do me the condescension to step along to my house, Mr. Pepys, you shall not only see my works of art in mezzotinto and etching and the like, but also a portion of my discourse on Gardenage which I hope you will opine to be a noble and pleasant piece. A play or two also I have trifled with, and here we have a notable judge in your worthy self. Nay, never look behind you! I know you voracious for work, but the bent bow must unbend sometimes. Therefore come with me. In you youth and wisdom walk hand in hand.”

Pepys had indeed cast a rueful look behind, though not at the Dockyard. He had promised himself a pleasant hour in the meadows with his arm about the temptress, and he could see her in fancy lurking behind the haystack with a furious eye on the grave and dignified beauty of Mr. Evelyn’s countenance. But there was no help. Evelyn was the last man whose good opinion he would hazard, especially for a cheap jilt like the Bagwell, and so, passing his arm through the elder man’s, they sauntered down the lane to Mr. Evelyn’s lovely old Sayes Court, with its mullioned windows and ornamented brick chimneys, drowsing among its fair lawns and shrubberies. Pepys never could see that house without envy. It brought before him so vividly the dignity and culture he would wish to accompany his own retirement when that day should come. The large rooms, yet not too large for ease, nor too small for a kind of majesty, were such as none but a gentleman or one who had learnt what gentlemanhood signifies could inhabit with any comfort. The library, in particular, repelling all that was not mellowed with age and thought, lined with books in such bindings as made the mouth of Pepys to water, with here and there a marble bust of some great Roman shining like a pale moon in the dimness, entranced him. There Mr. Evelyn sat and discoursed of the follies of the Court while he sipped some excellent wine beside him and thought it might have been the very voice of time invoking doom on these creatures of an hour. He had totally forgotten Mrs. Bagwell, who might go hang for all he cared now. She was but a ripple on

the surface. The man and his noble and grave possessions sounded the very deeps of the real Pepys.

“And I am credibly told,” proceeded Mr. John Evelyn, “that the Duke of York is besotted on a new woman and to the total neglect of his wife, though there I can scarce censure him, she being what she is. Still, there is a good man lost in him if all must be trashed away on a worthless trull. I hear her name is Becke and she is a cast-off of my Lord Sandwich’s. Proper doings! God knows what will be the end of it!”

Pepys drew a breath, then rapidly chose his part.

“Why, indeed, Mr. Evelyn, I am with you neck-deep in all your censures of the wild doings (which God forgive!) of high persons. But I hear very differently of this woman. She is the singing daughter of an able citizen, a Mr. Joseph Becke of Chelsea, and as to my Lord Sandwich I may guess but cannot tell, but hear her to be a most sober serious young woman and not to be chosen so much for beauty as good sense, and unexpectedly I hear it is thought she may keep the Duke to business, having no taste for follies herself.”

“A —— is a ——,” said Mr. Evelyn using a Bible phrase with decision. “And what we may expect of her I cannot tell, except that the Duke is forever at Chelsea, and if when he comes to be King (for the King is drinking and wenching himself to death) we have the same vagaries I can tell you this, Mr. Pepys, the Crown is not worth a rotten nut. The people have made one King shorter by a head, God forgive them!—they will think little to spew another out!”

Pepys, seriously disquieted by this view of the case, yet unbelieving, persisted:

“Sir, if a man must be held by women, though I do not suppose the Duke to be such, I hear this young woman is sober-minded and willing herself to be guided by serious minds. She is no damned ill-looking huzzy like my Lady Denham, but one through whom good may come, if used.”

It shook Evelyn a little.

“All have not the continence of yourself and me, Mr. Pepys,” he said seriously, “and if it be true that most men must follow women perhaps the Duke has luck in this. I warrant her no beauty, for the King says his brother takes his mistresses by way of penance for his sins. Lord help us! What a world! and money spent like a river flowing into the bottomless ocean! Would that we had young and yet understanding men like yourself in Parliament, Mr. Pepys! You must soberly consider it your duty to become a

Parliament man. And truth to tell, the King in speaking of you mentioned it to me lately, the Lord Chancellor standing by!”

What could Pepys say, stuttering in his delight, stunned at the coincidence with his own inspiration? He could have talked on it forever, but Evelyn, stretching forth a white hand gemmed with a Greek intaglio, gathered up an alarmingly long manuscript.

“And now, to my discourse on Gardenage.”

They went at it, but Pepys could not at first fix his attention on the stately lawn and shrubberies described therein, for Rachel Becke’s calm ivory face floated between him and Mr. Evelyn’s rolling periods. To what would she lead the Duke?—for lead she would. It is strange that his mind in seeking the possible passed over what he would have called the impossible—the dark fanatic religion which gradually possessed and obscured the Duke’s mind. He knew too little—too nothing of women except as the female of the male, to realize that when one will have power she will bend God to her service and make the very heavens her footstool, realizing too late that she has set the world afire to cook her dinner.

But Mr. Evelyn’s voice boomed on, reading with what Pepys thought far too much gusto some little poems of his own which were not transcendent, the prettiest one being on the lines of a Greek epigram, of a lady peeping into a cage and so being pecked by an imprisoned eagle.

“Lord, if it were cut on a gem!” he said with well warmed enthusiasm. “What is beyond you, Mr. Evelyn? These plays—and yet when I think of such little harlots as Nelly and Moll Davis at work on them—— No, no, your genius soars above the sewers and is in its very nature musical and noble and far above the rabble. Keep these for the closet and the enlightenment of the discerning!”

This was extremely well taken—Mr. Evelyn leaning back in a velvet chair, his austere beauty and elegance of dress a part of surroundings which made Pepys feel his own ferrandin suit had that conspicuous costliness to which Elizabeth’s fastidiousness had objected. Angry at the moment, he now acknowledged her right in view of the dull amethyst cloth which set off Mr. Evelyn’s somewhat irritating air of birth and breeding to perfection. He looked seriously at Pepys in replying.

“You are right, my worthy friend. Pearls are not for swine. I will reserve these dramas for persons like yourself in whom all the graces of intellect and conduct meet. And now, tell me—how does the beautiful and virtuous Mrs. Pepys? When we meet beauty and virtue combined . . .” and so forth.

When Pepys left to retrace his steps along the lane he had the grace to hope that the merry jade was no longer in hiding behind the haystack. Nothing could be more inappropriate to his late company and the praises heaped on his virtuous conduct. It sent a tingling through his ears which flushed them scarlet to think what Evelyn would have felt and said if he had seen that buxom form edging round the stack to keep out of sight of his stately advance. And besides, there were matters to revolve. He had had no idea that the Duke's attachment had become public property so soon. Happily none could guess his own part in it. That was invisible and intangible as a breath. But he could not wholly commend Rachel's discretion. She should not have permitted a woman's pride in a great conquest to draw her into any publicity as yet.

His mind turned to Evelyn with a kind of envy. Here was a man who walked in the light of day and without evasions. Not a circumstance of his life but might be printed and affixed at Paul's Cross, whereas—what sum would Pepys have accepted to allow his journal to be read by any human eye but his own? He could not himself tell why he set down his scaramouche entries in a polyglot of Spanish and Latin and French. True, it amused him to read them over, amused him sometimes to think of the upflung hands and open mouths if any were to decipher them. But yet——

“Why do I keep them by me?” he mused as he neared the haystack, resolving not to look behind it but pass coldly by. “Lord, I sweat in thinking of the risk run, and yet, sure, none could make it out! If I destroy it I may pass for the soberest man that walks the City. And yet, dear damnable delightful roguery, I cannot! Not yet. When I grow older, may be! I wonder had she the patience to wait while Evelyn poured out his treasures of learning. In fine, a most excellent person he is, and must be allowed a little for a little conceitedness, but he may well be so, being a man so much above others. Now, is she there and huffed with waiting? If so, let the baggage wait her fill!”

He strode bravely past the haystack whistling “Barbry Allen,” pert Mrs. Knipp's triumph. Not a sound, not a squeak. Probably she was playing off some little pretty anger. He went farther with steps a little less resolute, then turned, unable to resist the mystery, his short-sighted eyes and inquisitive nose peering before him in preparation for retreat at any advance on her part. But the hiding-place was empty. She had given him up in despair at Evelyn's long-windedness.

“And long-winded the worthy gentleman is!” thought Pepys hurrying his steps. “But I will see Mrs. Becke speedily and caution her.”

He had intended to go on to London but after all spent an hour at the Bagwells' little house, always kept spruce and neat on days when he might be hoped for, and so back to London and an unexpected dinner with Sir George Smith which filled his heart with pride to see how he, come from so mean a beginning, was treated and honoured.

"But it is God's mercy to me," he reflected piously, "and His blessing upon my taking pains and being punctual in all my dealings."

It was very evident that each day added to his importance. He wished Elizabeth would realize it more fully. A more proper reverence would save trouble at home. It was most unfortunate that he could never stand upon his dignity long but must slip off into some more stand-easy posture, alas! too susceptible of attack! It was the truth though strange to him to reflect that on the whole he had never lived so merrily as during the plague time, chiefly owing to stolen visits and junketings with Mrs. Bagwell and the gay Knipp. It was the exact rebound anxiety craved for.

There was no doubt—though it frightened him to admit it—that Elizabeth's absence was at times gayer than her company, and to meet her at dances in his agreeable lodgings at Greenwich less productive of dissension than the rough-and-tumble of daily life. And yet—his thoughts of her were always seasoned with "And yet"—he half dreaded, half longed for the drop in the Mortality Bills which must inevitably mean her return to London, as he stood remembering her in his bedroom.

"God help us!" he sighed, "and here's an invitation to a wedding and strange to see what delight we married people have to see these poor fools decoyed into our condition, every man and woman gazing and smiling at them, and know the deception that lies behind. I'll not go, and I'll save a present thereby."

And next day the Mortality Bills had made the first important drop since the beginning of the plague, and the Duke of York came to Greenwich to discuss the building of the *Royal Katharine*. Unfortunately the boy had forgotten to call him early, and Pepys, resolving to administer a good lambasting for that and other faults, sent Will Hewer for a new rod and calling the little imp to one of the upper rooms reckoned up all his lengthy list of faults and proceeded to pay them off, but unluckily Will with an eye to mercy had chosen such a slender rod that the imp alternately grinned and pretended to shriek, and his master belabouring him hurt his own arm much more grievously than the latter end of the little wretch before him. This had happened once before and vexed him consummately.

With the arm as stiff as a ramrod in his ferrandin suit he was obliged to make his way to the Duke of York's stately chamber of audience, leaving the boy capering at the window as soon as his back was safely turned. It had unnerved him so that he scarcely knew how to put a good face on it with a bow and apologies for rheumatism. But the Duke's mind was elsewhere, and after business was despatched he began leaning back in his gilded velvet armchair.

"Mr. Pepys, you know at this time and before, the good opinion I entertain of your judgment and how I would see justice done you in all things. On your showing, without any hidden purpose, that Mrs. Becke was a woman out of the common run I made myself acquainted with her and find your words true, for she has a steadfastness in serious matters very unlike the sex and no care for light pleasure, though with a cheerfulness about her and a taste in books and plays very encouraging to a man. Tell me now for truth, what do you know of this lady? Is there anything against her I should hear? For if so I will be beholden to your gratitude to me for favours done and intended."

This put Pepys in a quandary, for all the gossip he had heard and the responsibility of either withholding or giving it, coupled with Evelyn's serious words on the subject of the Duke's entanglement, rose up in his mind. With his quick sense of what would advantage himself he parried to gain time to consider. He looked with what courage he could into the beautiful melancholy face before him with its dark eyes fixed as if reading his very thoughts.

"Your Royal Highness, I think Mrs. Becke to be such a woman, so grave and well-carriaged as I never saw one in my life, and one who would hide nothing your Royal Highness desired to be acquainted with if you would ask her; and of myself I will most willingly collect all I may, but know nothing beyond idle talk not worth consideration."

"As to that," said the Duke, "I have asked her and she tells me she was my Lord Sandwich's mistress and could not be content with him, and that she was lightly spoken of with others but untruly. This honesty gave me a good opinion of her, being unlike a woman, but yet *being* a woman I ask you—was there more?"

Pepys could not sufficiently admire her courage and honesty. Every new thing impressed him as showing depths of courage and wisdom impossible to sound.

He answered eagerly:

“Your Royal Highness, it is a most astonishing lady. This I heard and no more, and admire how where another would have paltered and lied she has told your Royal Highness all, though she would go through Hell to keep your good opinion. Now whether a woman is to be judged only by the virtue of her body or also by courage and honesty and wisdom is beyond me, but this I know, for the last three I think her one among ten thousand.”

“I also,” said the Duke. “And had she had virtue a woman a man might trust his all to—but things being as they are, a secret friend and no more. Yet that may be much.”

He sat silent a moment, holding with melancholy eyes on some distant vision, and then:

“I know you a secret and prudent friend also. It is possible I may some day be King of England, for Monmouth, my brother’s bastard, can make no head against me. Well, Mr. Pepys—I have sown my wild oats—a large crop and thick-grown, but that is ended. The day may come when I can show that I have conned my lesson and may be a King that thinks of more than his pleasure, and if so, by God’s grace and your help we may make such a Navy in England as shall sweep the seas clear of all our enemies and no more disgrace of the Dutch outfacing us in our own waters. Furthermore, I perceive, Mr. Pepys, that Shakespeare spoke truth when he wrote, ‘There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,’ and I will not sell my conscience for gold. Nor barter peace of mind for power.”

He was silent again with his eyes fixed on his vision.

Pepys sat mute and bewildered. What could the woman have said or done that had made it possible for the Duke to speak as never yet? He did not know and could not have understood if told that Rachel Becke had understood the Duke and caught the mystic in him that no one else had known, and with that lever could raise or lower him as she would. If Pepys could have guessed that this would have been to his own ruin what would he have said, what thought? As it was he could only marvel bewildered and endeavour to say the thing that would meet the case.

“She is a very much to be admired lady—and stands alone, your Royal Highness, and I count myself happy that a chance word lightly spoken has borne such fruit of contentment.”

The Duke, evidently ashamed of having so far opened his heart, put the matter by instantly and turned with somewhat cold dignity to business again.

“Mr. Pepys, I count myself a sailor and had sooner be Lord High Admiral than King of England. I hear the Parliament that knows nothing of a

sailor trade and cannot, for it is beyond landsmen's purposes, is to make a strict enquiry before the Lord Chancellor into all the business with the Office and our late dealings with the Dutch. Now I have resolved that it is you that shall speak and defend us when this is afoot. Wherefore prepare your defense of us all and your accounts and what not, for we have the Lord Chancellor to face and soon, and I doubt if the matter can be kept private."

Pepys was stunned. Fear contended with astonishment in his heart. What, *he!*—sprung from nothing—a mere clerk at the beginning—*he* to speak before the Lord Chancellor and the world as mouthpiece of the naval service and the Duke—the future King of England. He stammered something protesting his own unworthiness which the Duke put by easily but firmly.

"There is none but you and me that knows the truth of the Navy," he said switching his rosetted shoe with a jewelled cane. "I cannot speak for us before a subject of the King's, and if I could it is not my place and I have not the gift of the gab. You have the facts at your fingers' point. Take this for a command and prepare yourself betimes. Your fortune is made. You have but to take it up. The man that makes this speech will be known among great men. And I have chosen you for it, eyes open, willing to give the best for the country, but willing also to set forward a friend. You are still a young man and shall go far."

He rose and stretched out his hand, and Pepys kissed it reverently. What to say he could not tell and therefore made his looks as eloquent of fear, humility, and gratification as he could, and indeed the thought of the responsibility weighed him to the earth with a kind of terror. He could not as yet sort it in his mind. But before he left the room the Duke called carelessly:

"Farewell, Mr. Pepys, I have good news for you. The Bills of Mortality have fallen so sudden and strongly that all the authorities have taken heart, and you may have pretty Mrs. Pepys up from Woolwich before long. But we will keep the Navy Office at Greenwich yet a little longer, so retain your lodgings there that you may wait upon us with the more ease. Set those lodgings down to the accounts, for they are for the Naval Service. And so farewell again."

He went down the stair scarcely feeling his arm disabled after all in such a worthy service. He knew his fortune made, secure and established, and could only give thanks to a good God who could sensibly overlook so many peccadillos and give honour to real merit. For he knew as well as the Duke that he was the brain and heart of the Navy, though the others did the

battling with the Dutch. In his subordinate place he had still expected his share to be the work and a certain amount of cash, and the credit to go to others, but now—— If he were to defend the Navy Office thus—Lord!—to what heights might he not reach? It would be cash and credit and all the others outshone for good. But there was much to think of with anxiety. Could my Lord Sandwich have scented anything out of this? He remembered thinking him a little high and strange at last meeting in spite of the wedding festivities, though to be sure at parting he had asked how Elizabeth did and remembered himself to his “cousin,” which sounded pretty well. How would he take this? Not that he would himself wish to appear before the Lord Chancellor, but a man does not like to see his creatures exalted. And Sir George Carteret? And Sir William Batten?—and others?—He walked as in a mist.

He met the apothecary Pelling on his way back, and getting a lotion for his arm, by now as stiff as a poker, heard from him that the Duchess of Albemarle and others were crying him up as the most stable and understanding man in the Navy Office.

“And indeed many in the town do talk publicly of you, Mr. Pepys, and the credit you do gain daily to the full contentment of all your well-wishers of whom I am a humble one.”

He blessed himself and God, not forgetting Rachel Becke, on the strength of it. Yes. Success was rushing upon him at last.

“God give me strength to bear it discreetly and acquit myself like a man,” he said under his breath.

Here he verified the plague returns and set his mind to consider Elizabeth’s return. It half troubled, half pleased him, and which the most he could not tell. But that was always his mind with her—he never could be sure what he felt, so quick were the changes in their relations. Possibly his thoughts would have been more definite could he have seen her lay down her pen with a sheet of cipher before her which he would very well have understood and have heard her say to herself:

“I will not use my knowledge—no. God knows I will not, unless he gives me occasion, and if he do, the Lord help him and me if he has cheated me.”

Had he known it the fear he always entertained of his own powers of resistance would have made him circumspect for a while. But he did not.

Part Three

Chapter Fifteen

DESPITE the gay evenings which took her to his lodgings at Greenwich Elizabeth had grown very unhappy at Woolwich while Pepys amused himself in London with the plague doing its monstrous work like a black background to a gay-coloured embroidery. Her evenings were lonely. Barker, who had left a little while since, was no companion—a good-humoured lump of a girl with a pretty voice in singing and a lying tongue and careless roving eye for men, and Elizabeth knew few women whose company she would have chosen, with the exception of such staid matrons as my Ladies Sandwich and Carteret and a few more of the same sort. After all, she was but a girl, and a girl may despair quickly if she thinks her husband has no regrets for separation, leaving her to dullness and amusing himself uncommonly well in her absence. Perhaps the French strain made the streak of jealousy in her more marked. She would have all or none, or at least she thought so often enough to make it as good as true. Furthermore she believed she could now attack the cipher whenever necessary.

Therefore, sitting one evening in solitude, the maids abed, the house silent, and a pale disturbed moon wading through clouds overhead, she sat thinking of these things, her mind beating here and there like a bird against a wind, and suddenly broke into a prayer, a prayer of her convent days before she had known her husband or the world, when happiness had seemed a thing as natural and necessary as blue skies and sunshine. It was a childish helpless thing and it did not help, having no relevance at all to the difficulties of real life. She put her hands down and sat staring out of the window. *What* was the trouble?

“Let me set it down in black and white and try to clear up the fog within me,” she thought, “that I may put it before him without tears and foul words when next it takes us.”

But she had never written in that fashion and did not know if it were possible. She took up her quill and to her surprise the words came as simply as though she wrote to her mother.

When a woman is married to the man she do love would anyone suppose her a most miserable poor soul? Yet this is true. I thought when we were wed and had scarce a rag to our back (so that I was forced to wash his shirt and he to sit till it dried) that all was for ever joyful because I had my true love's heart and body and he mine, and I cared for nought else and the little ups and downs were nought but merriment. Do I forget when first we had a fine dinner for his friends in my lord's lodgings he lent us, and much talk and planning about it for days and I in a most horrible fright lest all be spoiled. A dish of marrow bones, a leg of mutton, a loin of veal; a dish of three pullets and two dozen larks (all in one dish) a neat's tongue, a dish of anchovies, a dish of prawns, and cheese, a great tart (but the confectioner Wheeler made that)—and indeed a heavy dinner for one pair of hands, for it was dressed with my own hand and nothing but a woman to hot it and serve. And he kissed me and said I was his French cook and none like me, and all the company, his dull old father, his prattling Uncle Fenner and the whole gang of relations said the like, and it was true, God knows. Did I value the trouble? Did I ever value the making, washing, mending of him? No, not I, for I am his constant true lover and would do it again if the world played us a trick. And even that day began the trouble that galls me, painted Pierce coming so gallant, like a ship full sail, and so tossed off with laces and pearls as quite took away my courage and I in my old turned lustring and she leering and winking on my husband, and once touched my foot under the table in a mistake for his. But I said nothing for I would not believe he encouraged so sorry a wench. Yet he did and do. A woman must stand amazed to see how little love and gratefulness do count with a man against the lust of the flesh. Certainly a man must have a woman's company. This is nature and religion, but when he was my servant and vowed he loved me and was sick for love and knew not one minute's peace apart, counting all other women as dirt, might I not believe he was fixed for life as I was? It took much to make me think otherwise, but I soon saw that though I was his wife to be fed and caressed like a petted spaniel there was room on him for much other adventure when his body was satiate with mine.

It was not so with me, though a woman has her temptations also. When one that shall be nameless made shameless love to me thinking I of all women must be at his service, did I not keep a

quiet tongue in my head, putting him off gently and without annoyance that it might not injure my Dear? God knows I have kept my vow though tempted here and tempted there and one swearing he would die for me, and another that my husband was a timeserver and hypocrite that could not pass a woman by but he must chuck her under the chin. This last gave me much knowledge of the ways of the town and the gallantries of men. And here will I set down one thing for truth—namely that the only thing to make me a man-trap and worse (as I saw many about me) would be revenge, and I am certain sure that is the way many a decent woman is driven by her husband's rotten heart and forgetfulness of his promise. I had chances and temptation enough with that last young man, handsome as a picture, praying me to give him the meeting in places my husband could never guess, and he fiddling and singing with the slut Knipp and leaving me to the other's advances. But I would not, though I will promise neither him nor myself that the time might not come when I might run at it to pay him in his own coin and throw it in his face like a dish of foul water. What could he complain if I did? I own it worse for a woman to misdemean herself than a man if she bring a bastard into the family, but I am unchilded.

And again, his grudging me the very clothes on my back while his own are of the bravest, I always a little shamed because the women go so gallant and I cannot. T'other night, Mrs. Hamling very rich in an embroidered suit with Genoa lace and Mrs. Peg Penn in flowered satin, which God knows she do not become, and heads set off with the new fair locks while I very simple in my old black silk. Sam^l. declaring I am very pretty in this, but I trust him not, knowing it is that he is willing to save his purse. One passage of him kissing the little black beauty that he do call his Morena, displeased me, she being known for a mettlesome jade. Captain Wade, kissing me on parting, as he did the rest, did a little detain my hand, and for this Sam^l. did so betwit and becall me returning in the coach that I pretended sleep, which did put him in a great discontent and horrid bad words. And as for Mr. Pembleton, the dancing master—but I forbear to set it down because it is a thing forgiven in my heart.

Strange it is to see how his suspicions fix always in the wrong quarter and never in the right, such fools be men! Again at the playhouse, how well pleased he is with the bold manners about us,

but I saying; “Then praise it not in others for if a bold slut is what you love no doubt but I will do my endeavours to please you!” so whisked off, he sitting like a thunder-cloud, and left him in a sad musty humour. O would that we were both old and at rest! Such are men. Truly may I say there is hardly one a woman can trust, and what with these little meannesses and his jealousies of those that respect me and ignorances of those that would serve him as he would, for all I know, choose to serve them if he could, the disagreeables of my life have been very great, and for a shrewd man as he is, never was a greater fool at home—yet a lovable, for I love him.

I must here set down that since the beginning I have never had a gold piece of my own but one. Here and there I have sheared a few pence from the housekeeping not to be quite empty-handed. But could he think I did not know how his gettings increased and gifts from men that would have his favour in the Navy Office? If he had come like a wise man and said; “Let us advise together for ordering our lives till we are above with the world,” would I not have scrimped with him cheerfully? But he cheated me and I saw it a hundred times and said nothing. Such as the day when Sir William Warren gave him a pair of gloves for me and he brought them home and sent me from the room of an errand I saw to be a flam, and I creeping back and looking through the crack of the door could see him empty out of them gold piece after gold piece until I counted forty, and O the gloating in his face! So I crept away again and came back, swishing my gown, that he should hear me come, and he with the empty gloves before him, and he said:

“A shabby gift from Sir W. Warren; one pair of gloves. Lord! I had thought better of his liberality,” and I took them with a choke in my throat and answered:

“Better do nothing at all than do it so miserly,” and not a word more.

“But he must be thanked and warmly,” he said eagerly, “for I am mighty careful to stand well with the man. A cunning fellow and able to hurt me!”

“Certainly he must be thanked,” says I,—“Have no fear,” and so no more. And in a few days after I went and with his help

composed a little billet to thank this man for his “handsome gift,” for Sam^l. would have that.

And when a week later I went out and he at office work, I making up my mind to courage (for I thought a share of the forty gold pieces mine though I would not demean myself to speak of them) took a hackney coach to the woman at the Exchange where Sam^l. is known and bought me a laced handkerchief and pinner I had need of, saying my husband would be answerable for the price, and God knows it was little! and so home, having in my pocket only the coach fare from the housekeeping and not money enough to buy myself either bite or sup outside the house if I had been dying on the way.

So after dinner he to examine my kitchen accounts, which are troublesome to him and me to keep, and missed the coach fare and I did not deny it but said I took it to buy what I had need of, naming them. O the anger in his eye in a flash!

“And did you pay for the handkercher and pinner?”

“Not I! Where should I get the money? I that have not so much as a pocket piece to carry about for show, but go as empty as a drab in the street! I gave my husband’s name—what else should I do?”

He choked with anger, gobbling like a turkey-cock.

“What? Run in debt? The thing is not much I own, yet I will not permit you to begin to do so for small beginnings make great endings and you have the heart to be as choice a spendthrift as any lord’s wife if I would be the fool to allow it.”

I stayed quiet and silent waiting to hear how he ran on, and presently he says loudly:

“Give me your word here and now to spend not so much as a groat without permission given, for what are you, I ask, to spend with both hands while I work night and day to make money for your follies, and can scarce buy myself the clothes I must have to go decent among the great men, and you sit at home with everything noble about you of my earning!”

Still I was quiet and silent thinking whether to speak of the gold pieces and this went to his head like strong drink to infuriate him.

“Give me your word or I will pay the accounts to the cook-
maid and no money shall you see if it was to save your life. I’ll
disgrace you before them.”

“And yourself with me!” says I, very cool. “And what talk will
there be of the rich Mr. Pepys that married a thief not to be trusted
with a copper piece! The world shall know, I promise you. You
would not be the better for ill-using me. I have those would take
my part if they knew it!”

The blood flamed up in my face and my hands shook like an
ague. It frightened me because we get so used now to bad words
as not to care how we let fly in anger and yet how to avoid it I
could not tell. It frightened him too but not for that but because if I
face up to him he runs, his tail between his legs, for there are
things he would not have known and some of these I know, and
some I do not but will, for I see knowledge is the only means I
have to make my way at all. No need to write the end. The battle
was mine though he did give in but slowly, not to have his defeat
acknowledged and so terms were drawn,—he to pay what I spent,
and I mighty quiet and saying no words about the forty gold pieces
in my gloves because I could the better watch if he did think me
ignorant, and it is not right nor justice a man should hoard and
scrimp his wife and treat her like a wench in the house that would
thieve from him if she dared! If he did but know how to treat a
woman—if he did! Maybe I differ from others, but this I know—if
he would be honest and generous with me God knows I would
with him.

And what is there I cannot know if I will? Will Hewer, good
soul, as innocent as a daisy where I am concerned, lets drop a
thing here and one there about his master’s business and gettings,
and it takes but a careless word from me to draw out his tale—Not
but Sam¹. is close enough with him too. And does he think a
woman is blind that I cannot see how his spendings grow in
clothes and out at afternoons and nights? All this I could bear,
even to have my eyes blacked and my nose wringed and me hurt
with blows—if things were well otherwise, for a woman would
choose a knock on the face sooner than one on the heart, if there
was love to put a balm to it and his heart was mine. But I begin to
think he has no heart but only to hunt women as men do and to
play with them. I believe if it were to do again he would not marry

me or another but run after his pleasures and get money and so up in the world.

Now what is there left for me but to do the best I can for myself that he has no care for? I am half weary of my life, shut up in the house and hardly an outing a week and unless we have company (which gives me so great work that I can scarcely stand to receive them) seeing scarce a face but his and the maids and Will Hewer's. And I am a young woman and not thought amiss! Since we came up in the world and had Ashwell and the like to keep me company my lot is worse, not better, for he impresses them all for his music and spoils them with singing and jiggging and the like that I did never wish or could. Ashwell was not six months in the house but he had her playing on the virginals and triangle, and making eyes to her, and she to him till I must get rid of her, he expressing willingness that I know he never felt. And then comes Barker, a little lying slut, and then Mercer, the decayed merchant's daughter with her fiddle faddle airs and graces, and if I was to write a book it would not hold his carryings on with her. He ravished with her singing, for ever about her like a fly on marmalet; she jigging and singing and dancing, grown a fine lady in carriage and discourse, mistress of the house, and I wish no worse than that but cannot tell. Quite above taking any pains and myself nothing, but what else could be when I saw him take his opportunity to kiss the wench whenever he could, and at last, she disobeying me flat, I did dismiss her, and she for ever coming back to be his valentine and what not. The truth is he cannot look upon any woman as a friend or a servant but either she will be nothing because she is ugly, or be hunted and made love to with eyes and tongue if she is comely.

But now I have a quiet little maiden will come before long for company and sewing and it will be a share of peace in the house not to have my eye and suspicions always on her, for she is too young and simple for his notice, and my resolution is to keep her a year or more until he spoils her and little Deb. Willet grows cunning and artful like the rest. But this I can say, I weep for his follies. I despise them as a clean woman must, but if I did know they were worse than follies and he faithless to me then all were done between us for good and all.

She stopped there, laid down her pen and sat dwelling on what she had written. It was true and she might have said much more with equal truth.

When Pepys was what he called “horrid angry” with her he cared nothing at the moment for what he said or did and she had had wretched hours with him. But was it quite fair not to set down the other side of the account—the caresses and good fellowship between them, the days (though not as many as her hungry appetite for pleasure desired) when he would take her to the play, or for a jaunt through the fields to Marylebone Gardens there to eat cream and strawberries and look at the fine ladies parading and the gallants eyeing them (and also herself behind Pepys’s back). And the little plannings they would have together about new hangings for the closet, and the fine glazed cases for his books, and the winter evenings when the fire burned rosily with small homely noises and pleasure of light and shadow, and she sat on a four-legged stool at his knee reading aloud to him, and enjoying the book with all her heart and still more their common pleasure in it?

She read beautifully. Feeling and understanding and soft French inflexions made her speaking voice a delight whatever her singing voice might be. Now that his sight by candlelight was troubling him, he came to depend on her more and more, and this to her great happiness. Should not that mutual joy be set down? For be his faults what they would in his company she found pleasures she could never find without him. She remembered how he had struck her more than once on the face and hurt her eye, and she had flown at him like a wildcat, such was her fury of pain and fright, biting and scratching with such strength as she had, he holding her at arm’s length to “get her head down,” as he called it. At that moment she had thought she had done with him forever and all the world should know her wrongs. Yet in half an hour she was lying in his arms kissing him with passionate tenderness to make up for her violence. O, the weakness—the pitiful weakness of a woman!—so she thought.

At the remembrance the tears welled in her eyes and began to brim over—“For I love him—I love him!” she said in her heart. “If I could see where I was in fault I would correct it. If I could know how to hold his love I would hold it if I had again to be the drudge I was at the beginning. If I were forty and he forty-seven we might have peace and wisdom between us. Would we were! Should I have written this paper? Should I keep it? I am not strong and hearty like other women. A little fright will make me shake in every joint and my heart beat like a clock gone mad. When he rates me—when we quarrel, the pain in my head near kills me. And I have much pain otherwise and often. If I died—what would he do? Would he marry one of them? Or take his pleasures like the men I know? I think if still young he would.”

She sat awhile revolving this. Indeed her health was crazy enough, though she had no more thought of dying than any other young woman. Death was a romantic figure in her thoughts—no more—the cold lover who would hold her with eternal fidelity if her love was misused, and then it would be too late for Pepys's repentance and he would know the treasure he had lost. She saw herself lying pale and beautiful with flowers about her and him weeping above her.

It did not occur to her how quick and light were his emotions and that there might soon be a twinkle of relief in that streaming eye. She sat revolving this pathetic scene a while—then wrote on the unfinished paper: "This to be read by my husband only if I die"—and so secured it with a seal.

The next morning she waked with a growing compunction in her heart which strengthened when a letter was brought her in a hand she knew very well.

SWEETHEART,

His Royal Highness hath given me such good news of the fall in the plague returns as I think it will in a week or little more be convenient and right for us long separated to be again in our own home which will be to my delight and yours. Therefore I would have you to warn Mr. and Madam Sheldon that we give up the lodging when it is fit you should remove. The Duke desires me to keep my lodging at Greenwich because the Navy Office cannot readily be moved but how long I cannot tell. And I bless God and myself that you return to me, and intend a special dinner on that celebration to our friends. I would have brought these news instead of sending but must go down to Deptford Yard for speeding of the *Royal Katharine*. My Bess's loving husband to command in all things for our good.

Elizabeth kissed the paper, her tears of self-pity turned to joy. He wanted her back, he did care—he did! It was only in that moment she realized how she had missed him and her home. All had been out of joint in that unnatural separation, and her own mind poisoned by the unwholesomeness of it, and once they were together all would be well. She would keep that paper for six months to laugh at it and triumph over it when things went better. She put her head into the maids' room to tell them London was on the horizon, leaving what she had written on the table, and Jane, coming in after, put it away with her linen, a firebrand in reserve if she had known it. Indeed, there was great rejoicing in Woolwich for both mistress and maids—for London

pleasures are pleasures all the world over, and to have the grip of the plague relaxed was much in itself.

Pepys was at Deptford with pretty Mrs. Bagwell, she pouting at the news that all his household would be in London again.

“And I shall never see you—I that worship the ground you walk on!” she said, pressing a velvet cheek against his own as she sat on his knee with one plump arm curled about his neck. She had prospered on the intrigue, for her husband was a marked man for success and very ready to take the good that came his way without asking troublesome questions. She wore a dress now that the other women about censured as far too aspiring, but it became her full soft outlines and melting eyes very well.

Pepys could honestly reassure her. Business must always take him to Deptford Yard, and if pleasure lent a helping hand—— But that last clause he reserved to himself. Women must never get their heads up. He did not know one who would not trade on a man if she dared. He had no sense of unfairness in the matter, for he could certainly feel he had been very useful to the Bagwells and might expect to be considered. Naturally it was a private matter, and there must always be reservations of all sorts and kinds in a man’s private affairs. On these he became more reticent every day.

Can women ever understand a man’s attitude towards questions of sex? Certainly Elizabeth failed before that eternal riddle of the scornful Sphinx. Yet, in spite of all, the paper she had written comforted her as the knowledge of a weapon to his hand may comfort a harassed soldier. She would look at it sometimes in her armoire and think——“The day may come. But not yet. Not yet.”

Chapter Sixteen

THE plague was dying out in the provincial cities and London had shaken off the memory of her tears as a tree tosses off the dewdrops in a morning breeze. When Elizabeth returned she thought she had never seen the town so merry and men and women so alert for enjoyment. It seemed that manners were freer. Everyone had relaxed a little in times when you might be love-making one day and flung into the plague cart the next, and she had to think seriously how she should hold the maids in control with all the debauched young fellows patrolling the streets and looking out for a pretty face at every window.

Nothing stands still. Things had changed at home also. It was plain to be seen that Pepys had come up in the world and my Lord Sandwich gone down. He was heavily in debt for one thing and in the King's ill-favour for another. As they sat together one evening Pepys had much to say on that head. He had coached it down to Hampton Court, where the King and Queen were still in refuge till London should be purified of infection, and at Court who but he!—the King and the Duke full of little attentions to him.

“His Majesty put out his hand and I kissed it, and, Lord! how he did take me by mine and grasp it, and mighty kind he was and the Duke also, and both told me how sensible they were of my good service. And my Lord Sandwich there, poor man! with a very melancholy face and no man heeding him.”

“I am truly sorry for my lady,” Elizabeth said thoughtfully, “and my Lady Jem will be sad enough. Is it still the old trouble with Mrs. Rachel Becke?”

“Lord, no! That was done long since. It is his folly about the prizes that the King would have his share of, and his debts, and strange it is to observe how those that used to court him do turn their heads the other way now. When we sat down for the Navy Council, he walked in very melancholy and sat at the lower end of the table, no room being made for him, and no ruffling in him as it used to be.”

She looked up quickly:

“And you did not move for him?”

“Guess again, goose!” he said good-humouredly, pinching her little ear. “I am not one to leave my old master in the lurch so I did give him my stool and another was reached me. My heart pities him and I am as sorry for him as a man can be that expects daily to be borrowed of and would avoid it if he could. They will exile him to Spain as ambassador.”

He had a sense of triumph in saying this to Elizabeth. After all, if my lord had been in love with her she had shown good sense in standing by a plain husband who was coming up in the world rather than a peer who had not the wit to keep his high place. That memory always galled him a little. Perhaps he would have refused it belief had it come from any other than Rachel Becke, but her full and serious gaze compelled attention.

“My lady told me not long since,” he added, “that she looked for nothing better than to sell her plate to keep things going, and if so I will have a bit or two if I can scrape up the money. This morning I was troubled with my Lord Hinchingbroke sending to borrow two hundred pounds of me, and I refused though they offer good plate in security. I will not be undone for anybody. Not I!”

“I could pity them,” Elizabeth said slowly—“and my lady the most; she has much to suffer.”

“And so could I but for knowing good husbandry would set all right, but they choose to be spendthrifts. And now come and look over our plate, for it grows mighty noble and I will have my company observe it when they dine here.”

It was in full enjoyment of the change in Lord Sandwich’s luck and his own that he carried her off to the cupboard of plate and got out the glittering treasures his soul loved—silver plates and chafing dishes, and what not, all richly handsome and much beyond what they could ever have expected to possess. Aha! neither Lord Sandwich nor Lord Hinchingbroke could give her the ease of mind in a steadily increasing income that he could. Let her know it and behave accordingly!

He picked out several of the inferior pieces bought in narrower days and set them aside to be changed, looking over each piece and handling it to his great content, reflecting what a splendid show it made in his handsome dining room with the new hangings good enough for any lord of Parliament, and all so handsome about him that he could not contain his pride. And she herself rejoiced in it though she would willingly have exchanged the chafing dishes for a new slashed waistcoat and silver lace gown or better still a suit in the new and rather *risqué* fashion of the pretty ladies dressing like men

but for a skirt beneath the smart velvet riding coat. It was odd enough to her French taste that women should care to dress like men while men never showed the least desire to dress like women, but fashion is fashion, and the French soul of her thirsted to be in the mode with the best of them.

It was one of the happy evenings which still made her believe in life and her own luck. He warmed still further after supper, saying:

“And now that we are come to live so well and I dare to venture a little if I may trust you not to exceed, I have a notion in my head, Bess, that before long it will not be seemly for a man like me to be seen in hackney coaches and the like of that poor stuff, but I will have my own coach and a mighty fine pair of horses and go as I should. And I would have you to observe that this is for no vanity but because it do help a man up in the world to be seen well set off, for much gets more.”

He stopped for her reply, and indeed like the child she still was in many matters she was what he called half beyond her wits to think of ruffling it about the town in her own coach and pair. The wonderful good fortune!—what was there in Pepys that pulled all the luck his way?

Indeed things were going very well with her just now. There was a renewal of confidence between them, and with all this and the quiet in the house and preparing for the company Pepys desired to entertain she was able to put aside the notion of reading the cipher and to content herself, while he was out and about at work or play, with the household concerns and the company of her new upper maid little Deb Willet.

To Elizabeth her coming had been something of a good-send for hitherto she had never suited herself with Ashwell, Gosnell, Barker, and Mercer. They were all of the sharpened London type, fighting for their own hands: the typical servants at covert war with their mistress. But Deb Willet was on a different plane. She was a shy girl just turned eighteen, with large blue-grey eyes set in brown lashes burnished with gold, and curls to match, tucked in under a stiff little white cap, yet not so strictly but that glimpses of them strayed out sometimes about her temples and little tendrils over the white nape of her neck. She had a weak pretty mouth and soft indeterminate features not yet emerged from the blossoming roundness of childhood. And Elizabeth liked her blushing modesty and eagerness to please, as it was very needful she should, her parents being in a poor way and no room for her at home. She liked also Deb's little helpless manner of asking her commands about everything and hesitating until they were given, after the sluttish effrontery of Mercer, a born actress, and so sharp and sure of herself that she could make her way any day at the playhouse, according to Mrs. Knipp's

opinion. Deb had the cool shy freshness of a budding flower in dew looking at the world from under shadowing leaves, and it pleased Elizabeth to encourage her and show her a new stitch in embroidery in which she proved very apt, or a recipe for complexion water of elder flowers, or what not. To a young woman very much alone in her house and occupied with it Deb's arrival was like that of a shy younger sister from school, and she made more of her in small indulgences than she had done with the others. It was "Deb" here and "Deb" there, and the girl slipped into the household ways and was content.

She and her mistress were very busy next week preparing for a dance and musical party to be given in the large room at the office—a dance room after Elizabeth's own heart from its size and polished floor. But it necessitated much running to and fro from the house.

A good fire was lit and sconces with wax candles fixed here and there on the panelled walls, and garlands of evergreen hung between them, a notion of Deb's, who wove the garlands with fingers so neat and rapid that they seemed to take no time and with their glistening green made a splendid appearance on the dark oak panelling. Pepys had had a sideboard moved in for the display of his plate in the adjoining room—a splendid glitter amongst the garlands, and a plenteous cold supper was laid out there also, with lobsters, oysters, lamprey pies, cold pullets and meats, and every kind of cheesecakes, mince pies, pastries, and custards that the veriest epicure could ask. As to the wines—they came from the best corners of the cellar, and some were made into delicious mixtures of sack, Bristol milk, hypocras, and so forth, spiced, sweetened, and mingled by Elizabeth's well experienced hand, with little Deb licking her lips as taster. She had provided also a great jug of chocolate, a drink in the highest mode, which the maids would warm over the second fire.

"And I think, Deb," she said, drawing back to survey the table, "that not one of the Commissioners—nor my Lord Sandwich himself—could give a better set-out dancing party and more handsome plenty—not being a great crowded table, but set forth with such prettily trimmed dishes and good means for serving as the King himself might show without shame."

"Indeed, yes, madam!" replies the obsequious little Deb in a flutter of pink cheeks and expectation. "'Tis beautiful, most beautiful! La! those garlands with the silver sconces—I never thought the like were in the world. And what will you wear, madam, this evening? Sure it should be something extremely in the mode for the lady of such a house and dancing-room? And a Christmas feast too!"

Elizabeth sat a moment and smiled:

“And so I intend too, Deb. Nothing less will serve my turn. But the truth is I have not many dresses to pick and choose with, for the master buys silver and furniture beyond spending his money on my back. Well—the one lasts, the other is here today and gone tomorrow with the fashion.”

“But, madam—” little Deb’s eyes were large and rounded with the seriousness of the subject—“your white tabby flowered with roses is as beautiful as any rose-bush in the garden, and never yet did it hang in the closet without my wishing to see it on you. Sure it will become you beyond everything. And your necklace of little pearls——”

“Not good enough,” Elizabeth said decisively. “—And that brings to mind—the master has promised me a fine necklace of pearl one of these days, and I fear he forgets his promise. Now, Deb, I will put on the little necklace and you give a look at it and sigh and say, ‘Lord, madam, ’tis beautiful but so small! If you had but three rows about your neck!’—Something in that way! Can I trust you for it?”

“Indeed yes, madam.” She was bristling with importance at such a trust. “And I will say it right out—and why not you run out, madam, now we are finished (for I can set on the bow-pots) and take a look at the necklaces at Mr. Enderby’s, and who knows but the master might coach off and buy your choice for tonight? He comes in for his dinner in an hour. You could be there and back in a jiffy.”

A mighty pretty and useful little soul, Elizabeth thought and said as she kissed the childish round of the cheek and flew off to get her hood. She had real hope of the necklace because it had been actually promised so often, and certainly her homecoming had warmed Pepys’s heart and inclined him to caresses which might take a more substantial form. And he would be delighted with the stately supper table, loaded with silver candlesticks and meats and pastries set out to admiration on the old Delft dinner service he had brought back in the *Naseby* when he had gone with my lord to welcome the King at The Hague. Not one of their friends had the like of it with its beautiful blues and windmills and trees! Yes—he would be in the best of good humours. It might tilt her chance to luck.

Ten minutes afterwards her hackney coach was rattling off to Enderby’s, she leaning from the window with a few last directions to Deb and the maids—who were running about here and there like busy mice thanking Heaven the supper was to be a cold one, though only the Lord in Heaven could know what the washing up would be after all these fine doings! Deb stepped here and there composedly in her spread-out skirt of grey and the dignity she felt

she owed herself with the other maids. *She* dined with her master and mistress; they in the kitchen. *She* was to have lessons in singing and dancing; nobody troubled about their accomplishments. *She* was to appear at the party tonight—not to dance, for she knew nothing of dancing, but to watch like a bright-eyed mouse in the corner with the hope of picking up crumbs of conversation which would teach her the manners of the gay world in which she was such a small arrival.

Mrs. Pepys would allow her to lay aside her cap with small Dutch wings of lace on such an occasion, and she was to wear her hair in bunches of curls tied with blue ribbons, over each ear, and a blue damask gown of Mrs. Pepys, disused some time since but originally costing twenty shillings a yard, and made down for her as good as new with the worn breadth in front taken out. It was almost impossible for her to believe in the good fortune and consequence she was come to as these delights unrolled in her mind, and she ran to and fro in cap and apron feeling like a daughter of the house when she set the bow-pots on the tables and polished the beautiful glasses until they shone like crystal, with as much pride in all as if it were her very own.

She was so absorbed in work that for a moment she did not realize that Pepys had come in and stood behind her, and dropped a heavy silver spoon with a clash when she did, then curtseyed and stood in demure silence. He looked not at her but at the table.

“Lord! ’tis mighty handsome and a great show, and the candles and sconces a brave sight. And the silver flagons with sack! Noble indeed! What’s this? Green garlands hanging round the walls? Mighty pretty and gay and sets off the oak walls. Your mistress did well to think of that. Where is she?”

“Madam is gone of an errand—I think to the mercer’s, sir!” Deb answered, lying prettily as girls will, with another curtsey. “And I am glad the garlands please your honour because I did once see such and I thought _____”

She paused, blushing furiously at her own courage, and Pepys turned from the walls to look at her.

For the first time he saw her human—and pretty. Before this it had been a stiff little image with dropped eyes of which he had never seen the colour. Indeed all he knew of her was a cap and a curtsey. It was the difference between seeing a place-name on the map and visiting it and finding it abloom with gardens and the musical welling of life. It can never again be a

name and no more. So suddenly Deb Willet took life for him and he saw her pride in her notion, and the kindness in his heart rose to meet it.

“Why, child, ’tis what was wanted with candlelight and firelight all over it. Lord! to think it never crossed our brains before! The rooms have a look of Christmas jollity, and we shall dance the better for it. Come, give me a kiss, and you shall have as full a glass of sack tonight as the best of the company. A good girl deserves no less!”

He put his fingers under her chin and tilted her face upward, for a kiss. As was his manner he kissed her on the velvet lips, smooth as a rose-petal. It was he for never wasting a kiss on a woman’s cheek when her mouth could be tasted, and so sweet was the contact to his gross senses that he kissed her twice more and lingeringly, though with an air of patronage that excused it. She did not dare to disengage herself—had not the least notion whether such should or should not be the manners of masters with young maids in her position, felt nothing but gratitude and a little shock to modesty caught napping, and so stood like a child with her eyes cast down and scarlet cheeks.

“You will be a good girl, Deb, and a comfort to your mistress—I know it!”

“Indeed, yes, sir. I hope I know my duty and so I intend, and my mistress is a lady a girl should wish to do her best for. And I trust, sir, you are pleased with the lustre of the glasses for I have been at them for an hour.”

Such industry deserved and received another kiss. With his arm still about her he led her into the dancing-room and there admired to lavishness all the preparations. It was a matter after his own heart that his home and surroundings should impress his friends as handsome and substantial, and if Elizabeth had been present the other arm would have been ready for her waist also if she would have accepted the situation. But as he admired the splendid show the rattle of coach-wheels on the cobbles was heard and his arm fell to his side. It was now in a master’s tone, though kindly, that he desired Deb to search in his plush coat pocket for a notebook which he had brought from the lower office where he had been at work with the Commissioners, and Elizabeth found him alone when she came in.

“You like it?” she cried, running up to him eagerly. “O, the pains Deb and I have taken! The garlands——?”

“Mighty pretty and set off everything. It does my heart good to think I am come to such a height of prosperity, and all is as I would have it and more. A kiss for payment!”

She put up her mouth, her eyes sparkling with delight. It had really seemed a changed world since that happy return from Woolwich. How foolishly now would read that paper she had written if she had cared to cast her eyes over it! She would destroy it next time she opened her linen cupboard.

Deb came in quietly with another dish of pastries in her hand, and halting said in a serious little voice:

“And what gown, madam, will you wear tonight that I may put it out?”

Elizabeth caught her drift instantly.

“Why, the white tabby flowered with roses. That is my best.”

“And what jewel will madam wear?”

“The little pearl necklace I have on now. I have no other.”

Deb raised great childlike eyes of astonishment.

“O, madam—it is so little I can scarce see it. For a lady with such a noble house and silver like the King’s own to wear such little seeds of pearl!—But it is not for me to speak, I am ashamed. . . .” She curtsied and, as if in great alarm at her own interference, backed to the door.

“Indeed it is very true!” said Elizabeth with saddened eyes taking her part in the duet like an adept. “It is a puny little gimcrack, and with a house set out like ours—— But no matter! The day will come my dear will buy me the pearl necklace he promised. I know that well. Never mind, Deb. After all, my throat and bosom are still young enough to go bare. If now I could have taken Will Hewer’s diamond locket—— But no matter again!”

Pepys stared at her in bland consternation.

“Will Hewer’s diamond locket. Lord save us, what’s that?”

All his old suspicions rushed into his mind like wildcats showing their teeth. Yet she spoke freely and calmly, and little Deb at the door only showed the smiling interest any girl must to hear of diamonds, so that he could scarce believe his senses. Elizabeth was smiling too, pensively, though his frown was black.

“Diamonds? How could he come by them? What’s the meaning of this?”

“As to his coming by them, that I know not. But he came last night when you were out and very earnestly begged me to take it of him, saying that he loved both me and you and could never have the heart to forget the home we made for him, and would I take this to ease his gratitude—and a fine piece it is. It might come through his uncle Mr. Blackburne that might wish him to make some token of respect, and——”

He cut the tale short. The clearest image of Will in his mind at the moment was the day a while ago when he had observed him to walk with his cloak flung over his shoulder like a ruffian, and such an air of spruce and determined roguery that Pepys had bestowed two sound boxes on his ears, and was very much disturbed himself afterwards in consequence, for he loved Will sincerely and felt him a most necessary part of the family. He could not forget the look with which Will had turned silently away. Still—diamonds! Had he perhaps been secretly a ruffling saucy gallant all the time, and Elizabeth——? Stifling his feelings as best he could, he put out his hand for the trinket. She took a little box from her pocket and gave it, making a quick sign with her own hand to Deb. It said, “Run away! I can do my own work now”—and the girl vanished.

The locket sparkled brilliantly, being set with a few good but not remarkable diamonds.

There was no denying it would set off a fair bosom and a dress flowered with roses and no woman could despise it. He stood looking at it a few moments with very mixed feelings. It could be understood that Will’s gratitude wanted vent, but could it be that he or any thought Elizabeth Pepys so poorly treated that her husband’s clerk must give her something to deck herself with? Setting aside any baser motive this was enough to gall him bitterly, sensitive as he was to men’s opinion. Certainly gratitude for Will’s effort was not uppermost in his mind at the moment. He fixed his eyes on her and spoke.

“What is your own mind about this, Bess?”

“Why, I think I should not take it, the young man being what he is, but to you I may own it goes hard with me to return it, for I have nothing to wear when other women go gay and shining. But yet I think I should not take it. And you—— But I love Will as you do.”

“You cannot take it,” he answered in a voice of much relief. “A little gift, meaning no cost, you or I might take—but not diamonds. No!—Now, Bess—there were three necklaces of pearl at Enderby’s when we looked them over that pleased you. If I go now by coach and carry back the one you pitch upon, would it make it more easy to give back this trinket with my thanks and yours?”

She clapped her hands for joy.

“Please me? Beyond all telling! O, Samuel! But sure you say often we must go very slow in spending—how can you buy this or I ask it? I will let Will’s locket go—I knew I must—and I will go neck-bare until better days come. All said and done we are young and can wait.”

He closed the box and gave it to her.

“Tonight return it. And now which necklace will you have? My wife should go neither bare-necked nor obliged to any other man than me.”

“There is one with three rows—” she faltered—“but so magnificent—— You would not—— O, it is beautiful!”

“Thank Will from me as well as from you. And keep the dinner back till you see me. Will is a good fellow, but he shall see——”

He was gone. It was done. She flew after Deb as the big door clashed on him.

“It’s done, Deb, I am to have it. God knows I never thought to have anything so like a woman of quality. O, Deb—the master is good—good!”

“O, madam—we were clever! Did I do my part well?”

That checked Elizabeth, for it jarred something in her that dashed her triumph. She answered sharply:

“No cleverness in us, but the master’s goodness and his long promise, and I desire, Deb, that you say no more, for it is not your business!”

The rebuke was not harsh, but Deb’s lip quivered, and she drew back into herself, shut up and close as a snail touched on the horns retreats into its shell. It was the first rift between her and her mistress. She was sure in that instant that she preferred the master’s kindly ways and there was her real friend.

That evening with firelight and candlelight glowing about her Elizabeth stood to receive her guests with the three-row pearl necklace on her white bosom and pride in her magnificence shining more brightly than either in her eyes. The guests streamed in: my Lady Penn and her modish son, who was to become so grave a gentleman and give his name to a great state in a colony scarcely understood as yet beyond the sea. Plain Peg Penn, his sister, and her betrothed lover, Mr. Lowther, the gay slut Mercer and her sister, Mr. Pembleton to shed lustre on the dancing, Captain Rolt with his cunning eye for business and pleasure, as glib-tongued in art and music as clever at a bargain, and a little later Mr. Harris of the Duke’s playhouse, and on either side of him the handsome, heavily painted Pierce and the impertinent prettiness of gay Mrs. Knipp. She saw the woman’s greedy eyes count every pearl and weigh its lustre, gazing and staring on the sight, and still the guests poured in and the looks of all seemed to her to hang on the beautiful jewels that proud Mrs. Pepys was come to wear. Pretty Mrs. Anne Jones with her light feet for dancing, and more, all dressed in their best and in mighty good-

humour, but the women put a little out of joint by the splendour of their hostess—they all poured in.

And then the four fiddlers struck up and dancing began, and Elizabeth, almost afraid to move lest the pearls should break and spill, swam down the country dance with Mr. Harris, resolving to give herself up to the pleasure of perfect dress, jewels, surroundings, and the envy of every woman there. Can anything be perfect on earth? She wore her long-desired pearls, but Mrs. Knipp was in her most arrantly coquettish mood, and in an interval of the dancing Mercer sang an Italian song and that with such ravishing sweetness that Pepys hung over her like a bee drunk with flower-nectar and would have more and more—Mercer that had been a servant in their own house! True, all was wondrous merry and all enjoyed themselves to the full, but always a “but,” and when Mrs. Knipp’s bright soprano joined in a duet with Mercer, and the two trilled and sighed and languished at Pepys, who stood adoring them with open mouth and eyes, drinking it all in “like a gudgeon!” as Elizabeth’s angry heart declared within her, she would have bartered even the pearls for power to focus his straying fancies on herself.

And then the jade Knipp must needs affect illness and have his arm to a bed in the house declaring herself unable to go home, and painted Pierce went with them, and when Elizabeth could disengage herself to follow there was Knipp propped on pillows and Pepys lying beside her on the bed singing his own song, “Gaze not on swans,” and Pierce bursting with laughter at the rough-and-tumble jokes and fun, all in the highest height of good-humour and herself an intrusion. She left them, loathing the woman, and the pearls cold as hailstones on her bosom.

The party broke up at three o’clock almost wearied with pleasure, Pepys declaring it to be the merriest enjoyment he could ever look for in this world, and kissing Mercer with regrettable warmth while he did so. But even he grudged the heavy price of thirty shillings to the four perspiring fiddlers, and as late hours half destroyed his eyes they were burning furiously, Elizabeth was pale with fatigue, and Deb had sat unnoticed in the corner all night, her little heart swelling with neglect and loneliness. Only the pearls glimmered content in their beauty in the locked cupboard.

Chapter Seventeen

THAT night sowed seeds that were to grow in ground already prepared. Elizabeth, with an uneasy feeling that she had unbent too far to Deb and that the girl was sullen because none noticed her at the dance—and what right had she to expect they should?—drew apart from her and let fly little stinging witticisms—not indeed to her face; the girl was too humble for that—but to Pepys, arousing his natural kindness and sense of protection. What, treat a poor little soul at her mistress's mercy so hardly! It seemed to him that they never could have peace in the house, and he thought Elizabeth unjust and let her see it, sometimes in looks, sometimes in words. She knew herself ungenerous, and that did not ease the matter. Will Hewer coming and going with faithful dog-like eyes upon the pair of them perceived thunder in the air and wondered when and how the storm would break. Elizabeth had returned his locket, but so sweetly and gratefully and Pepys had added such generous words that he loved them even more for the refusal and there were times when his heart ached to see all was not well and he so useless. And so the months went by.

As for Deb, she had drunk in her lesson like a bitter medicine and it worked within her. She watched silently every day the relations between her master and mistress until she thoroughly understood them both, performed all her little duties so excellently that if Elizabeth were searching for cause of complaint she could never find one, and realized now very fully that she was a grown-up girl who had her hand to play, for certainly no one else would play it for her.

But for all that she saw she might have help if she went warily, and help she resolved to have. Her duties about Pepys were almost those of a valet as they were a maid's to her mistress. She must darn his lace and hose, must comb his hair as he sat at ease trying to force his paining eyes to a book through the new glasses his oculist commended, she must be in and out of the room where he kept his papers, on little errands easily magnified. And now she began to magnify them almost unknown to herself and certainly unknown to him. She was often in and out—a pretty smiling presence, gentle and gay-humoured always, a helping hand about him. She had no

readiness of wit, nor did he miss it. One does not expect a rose to add to its sweetness by singing like a bird, and at first, since he was allowing himself a little more than enough of Knipp's sophisticated company, he was glad to find innocent eyes at home full of candour and virgin timidity. Elizabeth was far from well at the time, suffering much pain, her nerves taut as fiddlestrings with suppressed irritation, and she gave away every ground of vantage to Deb that a foolish woman could give to another. Could Deb ever forget the day (and what it taught her) when Knipp and Pierce dined at the house, Elizabeth restive and jangled to almost unbearable irritation at their oglings and affectations? They would thrust themselves upon her—then let them! Pepys was out, and she sent a cold message for him to come and join "the good company," on which the women, exchanging glances, fled, and when he returned they were gone.

"Will he stay? Will he go?" asked Deb's anxious heart in silent chorus with Elizabeth's.

He went and did not return till evening, carelessly letting drop that he had been at the playhouse with Knipp and calling her, as he had done before, a most excellent mad-humoured thing. Then Deb's studying eyes as she came in and out on her errands beheld a bitterness between them that she had not yet seen. Elizabeth turned pale as death under the stress and let fly a stabbing word, and Pepys retorted that he meant to be no prisoner in the house—tied to a jealous fury's apron-string, and so like thunder and lightning the battle flashed and raged for a few minutes. At length Elizabeth sank back exhausted in her chair and covered her eyes with her hand.

It is true that next minute she was at his feet, imputing no wrong to him this time but all the folly to herself, though knowing in her heart that women—women—were the curse of her existence, and that he could put an end to all their troubles if he would. But he was stung to the very heart. After all, what harm could it do to sit at the play with the merry bold slut Knipp, laughing at its freedoms and winning the introductions to the pretty actresses who took the King's fancy and betrayed him as lightly with the beaux of the Court? Let a woman be thankful her husband did no worse—or rather (for here his conscience corrected him) be thankful that she could not accuse him of anything more—not having convicting evidence. What the eye does not see the heart should not grieve over. He pulled himself away and got out a poem of Dryden's which someone had given him, and lighting a couple of candles and a reflector he had contrived for more light sat down as far from her as the room would allow and buried himself in it.

With a heart burning with pain she watched him pushing the lights here and there to help his eyes, shading them, setting the print at different angles. But all would not do, he could not see. He gave it up and, shutting the pages, sat staring heavily at the fire. O, the fool she had been! Surely she was cutting the ground from under her own feet like a very suicide! After all—Knipp!—Was she worth this sore trouble? She dared not go to him, but Deb with her ear at the door heard a rustle and a pleading voice.

“Let me read to you, my dear, I beseech you.”

Dead silence. A frightened smile tipped the corners of Deb’s red lips. She crept closer to the door-crack.—“And serve her right!” she whispered to herself, “the fury!”

Again the voice.

“It pierces my heart to see your eyes serve you so. I love to read for you.”

She half rose from her chair, but there was only the unbearable repartee of silence. She made another movement towards him, but he instantly got up and left the room. Deb had only just time to save herself by soft-winged flight, and when she came in, cat-quiet, ten minutes later for a forgotten thimble Elizabeth was sitting stiffly in her chair gazing into the fire, and the bedroom door had closed upstairs with a clang that went through the house. Deb crept off to her own room frightened but smiling, and still Elizabeth sat there.

It was three o’clock in the morning, and she had fallen into a disturbed sleep when a noise in the house waked her with a start, feet coming heavily down the attic stair that led to their bedroom above. One of the maids ill? Her first instinct was to hide her vigil from anyone, and she ran up the lower stair and into her bedroom leaving the door ajar. Pepys was sound asleep, and as the steps came on, her fluttering heart assured her she had just saved herself in time.

It was tall Jane’s voice at the door.

“Sir—madam! There’s a most awful fire raging in the City, raging like hell. Will it come this way? For God’s sake, rouse and see!”

The girl was so frightened that she burst into the room lit only by a pallor from the uncurtained window. Pepys sat up, startled-awake. No time to notice Elizabeth or to remember the night before! In five minutes they were all at Jane’s window, the women hanging on the masculine opinion as women will.

“That fire is in Mark Lane and no danger. Lord, Jane, have you no sense but must be galloping over the house and rousing folk up in the middle of the night? Get to bed and sleep and ask about in the morning to find out the damage!”

He went grumbling back to bed, and Elizabeth, half fearfully, looking back at the mounting flames, followed and crept in after him. There was a wall of silence between them. He held himself aloof and pretended sleep, and so they lay until the dawn looked in.

Household life cannot be conducted in dumb show, and going to the window he spoke coldly and quietly then.

“The fire burning mighty strong still. I’ll go round by Mark Lane for my morning draught and see how it stands. Sure they have let it gain head most shamefully.”

He dressed in haste, taking little notice of her, and was finished when Jane came running up the stair big with the importance and terror of her news.

“God have mercy on us, sir! Three hundred houses burnt last night and the fire gains every way. The man says if any gentry value their goods and carcasses let them be up and doing! And it Lord’s Day and all!”

Her eyes were half starting out of her head, and Pepys, thinking she made the most of it as servants will, waved her off angrily and snatching at his worst hat in case of a crowd of sightseers went out. Elizabeth utterly exhausted sank on her pillows and so lay while Deb and the maids craned from the windows to snatch what sight they could.

To Pepys, launched into the street, the first and most amazing thing was its emptiness, recalling the days of the plague. Either all the world was sleeping late as folk do on Lord’s Day morning or they had run out deserting their houses to see some great and fearful sight. With a weird breath of fate upon him chilling as a dawn frost he quickened his steps, fear urging him, until at last, unconsciously to himself, he was running towards the Tower of London. And as he ran, dribblets of men came tearing down side streets, and suddenly a boy—the son of his friend Sir John Robertson—clutched his hand crying:

“Take me with you, Mr. Pepys. They say the whole city is a-burning! Let us climb the Bloody Tower and then we can see. Run—run faster!”

They ran together as hard as they could pelt, and presently a wild confusion on the left side from a street—no, from two, from three, or more, and a pitiful crying of women and shouting of men. They would not stop to

see, but ran almost beyond their powers and so at last, gaining Tower Hill and passing in through the huddle of Beefeaters as full of consternation as themselves, they scaled the climbing winding steps of the Bloody Tower and looked out over London.

Then indeed his heart failed him for fear, for the fire was roaring like a great gale and carrying raging destruction on its wings fanned by a high wind. A sea of flame roared beneath him—a pit of hell unashamed in broad daylight. It had devoured its way to London Bridge with the tall narrow houses, and on the City side there were spouting red flame and smoke and beneath them the pitiful helpless people like an ants' nest disturbed and running aimless here and there carrying what little goods they could snatch up in their frenzy of fear. The fire had crossed the bridge and for heralds sent storms of sparks and blown brands and stifling volumes of smoke. Men dropped in the street overcome, and to Pepys it appeared that he looked down into the heart of horror. The plague—and now this! Was God dead set against London that He would not leave one stone on another?

“O, Mr. Pepys, will it burn us all alive?” the boy cried through chattering teeth.

It roused the man in Pepys.

“You stay here, boy. If God forsakes us man must do his best,” and dragging his hand away from the clutch he ran down the narrow spiral of the steps as he never thought to run, and so away with him down to the waterside, pushing and thrusting through the gathering crowds and taking a blow here and there as he pushed on. The streets were hopeless. He was making for the river, hell-for-leather! He found a half-dazed waterman and pushing money into his hand took an oar himself and so to work and through London Bridge, the risen wind sweeping above him to aid the fire and bring despair.

“This night will not see a house left in London town unless that cursed wind drops,” cried the man above the roaring and crackling. “O God, look at London Bridge aflame! the houses, the houses!”

“Don't talk, man. Pull for your life!” shouted Pepys in answer. They put their backs into it and strained at the oars. The bridge itself could not burn. It was stone clamped with stout iron, but all along it the houses were volcanoes flaming to Heaven. He kept his eyes open and his head as steady as he could as they took the middle arch, the brands and sparks falling hissing in the river.

Who could understand the dealings of such a bitter Providence? The poor pigeons, loath to leave the kindly eaves and dormers that had sheltered

them, hovered over the houses in human terror, as near as they dared. He saw the smoke catch and smother them—their wings singe and blacken—and they dropped down into the gulf of flame and were gone. The people mad with fear were hailing lighters to stand in to shore that they might fling their goods aboard, and not a soul—not a soul was directing a thought to checking the monstrous onrush of death. They were sheep without a shepherd. Some hailed Pepys with despairing cries—would he take some treasure of plate aboard, a box, brassbound and heavy, or what not? But he rowed on steadily to Whitehall feeling that never man in all history had carried a heavier weight of responsibility, and so up the long broad stairs to the King’s closet in the Chapel.

Black with smoke and dirt, his eyes half extinguished in his head from the smarting smoke, men ran about him taking him for a messenger of doom.

“The King!” he said, “and a draught of ale, for God’s sake, or tell my tale I cannot. My mouth is black as pitch.”

They brought him a flagon of ale that ran like the water of life down his parched throat, and carried in word to the King of evil news, and in ten minutes more he stood before the royal brothers—Charles in his chamber robe fresh from the Queen’s bed, the Duke cool and full-dressed and prepared for anything—as a sailor should be—at his shoulder.

Pepys went down on his knees, panting.

“What is it, Mr. Pepys? They talk of fire. Where?”

“Sir, unless your Majesty gives orders, and that right soon, to destroy houses—to pull them down every way—there will be no City of London left, for a most hellish and malicious fire devours it before our eyes.”

Charles could not be hurried or flustered. His own hairbreadth ’scapes in early life had exhausted all his capacity for wonder or fear. He commanded Pepys to his feet and asked him half smiling whether this account was magnified:

“For indeed such a fire would be a world’s marvel, and especially coming on the plague’s heels. But I know you a sensible man, Mr. Pepys. What would you have us do?”

His saturnine face had almost a mocking air in the rich shadows of the splendidly furnished room. The King of England who could spend the evening chasing a moth with Lady Castlemaine while the fate of England hung on a sea-fight with the Dutch was not the man to be very sincerely concerned if the City burned while he played. No one could say it was his

fault and that was what concerned him most. If Pepys had hoped to see him throw himself instantly on horseback and ride down to the tortured city to lead and command, he knew better when he looked at that face. If it had been Oliver Cromwell—but that was past. They had chosen their king and got him. But instinctively, though he looked at the King, he spoke henceforth to the Duke.

“What is wanted is orders to the Lord Mayor to pull down the houses and stop the fire. And some person to lead. The people run about and none to command.”

“’Tis damnable ill-luck!” said the King. “Eh, James! And beyond all expectation after the cursed plague. It never rains but it pours! Well, Mr. Pepys, you shall take my order to the Lord Mayor and lose no time in getting it to him. I am very much beholden to you. You are a man sure to be in the way when wanted, and so I have always said.”

He took a pen and wrote a few words, signing it with his flourish, and meanwhile the Duke got his word in.

“We will come down. Count on his Majesty. Have a care of yourself, Mr. Pepys. We cannot spare your like. And now speed—speed for your life. And tell the Lord Mayor he can have what soldiers he will to help the work. We will take order for it.”

He was back in the Closet in another moment and running down the stairs with Captain Cock shouting after him that his coach was in waiting in the courtyard and to take it—and make straight for the City.

Therefore Pepys had leisure to think for a little as he lumbered eastward at the utmost speed of the heavy plunging four. He lay back, shaken, but taking what rest he could. And that was a king! And for that they had shaken off the Puritans and their sense of duty with them that made the country respected along the seas and lands of the earth. Was this God’s vengeance on their folly and madness, and was all the loose living and mad outlay of hard-won money on base pleasures to bring them to ruin at last? What had he not seen? The Dutch disputing the mastery of the seas with English soldiers actually serving on board the Hollander ships because they could get no pay from the King or Parliament—and Castlemaine and Nell Gwyn must have their diamonds and all their pretty lusts satisfied! Pepys knew and had told the Duke to his face not only that this must come but that it had already happened. Men hearing it had told him of English voices aboard the Dutch ships crying: “We did heretofore fight for tickets but now we fight for dollars.” And he himself in the open streets of Wapping had heard the sailors’ wives calling out: “This comes of your not paying our husbands; and

now your ships may rot in hands that understand not the work!" What ruin might it not bring?

Mismanagement, corruption, and disgrace everywhere! Alone in the coach the blood ran to his face as he thought of the open cess-pit the Court was in the land. Would Cromwell's mutilated body turn in the grave at Tyburn where Charles had flung it to think of England in her shame? Pepys half believed it. Cromwell was a man—a great King. He and Elizabeth Tudor would have known how to deal with Dutch and English alike. A sigh that was almost a groan tore his heart. To his nervous emotional nature it seemed at that moment that England in her bleeding unhelped wrung him more than the sight of any human being dying forsaken before his eyes, and that henceforward that need would be his only thought and care.

In the Strand a coach lumbering past his, going westward, pulled up alongside, and a woman put her head out of the window, her features half hidden by a plumed hat. It was Rachel Becke. Startled into a sudden recognition of the world and its claims, Pepys stared at her and was dumb.

"Mr. Pepys, a word with you. May I come into your coach a minute? You are in haste."

"Mad haste, madam, with the King's order in my hand and the City burning to death at the end of my ride. I must not delay."

"You shall not!"

Quick and alert she sprang out of her coach into his own and ordered hers to follow.

"Don't weary yourself to tell me, Mr. Pepys. I know all. Tell me only this, what can the Duke do to show himself off to best advantage to the people?"

It was so chilling in the perfect worldliness of her point of view that in his pain and shame for the country the words fell like a jet of ice-water on a cheek aflame with fever. He winced away from her, and then with a sudden revulsion to the grosser side such as often overtook him saw that she was right after her own gospel. After all—every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost—and certainly his own interests stood or fell with the Duke's and hers! She sat beside him, more calm, intelligent, and queenly than any woman at Court from the Queen downward, with her eye fixed brightly and steadily on the main chance and harvesting what could be made use of in power and money from the general wreck and ruin; and who was he to set himself up above such considerations? It dawned on him with a kind of astonishment that never till that moment had he realized the danger

of his own possessions if the fire should strike into Seething Lane, as easily it might—his money, his plate! Why was he not thinking of them instead of flying over the town like a post-boy in everyone's pay? She tilted her hat a little back so that he could see her features, clear cut as a Greek gem.

"Tell me! I dare swear the King will do nothing. He is a fool. Lord, what a chance for the Duke!"

Her eyes sparkled more brightly than ever he had seen them.

"I drove east," she added, "thinking to catch you at the Navy Office but could not get through. The crowds are like madmen."

They were driving east helter-skelter as she spoke, but her presence steadied Pepys. He caught her vision of the future and spoke hurriedly:

"Madam, tell the Duke to show himself. To come east this day. To have the houses blown up with gunpowder—no time for any other way! To give money. But above all to show himself everywhere with orders and much talk of sympathy. That will count to him more than money."

She grasped at every word and smiled.

"Then he shall.—The King intends his bastard Monmouth for the throne when he has wrenched himself to death—but we know better, you and I. God go with you, good Mr. Pepys, and have a care of yourself, for the future that's to come. Gunpowder?—that's well!"

She halted the coach and sprang lightly out, her face bright with calm pleasure. He caught a wave of her white hand with the Duke's diamond on it, and she was gone.

The current of his thoughts was wholly changed. Lord!—the Duke's luck in having that woman about him while his fat wife amused herself with her lover. How like her to seize the occasion on the wing! What a queen she would have made had fate willed it! He could imagine her calm dignity and steady remorseless pushing to her end careless of what or who stood in the way, and a feeling of fear shot through him. But on—on! If it were good for the Duke to show himself keen in the public interest, so it was good also for the Clerk of the Acts—the coming Parliament man! What had been instinctive and generous in his haste became calculated, wary.

What with the swaying toiling crowd the coach could get no further than St. Paul's, and there he sprang out and began thrusting through the crowd with "Way for the King's message! Where is the Lord Mayor?" in his mouth, even the frightened people falling back before his air of consequence. Much to his pleasure he heard his name passed from lip to lip with awe. The King's chosen messenger, Mr. Pepys of the Navy Office! At

last in Cannon Street he spied the fat flustered Mayor, Sir Thomas Bludworth, lumbering about like a rudderless ship in a heavy sea. He stared confusedly at Pepys, wiping his sweating face with the ends of a handkerchief tied about his neck. Not even Pepys's air of authority could steady his nerves as he stood gasping and trembling to hear.

I command the Lord Mayor to pull down houses before the fire every way and that all be done in my name to halt it. C. R.

To the King's message he cried like a fainting woman, staring confusedly about him:

“Lord! What can I do? I am spent; people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it. I tell you, Mr. Pepys, I have done what I can. I need no more soldiers and care not if I do. Home I must go and rest and refresh myself, having been up all night.”

He turned and, for a heavy man, almost ran into the distractedly surging crowd and was lost. Pepys stood a moment looking after him and then quietly turned and walked home, noting as he went the people filling the churches with their goods and all intent on self and no means used to stay the fire. It was a commentary on Rachel Becke's words—if any were needed. If no one took care for others the more need to consider for oneself. Of one thing he was certain—the Duke would come Cityward today and he must himself be beside him for all the world to see.

“Lord!—and to think I have guests for dinner, and I as smutty as a devil!”

He quickened his walk and arrived to find Mr. Wood and his wife—she a fine woman, dressed in the highest style of the mode, and so to an excellent good dinner and mighty merry—Elizabeth showing no sign of unfriendliness. Let it blow over, he thought, as far as he was concerned he asked nothing but peace.

It was no surprise to him to have a message from the Navy Office that the King and Duke of York would be on the scene in the afternoon. It was wisely done of the Duke to insist the King should put himself in the forefront! There too Pepys imagined he could discern the skill of Rachel Becke. What? Provoke the King's jealousy—and the future so uncertain that any day the Queen might be declared with child! No, indeed. And so off with him to the waterside again to meet the King and Duke in the royal barge sweeping stately on her oars down the river.

They stood together on the raised deck with a little spaniel of the King's pressing up beside him and the King was hailing the lightermen's barges loaded with every sort of household goods and bidding them do their duty for he would remember them. They cheered him, but feebly as men that have no time to spare on anything so unreal as kings and their fripperies. With the Duke it was a different matter. He stood behind but was surrounded with men to whom he spoke earnestly, commanding and suggesting, and landing he strode about giving orders with anxious eyes, noting how the fire was always the stronger, sending its light artillery of firedrops in showers before it to clear the way for the all-devouring flames. He turned to Pepys.

"An awful sight! It is a most horrid malicious bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire but devilish and unnatural. Well, God's will be done! I take command in the City. My purpose is to have the houses blown up with gunpowder. I believe it will answer."

Pepys dutifully believed so too.

"And God knows the people want a leader, your Royal Highness, and I thank the Almighty you are here. Is the gunpowder come down?"

The Duke nodded. He had given orders for that. Remaining after the barge had carried the King off he commanded gunpowder to be laid to the houses in Tower Street, next to the Tower, and great was the horror when it exploded carrying the houses heavenward with it. Many cried out that it was the Day of Judgment, and women fainted, the Duke watching, leaning calmly on his gold-mounted sword.

"Good! Good!" he said approvingly. "Now stand by, my men, and see. Even fire is not so swift as gunpowder, and here it comes. Now watch!"

The roaring crackling beast shot out a fiery tongue to lick up the houses and found—vacancy! It was as if it coiled back on itself disappointed—the first stay in its ruining rush.

The people stood amazed a second, then cheered and cheered with what strength they had left in their dry throats.

"The Duke! God bless the Duke—our deliverer!" they shouted.

He stood there raising his hand to his hat like a soldier in salute and issued orders for more gunpowder and more, and above all to save the Navy Office with its priceless papers from destruction. How long he stayed there Pepys did not know, but he was almost dropping himself as he stood when the Duke took to an ordinary boat and so, amid rousing cheers, up the river.

"Another nail in Monmouth's coffin!" Pepys said to himself as he turned wearily homeward.

To fresh alarms. There was a wild arch of flames in the sky most menacingly near. Seething Lane—and another up the hill a mile long—a wild corona of splendour with great flame storming the sky. Halting he saw Elizabeth lean from the window beckoning and pointing, with Deb pale at her shoulder, and in five minutes more was in the house and beside her.

“God, it’s on us!” he cried and so silently to work, Elizabeth kneeling beside him stacking the flagons, their best treasures in silver plate, into two boxes. Desperately pale she worked and said not a word, but once looking up their eyes met, and kneeling she flung her arms about his neck as he sat, and kissed him with passion, and so hard at it again, Deb fetching and carrying and every soul in the house stopping neither for food nor drink if they could but save their all from the oncoming terror. Despair brings men and women together even as it herds animals aghast and despairing.

Chapter Eighteen

THEY had had two days of exhausting work and terror with the fire drawing nearer like a leaping lion and Elizabeth could hardly drag her little feet about the house. They worked like galley-slaves in ridding the house of goods and lived on such scraps of food as could be snatched up at a moment's notice, and on the third day, when she was at the point of collapse, news came that the danger was advancing steadily towards Allhallows Barking Church on its way to Seething Lane.

She nearly fainted at the news, and Pepys, almost at his wit's end, had no choice but to hurry her to the old refuge—the rooms at Woolwich which had sheltered her during the plague. Deb and Will Hewer were to go with her, and between them they must carry two thousand and three hundred and fifty pounds in gold, a part of his hard-won savings. He had no trust in the newfangled system of banking and had always been driven to the anxiety of keeping all his uninvested money under his own eyes—a matter to turn his hair grey with care under his fine curled periwig. The best he could do was to divide what he had on his hands between Woolwich and a refuge offered at Sir William Rider's great house at Bethnal Green. A horrible business and one to set all his nerves quivering. Life had repaid his devotion up to the present time but the fickle jade was going awry now with a vengeance.

Leaving his gold in a room and giving a solemn charge to Elizabeth and Will Hewer never to leave it, one or the other of them, night or day, he hurried back to London to get his other goods into the lighters and take them off himself, well watched by men he could trust, down to Deptford. No time for pretty Mrs. Bagwell now! He never gave her a thought. Returning he found the fire halted at the foot of Seething Lane by means of the Duke's gunpowder, and so ventured himself home again, worn out in body and nearly so in mind. Yet next day, with his marvellous elasticity he was himself. He had a perpetual nourishment and support which could never fail, Life itself being his passion, and Life outlives a man's concern with her.

The strange eventful happenings in the streets were a cordial to him. A noise, a shout, and down went his pen and out with him into the very heart

of the disturbance mad to see and hear. To a mind like the great Romantic's such things could dull the edge of his own anxieties, and come what would he must revel in the pageant of human existence as if all were his own intimate concern, as indeed it was. To see a poor cat taken from a hole in the wall of the Exchange, hair burnt but still living, was an adventure which gave him half an hour of moving pity and interest. To pick his way among the hot cinders and count the great blazes of oil-cellars and other combustibles aflame and note the crawling river stripped of the houses and churches along its banks until the Temple stood up stark and sound, meant hours of tragic drama from which he could hardly tear himself for necessary work at the rescued Navy Office. And there was merriment too—the comedy-relief scattered here and there to relieve the enthralling tragedy. He had seldom enjoyed a meal more than the picnic on earthen platters at Sir Richard Ford's when Elizabeth was safe at Woolwich—a fried breast of mutton with not so much as a vegetable, but all very merry and indeed as good a meal, though as ugly a one, as ever he had seen in his life. Incurably a lover of Life, he took her blows like those of a beautiful mistress in turn with her caresses, and adored still.

It was a perpetual picture gliding by his eyes. There was the Duke riding by the Navy Office with his guard behind him, General of the City and in charge of all. His name stood very much higher now than any other, though he would never have the rakehelly popularity of the King's slipshod good-nature. Serious men saw in him a hope for some decency of management in the country's affairs some day. Pepys with tickling satisfaction heard right and left:

“The Duke comes forward well when needed, and a fine sailor with a care for the country afloat and ashore. God send he be not a concealed Papist as the King is for sure! But no! the Papists likely set the City afire. It proves the Duke to be an honest Protestant that he puts it out. And indeed the talk is that he minds religion less than he did.”

But yet the ugly rumours about the Papists and the fire went from mouth to mouth, and at times Pepys would reflect on the possibility of Rachel's interest with her lover being strong enough to allow of her reconversion in the character of a Presbyterian's praying daughter and dragging the Duke after her. No—not yet. She would know the time—Trust her! But the Duke was a gallant sight, riding and commanding and smiling gravely on the people and their applause, and the more so as he knew that with the Duke's interest his own mounted daily and steadily. He blessed his own foresight, hugging the drama of it to his heart. There was the pleasure too of seeing fortunes made and lost almost in a day, so had land and house values swelled in the City.

The ruined took it in silence like stunned men; the winners exulted as publicly as they dared and the more freely as the fire was conquered and men stood to face their losses and gains. There was much to enter in his diary when the fire slackened, after he had got his goods from Deptford; the money at Sir William Rider's again under lock and key at the office—and his wines and cheese dug up from the garden, where much to his annoyance he could see Lady Penn's eye at watch from her bedroom window. If it had been her case he could not deny however that his curiosity would have put himself behind the curtains to have his share in the show.

It was also a part of the eternal drama that with the house put straight and proper watchers appointed in his absence he must go down to Woolwich and bring Elizabeth home as she had pressed him to do the moment return was possible. She sickened of Woolwich and all the upsets and alarms. She was sleeping ill and the one thing she desired was to be in her own home and at peace, with her husband beside her. Surely after such horrors as the Plague and Fire any man would be sick of gadding and covet nothing but peace and his own fireside?

She could not but laugh at this notion of hers when he came down to fetch her, florid and jolly, brimming with life and as gay as a lark with his stories of the Fire and the picnic dinners and suppers with his colleagues of the Navy Office. Would anything ever change him into seriousness with a proper view of the time to laugh and the time to weep that a woman could rely on in a husband? Never!—not though the sky should fall!—He would always crave amusement and find it out of bounds if not within them and with others if not with her. There were times when she felt she could be as jealous of life itself as of Knipp, so sure was she that in every way he would find rich food to keep him happy whatever might be her lot. For him London had become a city of new interests and surprises and the dramas in rich and poor households about him were so great a delight that he could talk of nothing else. How he laughed at Dean Harding's bad poor sermon with its ridiculous illustration of the City's being reduced by fire from a folio to a duodecimo volume; the bewigged old idiot! And it was at the same service he told her of a proper gallant he had seen labour to take a pretty modest girl about the body who stood by him.

“And would have done it, and Lord! I could not blame him, but I saw the cunning little slut get out two pins from her pocket to run them into his arm and so he refrained and behaved himself decently. To think what men will be at!”

“I have known such men,” was Elizabeth’s only comment. She had an inkling that he was the hero of the adventure and could not lose the mirth of passing it on. Was there another man in London in the wake of the Great Fire who would have thought of such an advance and in the House of God! Her every Catholic sensibility revolted at it.

He had met and kissed Deb in the parlour below stairs before Elizabeth in her bedroom heard him come. Deb adorned her cheeks with a pair of lovely country roses in his honour and stood there with drooped eyelashes, a pretty picture of the shyness that courts advances. She had grown prettier every day since her coming, on the good food and easy ways of the Pepys household, for the maids did the drudgery, and though she must sew for Elizabeth and keep Pepys’s clothes in order (a labour of love!) there were leisure hours when she could adjust her own wardrobe and play tricks with her hair to set it off or brush her silky eyebrows into the pencilled lines which refined the whole expression of her face. She picked up lady-ways and delicacy of accent from Elizabeth and also a good taste in dress as far as she dared to go, but there she must be cautious, for Elizabeth was fitful and would sometimes pounce like an angry cat on a mouse with a few words that went home and kept her in her place.

But on the day that Pepys came down to Woolwich to fetch them back to London Deb cared very little what her mistress said or thought. She saw a look in his eye that experience was teaching her to understand. It meant that every movement of hers interested him, and that between them was a secret and uniting understanding—alarming, delicious, and the more delicious because no one must dream it existed. For his part he thought her prettier every time he saw her, and now as she stood there in a little pink dress and cap winged at the ears above the lovely tendrils of auburn hair she reminded him of shy Dutch girls he had seen at The Hague with their exquisite primness that a man yearned to ruffle. He could no more resist her than picking a lovely rosebud at dawn with the dew in pearls on it.

“Why, Deb, Woolwich air suits you, you grow more apple-cheeked every day!” he said. “Will you stay here for good or come back with us to London? And how many young men’s hearts have you broke to fill your pockets?”

He put an arm about her and pulled her to his breast; she lay there looking down, and it was the most natural and necessary thing in the world to tilt her chin and press his mouth to hers—

*“As if he pulled up kisses by the roots
That grew upon her lips.”*

That too was a part of life's delight, and the girl was such a child that she would not take it as more than a merry jest. He would know how to be careful, and the line was drawn in his mind where he would stop. "But I am too much pleased with her," he thought feeling her bosom flutter against him and the thrilling pleasure it sent through his own body. "I must not mind her to the discontent of my wife, but like this—what harm?"

"Well, Deb?" he asked aloud, to prompt her silence.

"I would not stay from you—no, not if it made me a beauty like Mrs. Williams!" she whispered in answer, clinging closer.

Mrs. Williams! That amused and disturbed him. Mrs. Williams was the black-eyed mistress of Lord Brouncker who came often to the Navy Office on business, leaving the bold beauty sitting back in his coach tossed off in rich silks and laces and a necklace of pearl better than Elizabeth's. It was not the best sight in the world for eyes of eighteen, he thought. The Puritan born and reared in Pepys and only drugged by the vices of the Restoration reared his head instantly at the notion.

"You should not look at the woman, Deb!" he said with a retreating note in his voice. "What? Would you sell your virtue to wear silks and pearls like a lady? I would rather see you have a care of your honour and fear God—a chit of a girl like you!"

"And so I have, sir—so I do. Yourself knows a girl can't go in the street but she is tempted, but I mind what my mother taught me and your own good words."

She looked up trembling, with liquid eyes, and such conduct deserving encouragement he put the other arm about her also and kissed her again and again. If only it were not against his conscience how he could enjoy it! What made those kisses so delicious? Who could blame him if they had seen the lovely fluttering thing?

"Do you like me, Deb?" he asked presently. "I would know why you let me kiss you though no other may touch your little soft lips and cheek. Why is it? Tell me—I must know!"

"I like you, sir—O, more, much more than I must tell. I love to touch your hand. I have no courage to kiss you but——"

"Would you if you could, pretty Deb? Then kiss me—why not? Kisses leave no mark!"

"They leave it—here!" she said, panting a little and laying her hand on her heart. "Sir, shall I tell you a secret?"

He caught at that—the perspiration of excitement standing in beads on his forehead. What was it? Who could have supposed—— Something had warned him when Elizabeth spoke of her beauty that this girl would bring trouble. Even before she came he had felt it. But now—his heart would not have him stop, come what would. She whispered very shyly, her mouth against his ear as he stooped his head to her.

“Sir, when I saw Mrs. Williams and I heard Jane and Alice say she was the lady that lived with my Lord Brouncker, it was not at her gown and ribbons I looked—no!—But I thought——”

“What?” he asked greedily as she stopped and sighing hid her face in his breast. A muffled voice, very small, told him the rest.

“I thought that to live in the same house and love and be loved—I thought—sure this is Heaven on earth, and I coveted what she had and would take it from her if I could; if I had her chance to live with one she loved. Sir, was this wicked?”

“No, my poor, poor girl, but most natural. So long, that is, as you keep within bounds. But it was not Lord Brouncker your thoughts veered to, but another? Give me the truth and your lips!”

She whispered “Another!” in a voice that touched his ear like a sob. His arms tightened about her, and as she lay against him—a flower for the plucking—Elizabeth’s clear voice rang down the stair:

“Deb, come up! What was that noise I heard?”

Even to Pepys it was something of a shock to see how lightly and quickly Deb disengaged herself and flew up the stair crying joyfully:

“O, madam! the master is this minute come to take us back to London. And which gown will you wear? The blue one, because you look so beautiful in that?”

“Lord!—women!” said Pepys to himself. It had to be and yet discomfited him. “I believe they know every secrecy in the cradle and are perfect mistresses of evasion at two years! Yet I think the girl honest. Her eyes declare it. I must go warily though—warily!”

Deb certainly did. Before Elizabeth her eyelids were like the dropped petals of white flowers. She never raised her eyes and remained the waxen model of a maid, dutifully obedient to her mistress.

And so they got back to London.

But now it was becoming an obsession with him as well as with her. He could shake it off out of doors, for there Life the wanton asserted herself in a

hundred new postures to catch his eyes, and besides there was rumour of Dutch activities with their ships that must keep the Clerk of the Acts up and doing knowing too well, as he did, what little money, how few men and what disordered ships there were to meet any attack. But when he came in Deb would be the shadow haunting his heart—yes, heart.—So far as a heart troubled him. He watched for her. She grew sweeter and more perfumed with charm daily to his warring senses. Elizabeth's presence was irksome to him. He had no more than a careless kiss for Mrs. Bagwell now at Deptford, and as to the bold Mrs. Martin at Westminster Hall he never went near her but when real business took him that way. The liking for Mrs. Knipp still persisted because she could give him what Deb could not and what he found always irresistible—the gliding ravishing sweetness of song.

“Women and music! God knows I would resist them but cannot!” groaned Pepys sitting beside her to see her face become angelic and unlike the bold coquette he knew, as the divine sweetness of an old Italian air stole from her parted lips in honey-sweetness. What was a man to do? She sank her head on his shoulder, and even in kissing painted lips he felt the blossom warmth of Deb's virgin mouth at home.

Yet at a call—at a shock—he thought he could lay it all aside as if it had never been. Possibly, but as always the call came too late.

There was a day when Elizabeth was called away by her mother's sudden illness. Her parents were in better case now, but still she went constantly to see them and found peace in their admiration of her worthy husband, her riches and happiness. They had not much else to rejoice them, poor souls! and she never let slip a marring word. But it happened that Pepys came round from the office to find some papers he needed and there was Deb with the news of Madame St. Michel's illness and a look in her eyes that dazed him, drove him beyond himself into a brief but most ruinous madness that afterwards he loathed yet loved to dwell on. That night Deb's lips were no longer virgin and there was a guilty secret in the house.

Could he blame himself or little Deb? He could not adjust his thoughts to the new and irretrievable conditions.

“God forgive me! What a strange slavery is this that I stand in to beauty that I value nothing near it at the moment. Not home, nor peace of mind nor nothing!” he thought as he waked by Elizabeth that night and heard her light breathing while he was wondering what Deb's thoughts might be in her room overhead. Pride and triumph at their full, but that he never guessed nor could have understood.

And the very next day came the call that might have saved him, and brought with it wild confusion of dread and shame that vexed him to the blood and put even Deb out of his head for some most cruel days. He had gone quietly down to Deptford on the usual business and even while he was walking with Mr. Evelyn on the road to Sayes Court came a post running after him with a letter from Sir William Coventry to tell him that the Dutch were abroad again with eighty ships of war and twenty fire-ships ranging the high seas like wolves and, bending, it was thought, to England. The look of fear in Evelyn's eyes when he held out the letter combined with his own bitter knowledge that there was not one English ship at sea fit to meet them struck him dumb with dismay.

For a moment Evelyn also stood with Coventry's letter in his hand and dry lips that could shape no word. At long last, drawing his breath with a groan he looked in his friend's eyes:

"And our ambassadors are treating at Breda, and the Dutch look on them as come to beg peace like whipped hounds and use them accordingly! My good friend, what hope? For all hangs on the Navy."

"None there—and not our fault but that of the King and Parliament!" said Pepys violently, his face red with a very different and manlier passion than that which had bent the girl to his will. "We have prayed and besought for money and they would give us fifty pound here and a hundred there, and all the men to pay and the ships to fit, and could do nothing with our hands tied. Mr. Evelyn, bear witness I say that whatever ruin come upon this unlucky country it is the fault of her rulers and if I am a true prophet it is on us now! It is an eyesore, a shame, a scandal, to see the corruption and vanity of these men!"

His caution was broken down. For once he spoke out as he felt and knew. Evelyn shook his head sadly.

"With me that knows the truth all you say is safe, my most worthy friend, and would that all our governors were like yourself, wise, industrious and disciplined, for sure the Court is a stink in the land, though I believe the Duke to be honest if he could have his way. Pray therefore, Mr. Pepys, for this unhappy nation, and I will add my prayer unworthy to yours that the All-Merciful may consider our needs rather than our sins."

But there could be no delay for talk. Pepys wrung his hand with water standing in his own eyes and turned back, and on the hurried way to London Evelyn's beautiful austere face rose before him like a prophet's denouncing doom. His words too were ravens at his ear—"disciplined," with that secret in the house and others outside it! Something like a prayer shaped his lips as

the boat pulled steadily up stream to Whitehall: “God send I do my best for the country in this pinch, God send the King and others may be men and not fail us!”

But that too was a gesture of Life the sorceress; each thing passed and another as seductive and engrossing took its place. And the thought glided in that if he stood fast where others failed he might, as he had done in the plague, get his head above theirs and step into a higher place. Yet after supper and in his uppermost thought was the anxious consideration of how he could keep some part of his wages as Surveyor of the Victualling which he dreaded would be taken away as a result of the war. Strange soul of man—climbing near heaven and then grovelling contented in the muddy wallows!

“As the Lord made us so He must take us!” was his last thought as sleep overtook him after Elizabeth’s good-night kiss.

And then events thick and fast came hurtling upon the terrified people. The stately Dutch ships were at the Nore and higher, and no English ships to oppose them—Chatham and the Dockyard, the very heart of English naval strength their goal. Men went about in the City pale-faced, the merchants realizing the terror if their rulers did not, and all day long Pepys was trying to organize some service of fire-ships that the wind might drive amongst the marauders and save England as they had saved her once before. He was urged almost to a frenzy of work by passionate entreaties from Sir William Coventry who lay idle on the High Seas half heartbroken for the lack of help and men and fire-ships. Through the Duke Pepys got an Order in Council placing every man’s ships at the King’s service—but it was too late to prepare with the great Dutchmen sweeping steadily on to Chatham, there to deliver the death-blow.

Deb slunk by him with dropped eyes those days when he came home wearied and half mad with anxiety at the frightful responsibility on him and the impossibility of the country’s learning where the guilt truly lay. The amour fell into the background like a thing withered at birth, and with timid plaintive eyes she watched him and could not understand nor dared to complain. That evening with the beating of drums all about them to call up the trained bands all over the City on pain of death, he shut the door for a secret word with Elizabeth.

“It is very fit you should know, Bess, how matters stand, for you must deal with our goods, I having no moment to consider them. It stands thus. The Dutch will win Chatham so sure as I sit here and if so will land men and London go next. There is come news tonight that they have broke the Chain

at Chatham and are through, and they have burnt many of our ships, more especially the *Royal Charles*, and to you I say what I would not dare to another, would it were the man himself, for the Duke would do good work if he were the head. I would the King were dead and buried!”

She stared at him with pale lips apart—the Plague, the Fire, and now this horror! God’s judgments—plain written, plain to be read. She could not shape a word, could only stare at him in helpless horror—home, country, wealth, all else ruining about her ears.

“And it is very like when all is done that they will commit me to the Tower for it that am as innocent as a lamb!” he went on bitterly. “The small men pay while the great men fatten. Last night while the Dutch burnt our ships the King and my Lady Castlemaine were chasing a poor moth all the evening at a supper at my Lady Duchess of Monmouth’s—and he takes ten times more pains to make friends between Castlemaine and Mrs. Stewart when they fall out—or to reconcile Castlemaine with her woman, than ever he does to save his kingdom—the damned weakling with women! To see his horrid effeminacy and the Dutch up the Medway! But now it’s every man for himself, and I must think what to do with the little I have in money by me. So God help us!”

He choked down something in his throat and went on.

“I am resolved that my father and you, Bess, go tomorrow to the country at Brampton taking our all with you and bury it in the garden. And lucky it is in our own hand, for the banks—as they call themselves—cannot pay those crowding about them and are staving them off with fine words. Go and take Deb with you, and I’ll stick to my work.”

She promised faintly, sick with fear, weary of the calamities that rained upon them one after another.

He could not even see them start next day, for the King and the Duke required his assistance everywhere in shutting the stable door after the steed was stolen, and many a pregnant look passed between the Duke and Pepys at the King’s listless flurries of anxiety. The deed was done. The Dutch were in possession of Chatham and the Dockyard, and England shamed.

Burning and capturing they had come on—sinking the storeships, lowering the Jack on the King’s ships to the accompaniment of mocking music; met only by horrible miscarriages of common sense everywhere of which they took the fullest advantage, and no Englishman knowing which way to turn himself for want of preparation and management.

As for Pepys, he sent what Elizabeth and his father could not carry by a sure hand down to Brampton and then abandoned it to chance, for there was not one moment in which he could give it a thought. Bess must see to it, and if it went, it went. He knew too well that the day of account for the Navy Office, let the invasion end as it would, was coming. The English are patient to folly but they will have their sacrifice when their trust is betrayed. Therefore in the brief intervals of work and late at night he sat collecting papers for the defense he saw looming starkly ahead of the Commissioners, with the Tower and likely enough the block to complete the vista.

One day he was brought with his books and papers to a useless recriminating council of the Lord and Ministers when Pett the Naval Commissioner at Chatham was called in before them, his tail between his legs and head hanging, a fool in his folly, and the evidence of the Clerk of the Acts demanded. They sent Pett to the Tower with threatening looks that chilled Pepys's own soul. Do men discriminate in the cold embrace of fear? He was in absolute terror lest the hooting populace outside should take himself for an accomplice of Pett's weakness, and passed through them bowing and smiling with a cheerful face and heart chill with dismay. They might believe he was a prisoner, as God knew he soon might be. He and others knew well it was the King and his ministers should be at the bar instead of an insignificant fool like Pett. He saw it in every glance of the Duke's eyes when they met his own. But that could not be said unless and until the whole outraged nation raised its voice. He must prepare for the worst. On returning he gave his clerk Hater his closet-key and directions where to find £500 in gold to remove in case of his arrest. He knew, none better, that all the town was crying out on the Navy Office for a set of fools and knaves and though many a good word was said for himself and the Duke would stand by him, who could foresee the end? One hope—one only. The English ships collected at last near Harwich, hoping to make a stand. On that event all interests little and great centred.

And whether it was that threat or what else God only could tell, but the thing fizzled out in the unexpected. It seemed that the King and his ministers would bear any degradation so long as they could have their sloth, for at last, after two Dutch visits to Chatham and wrecking at their will there was talk of peace, and the Dutch sailed down the Medway again and were gone, leaving behind them shame, ruin, and wreckage and the Navy Office with a terrible bill to foot in the face of the furious and humiliated nation.

Was there any use in trying to be better than the times, and such times? Pepys asked, as with aching head and eyes that felt as if they shed blood instead of moisture he sat forcing them to work far into the night while he

prepared an answer to the indictment the King as well as the country would certainly bring against that scapegoat, the Navy Office. Outside, men were talking of nothing but the shameful peace the King was making with the Dutch at Breda, and clustered in crowds and every English face dark with shame and impotent anger. The King was at Hampton Court with his women, and Mr. Evelyn had given Pepys such an account of the orgies there as must make a man blush to think of the days of Cromwell and his stern unforgotten face fronting unmoved tempest from every quarter. It was something then to be an Englishman. It was a disgrace now.

Chapter Nineteen

YET even a passionate lover of life is sometimes exhausted by her caprices and when the strain relaxed and the dishonourable peace was signed Pepys was worn out, eyes and body. He had his clerks at work almost night and day transcribing the accounts and evidence which were to clear the Navy Office without damning the King and those about him, for a Parliament had been summoned and the investigation must be made public. Commissioner Pett's arrest and imprisonment in the Tower had terrified his superiors and they urged Pepys until he almost cried out that he could do no more than he was doing to furnish facts for whoever should be called to defend them at the bar of the House of Commons.

“For be it Lord Brouncker or Sir William Coventry or Sir William Penn who shall speak for the Navy Office before Parliament, here is the ammunition to his hand.”

He knew well as he said this that if it suited their interests there was not one of the men he had named nor one connected with the Navy Office, except perhaps Sir William Coventry and Lord Sandwich, who would not take the glory of the defense and cast him to the wolves if a victim was still called for. But Sir William talked privately of retiring from the public service, wearied as Pepys himself of the unending struggle against corruption and utter indifference. Those were dark days. He could see no way ahead of him.

As he sat one evening pressing his hand over his eyes to ease the pain in them and turning the tangle over in his mind in a state of exhaustion like a heavy fog that made him grope in twilight physical and mental when most he needed his wits about him, a letter was brought in sealed with a plain seal. He opened it instantly, for in these dangerous times nothing could be neglected, and knew the hand at once. Rachel Becke. It was so like herself as to be worth transcribing.

SIR,

If amidst your fatigues an hour or two of quiet by rustic Thames would refresh you, winged by such music as pacifies your

soul, both such could be had tomorrow at any such time in the afternoon as you are at liberty for trifles.

Your well-wisher, R. B.

Post scriptum: Write not, but come or not as pleases you.

Instantly he knew there were important matters in the air. Nero might fiddle while Rome was burning but not Mrs. Rachel. In the quivering nervousness of his own nature, heaven-high one minute for pleasure, in hell's pit for fear the next, foreseeing troubles that might never come, the very thought of her calm eyes and steady persistence revived him like strong drink. He went to his supper with Will Hewer, so different a man that honest Will was delighted.

“For you have your own air, sir, and I know well that however ugly they use you, you will give them as good as they bring and better. And if not against your resolutions take a glass or two of good wine, and then when madam returns from the country the day after tomorrow she shall be cheered to see you.”

He ate and drank and was more hopeful, and next day, working till the afternoon like a man whose all was on the throw of the dice, hailed a hackney coach in the street, hoping the man would not know him, and away down to Chelsea sitting well back with his wide-brimmed hat pulled over his eyes.

“For no man must see me in any private understanding with the Duke,” he thought, “and this is a mighty discreet lady and will have me take all pains to avoid suspicion as I see well by her letter.”

He had brought his violin with him and carried it ostentatiously in his hand when he went in that the coachman might see the visit was one of pleasure and idleness, then despatched him to wait and bait his horses at the Silent Woman until summoned.

The maid took him straight into the garden, where Rachel sat by the river under a tree with a little table beside her carrying her embroidery and two or three pieces of music. In her grey dress made in the style that best pleased her with long falling folds, she looked taller and more stately than even he remembered her, and as he kissed her hand the homage required no effort, for her personality took it as a right though never demanding it. She had no hat, daring the sun with her beautiful pallor, the skin fine and close-grained as a lily's petal and admirably designed to set off the great eyes in which apparently her thoughts could be seen playing as clearly as fish in a brook. But Pepys knew better than that now, if he knew no more. She sat behind them, as it were, and used them for her own inscrutable ends.

“Mr. Pepys,” said she when he had seated himself near her, “I do perceive you are troubled, and it is little wonder when the hand of God lies so heavy on us as has been seen in the Plague and the Fire and now the Invasion. But remember clouds pass and the sun abides and so you shall find it. Now, my very good friend, I have news for you that shall give you great content and so prepare yourself.”

Her tone was so friendly that Pepys, responsive as a harp to the hand that played upon him, felt the quick tears well into his eyes. That weakness often befell him to his great shame and wrath, but he hid it so well that none suspected it behind his coarse gaiety. Now he made no attempt to hide the touch of emotion but sat looking at her with that something of the boy in his expression which made so many friends for him and drove daggers into Elizabeth’s heart after any quarrel. She leaned over and touched his hand with one as white and cool as the water lilies swaying on the ripples.

“You need rest of all things and I think will take it after my news. To be brief, the Duke is resolved as he told you long ago that you and none other shall defend the Navy officials before Parliament and——”

Good news? Pepys almost cried aloud in his horror. He? And draw the Court faction on him headed by the brazen harlot Castlemaine? And invite all the jealousies of his own superiors? And set himself up as the public target for the hatred of the people betrayed and shamed? No—not while he had breath in his body! She saw his consternation and smiled:

“Why, sir, can you think his Royal Highness would allow anything but for your most greatest advantage? Surely no. The way of it is this—if you will have the patience to hear while an ignorant woman speaks. The Duke labours to put off this matter so that it shall not be done until peace is made with the Dutch and the people in good temper again, and then he knows well that whoever makes the defense of the Navy Office will have honour and great respect, and he means this for you. Only this English people is very indolent and forgetful and when a thing is done and over, trouble their heads no more. But they must be given time to forget, and therefore the defense shall be delayed a year or more.”

There was excellent news in this, for Pepys knew as well as the Duke that their salvation hung on the thing cooling down.

“And can his Royal Highness compass this?” he asked wonderingly.

“It is already compassed,” she answered with a touch of pride. “The Parliament is summoned but will be sent about its business with nothing done. The next will not be called for round about six months. The King has

no lust to face a Parliament, as you may well think. And then, Mr. Pepys, he also intends you shall speak and——”

Here he ventured to interrupt:

“Madam, I am his Royal Highness’s slave, but let me venture this much. It makes me mad to become the hackney of this office in perpetual trouble and vexation—that am not to blame. Let them turn me loose. I have enough for myself with a book and a good wife and a good fiddle and can be well content without them.”

She looked at him with her inscrutable eyes and the thin edge of a smile.

“Mr. Pepys, when we made our alliance I thought you were a man of ambition that would go far. I did not guess that a beggarly few hundreds a year would content you. Now let me make two pictures for you and tell me which you choose. Here was my Lord Sandwich exiled by his own follies and Ambassador in a beggarly country like Spain where all the world forgot him. In a year and a half there he did spend twenty thousand pounds of the King’s money and ten thousand of his own. He comes home to ruin his own family which may go on the parish if he goes on. Why is all this? Because he is a man without ambition. A good sailor, some tell me, though some contradict it, but with the spirit of a parish constable. I saw all this in him and resolved that such a fool was not for me. Was I right?”

He could not deny it; my lady’s sad confidences and his own knowledge confirmed every word. Even in the last few weeks my lord’s behaviour in the Dutch business and slackness in following their ships had done him grievous harm.

“Lord, madam, it is true. I fear my lord will never go far, and it pinches me for he did me many kindnesses. But he lies open to many temptations and——” He halted. The thought crossed his mind that she herself might be cited as one of the causes of the downfall. Perhaps she read that in his face, for she answered it instantly.

“I don’t blame myself, Mr. Pepys. I was neither the first nor the last and if he would have had it I would have pulled him up instead of leaving him to his toys. But he is a fool and deserves ruin and no more. But look on the other picture. Here is yourself mounting steadily, high in the good opinion of men that rule. Let me tell you that the King is in this business too and desires no enquiry until come it must, and agrees with the Duke that you are the man to carry it through, calling you the right hand of the Navy. Now I will say plainly what lies before you. You are to be a Parliament man.” She smiled a little more broadly but very good-naturedly at his distended eyes fixed on her as though they heard as well as saw, and continued: “The

borough chosen for you is Castle Rising, and furthermore the King shall do away with the Naval Commission that now is and he marks you for Secretary for the Affairs of the Admiralty of England and Baron of the Cinque Ports. And so much for the King, though there is more I could tell you and will as you see my words come true, but I say soberly that when the Duke is King after him there need be no man in England greater than Mr. Pepys—even to becoming ‘my lord’, unless it be his own will. And do you like this picture? It is the truth and your own likeness if you will sit for it.”

Well did she know the romantic glitter he could not resist, and so caught the man she needed.

What could he say? The impossible opened before his eyes. He doubted her words no more than Holy Writ, and indeed his own knowledge assured him of the Duke’s favour. That might have failed him in the storm of politics but with this woman beside him Pepys was assured of his foothold. He could see the Duke’s side of it also, for he knew himself a faithful servant and with such a knowledge of the naval service as no other man in England possessed. But at the moment he could not think much of himself, the recognition of this woman’s unusual qualities so crowded on him that the words stumbled in his throat as he tried to answer.

“Madam, I am the King’s and Duke’s humble servant, and yours. For I do perceive that to you I owe all. With your assistance I will try to forget my littleness and aspire to your greatness of mind that is equal to any fortune. Would I could see you Queen of England.”

She looked him in the eyes saying nothing, but it was as if a current of thought and purpose passed between them. Then she said lightly:

“Sure, madam will gladly be my lady—what woman would not! But, Mr. Pepys, forgive a free word. No scandals with women. That is the common folly but not worth breaking a man’s life on. Men will be men but should go warily, and a wife affronted is a danger. The man who keeps free from the vermin of scandal is now a marvel so rare that men watch and trust him. And now, for you are more wearied than you know, take madam and go down into the country and hear the birds sing and ease your mind, for all good comes down your street and there is no haste for the defense before Parliament.”

She gave him some of the King’s own metheglin to drink—made of honey fermented and therefore entailing no fine on his conscience. And that it was the King’s own drink made it nectar, and then calling for her guitar to give colour to their meeting sang like a seraph before the Throne old religious Italian music and such words as raised the heart to heaven and

entranced him to forgetfulness of all else. This done she dismissed him, he observing as mighty pretty that she required no promise of secrecy from him as most women do in a foolish flurry, but took it for granted that a man destined for so great ends would behave discreetly. He kissed her hand again on parting, bowing as low as to the Lord Chancellor or any of the royal people. He had decided that he would make no present of a ring or any such thing. She was no woman to be pleased with toys or swayed by them. He judged rightly there. It would have been a false step indeed. Greed and levity were no part of Mrs. Rachel's outfit in her way up the cliffs of success, and he accommodated himself wisely to his company. Strange indeed to recall that it was the simple Lady Sandwich who had set these great things on foot!

So returning home he put aside the greater part of his work and sent for Elizabeth to come up from Brampton and give an account of her management of the gold. Deb had better not come with her, he wrote, because she must return to Brampton to collect what had been sent down there. His heart was more at ease than for many a long day, and Deb seemed to him a circumstance as light and carelessly to be forgotten as the fluttering of a leaf to the ground. The whole matter had been trifling as a kitten's caresses and was now to be postponed to great matters.

Perhaps his alliance with Mrs. Rachel did not make relations easier with Elizabeth, especially as both were a complex of nerves and irritations with all they had suffered. When she came her fretfulness after the large calm of Mrs. Rachel drove him half mad and her talk smacked of the infinitely little to a man engaged in high affairs. But he bore it fearing worse, and with Rachel's words in mind.

"I am wearied out, Bess, and my eyes pain in a devilish manner. I would stay from the office this evening if I could have some reading to delight me. Your eyes shall serve me—Lord! how bright they are!"

That was the right way if he could but have practised it always. The brightness was joy. She flew for the History of Algiers, declared it to be mighty pretty reading and a book after her own heart, and so with her stool at his feet, and arm on his knee, read in her sweet warble, until, cunningly lowering her voice by a little and less and less, she read him into a most refreshing sleep and sat stiff as marble for fear of disturbing him until the clock struck one and he waked in astonishment. She asked no better happiness than his tone as he said, "My poor Bess! Hog that I am!" and half carried her up the stairs to bed. That was peace. That was what her soul desired with passion—only to know him her own and none beside her.

A day also to be remembered was the holiday he gave himself next Lord's Day to take herself and Mrs. Turner down to Epsom by coach for the day. She could have no jealousies of Mrs. Turner, and it was pretty to see Elizabeth's pride in her new gown and the fine coach, the boot packed with wine and beer and cold fowls and ham. There had been rain, and now the country glittered in fresh green, and the wild perfume of the meadows and hedges was sweeter than kings' palaces.

For a moment it seemed to her that a little house bowered in roses and dreaming in its own garden would be Heaven after the darkness and clatter of London and the experienced women whose whole pleasure was to win a man from his wife. Surely in these still meadows there must be innocence and kindly days and peaceful nights!

Will Hewer, who rode beside the coach, saw her eyes fix and grow distant while Mrs. Turner chattered pleasantly with Pepys, and half read her thought. In his equally divided allegiance perhaps a little more tenderness was given to Elizabeth, for he knew more than he would ever tell, for he was grown now, of the wrongs she endured. He had his own opinion of Deb as he had had it of others, and seeing the dream in her eyes it moved him to pity and great understanding.

"Would you be content with a little house here when your work is done?" she asked wistfully, breaking in upon the talk of the others and looking Pepys in the eyes.

"Me? Lord, no!" he answered good-humouredly, "and if I wished such a folly myself sure it would drive you mad. You are too much a Frenchwoman for anything but the clatter of the streets and playhouses and what not. But I was telling Mrs. Turner, that is mighty pleased with my resolution that when I set up my coach we will come away from London on Saturdays and go sometimes to one place and then quit to another, and thus there is more variety and less charge than in a country house. What say you, Bess?"

"I say, give me my coach first and then I'll tell you!" she said, laughing, her thoughts running into the new channel, and indeed all happiness was possible in that July sun and the balmy breath of hay wafted over the hedgerows. What did it matter whether town or country so long as he loved her company and hers only?

Epsom itself was crowded with people drinking the salty waters, and Pepys had his share—willing to miss nothing—and then they dined on their provisions at the inn, and after that yielded to the great heat and slept. Delicious was the ramble through the woods and their strange silence and listening air that made people cautious what they said, as if presences lurked

behind every tree, but invisible if you sent a thought in their direction. She could not understand how Pepys and Mrs. Turner could talk and laugh so loudly over the scandals of the Court and graceless doings of their friends, and she and Will followed behind silently, wishing for silence in the others until the green shadow was left behind them. So up the winding way to the Downs, and there another picture to illuminate the golden day in the page of memory. On the lonely Downs was a flock of sheep, cropping, nibbling the fine moss-like herbage, and the old shepherd among them with his crook beside him and a little boy reading the Bible aloud (since it was Lord's Day) in a sweet falsetto as children read. A sight of peace and one Pepys could not pass by.

"Read to me, lad!" he said dangling a bright silver coin before dazzled eyes, and the boy dropping them shyly on the book turned to a Psalm and read aloud, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," and so on to the end, while the old man sat white-haired and content to hear. Pepys fell into talk with him on learning he had been a servant in his cousin Roger Pepys's house—the encounter pleasing him mightily.

"And a good master he was, your honour, and kind, and the servants did love him. But for me I am content with my sheep and my little lad that comes to read like a scholar and God bless him and me together."

The old shepherd blessed God for this boy most like one of the old patriarchs that ever Pepys had seen in his life, and romance instantly flung a tendril about the moving and simple sight. It meant little to Elizabeth, nothing to Mrs. Turner, but he hung over it and had thoughts of the simple old age of the world for days in his mind afterwards, growing up like mosses between the hard rocks of his struggling life. He took notice of the old man's coarse knit stockings of two colours mixed, of his shoes shod with iron and great nails in their soles, and thought it mighty pretty and delighting to the senses.

"Why," says the shepherd, "the Downs, you see, are full of stones and we must shoe ourselves thus, and these will make the stones fly till they sing before me." So he prattled, and the great Romantic sat to hear. Elizabeth and Mrs. Turner wandered off, picking posies of the small flowers in the herbage, wondering what on earth the interest could be, and still Pepys stayed, trying to cast stones with the old shepherd's crook, patting the wise sheep-dog on the head as he sat on guard, and questioning the old man as to his little wages. It seemed to him as a strange thing and enviable that in such a life there were neither hopes nor fears but simple peace and content and at the last the village churchyard and a sleep scarcely more untroubled than the

quiet years in sun and rain on the Downs. The thought lingered with him. In its way it charmed him no less than the picture of the worthless slut Castlemaine when he passed her house a few days later and saw her in her aviary in Whitehall Gardens with several of the Court gallants looking in between the gilt bars to flatter her that she was the bird of paradise and none like her. Pepys could forgive all her sins against the country and common decency while he stood to see her dark sumptuous beauty like a heavy scented flower reclining on folding leaves.

That was his nature, though he could never analyze himself. There were moments when the thought crossed his brain of making a clean breast to Elizabeth and declaring that whether for joy or sorrow, beauty or ugliness, lust or chastity, Life had got him for good and would not let her slave go. That was his true marriage, and Elizabeth an adjunct to be left on the bank while the stream took him to regions of enjoyment she would never reach. But, since he could not comprehend the matter himself and therefore could not word it, the secret was never divulged, and she took for perversity what was the man's genius and his very soul as much past help or change as his height, or the colour of his eyes.

Some days later they were down at Brampton to resurrect the gold pieces Elizabeth and his father had buried in the garden at Brampton during the Dutch invasion. Elizabeth was mighty uncomfortable for she knew well she would never hear the end of it if so much as one had strayed, and as she had feared the trouble began.

“You get a dark lantern and come out with me and my father to dig for the gold in the garden, and if it is gone or any of it——”

“Lord, what a toss we are in!” cried she with a toss of her own pretty head to hide a quaking heart. “Where should it go that has no legs to run away? Here is the lantern, and call your father that you trust in more than your wife. Deb, pull the curtains that no light may shine out on us!”

Deb, pale and silent, glided to the windows. What she had expected on Pepys's arrival she scarcely knew, but that it would be a secret recognition of their relations she never doubted, and with that support she could wait his will. But there was no recognition. He greeted her with purposely careless kindness and never sent a look her way that she could claim. The notion of the gold seemed to engross him, and she dared no slightest motion for fear of blowing over the house of cards in which her happiness dwelt trembling.

She knelt by the window, half praying, half crying, as the three crept out into the garden. Will Hewer, who had come down with them, had gone off to the scullery to prepare pails for washing the gold, and a bit of fire upstairs

for drying the notes if damp, having first carefully blinded the windows that no curious eye should peep in. So she was entirely alone. Indeed she was always alone now even in company, so completely did her own hopes and fears shut her into a little glass globe of egotism. Nothing mattered but herself and her lover.

Meanwhile Life was treating Pepys to one of the comic gestures in which he least understood and loved her. He could never understand his Beloved in that mood so easily as in any other, and her ridicule slid off him into vexation. She stood now with her fingers cocked at her nose.

When Elizabeth and his father pothered about and could not be sure where they had hidden the treasure he flew into a frenzied rage the worse because it must be whispered when shouting and yelling seemed adequate to their imbecility. Life stood by and laughed while they prodded.

“What! you took no mark! If you put it here it’s gone and all my hopes with it. Lord! what must a man do that has damned fools to deal with! Try here! Get your noses to the ground, for I swear you shall taste neither bite nor sup till the money is in my hands again!”

His meek old father sighed and dug hopelessly.

“Sure, Bess and I hid it here! She knows it!”

Elizabeth’s angry whisper drowned him:

“Not here, but nearer the bay tree.”

“No, here—by the currant bush!” the old man persisted with the maddening obstinacy of old age.

“For God’s sake agree between yourselves where you put it!” hissed Pepys in a furious whisper. “Take a spit and poke into the ground, and give me another. It drives a man mad to think two such turnip-heads must be in his concerns.”

They were prodding now all over the possible area, Elizabeth biting her lips to keep back the retort discourteous. She had done her best, and as to marking it—Lord! the storm if she had ventured! At last her spit struck something hard and in an angry whisper she gave the news. Pepys snarled at her.

“But good God, how sillily you did it! Here, not half a foot under ground and in the sight of the world from a hundred places and almost before a neighbour’s window and their hearing!”

“But, Samuel, sure we did it of a Lord’s Day and all good folk gone to church! Who should be there to see?” asked his father patiently. “Dig, my

boy, in good hope, and all will be well.”

Well? The first lift of the spade in Pepys’s hand brought up loose gold pieces and scattered them among the grass and loose earth. He stopped then in a kind of desperation beyond raging words, angry to the very blood.

“I perceive the earth is got among the gold and is so wet the bags are rotted. Well, if you have ruined me you can take your pleasure in it. Go in, for two damned fools, and send out Will to me and let me not see either of your faces lest I strike you down. Go!”

The next half hour left him sweating with exertion and fear, but Will, quiet and resourceful, came to the rescue with pails into which they shovelled gold and earth together with infinite care by the miserable light of the dark lantern. Will was obliged to own his master’s temper difficult on that occasion, but he himself had the ornament of a quiet spirit and they worked with few words. Finally they carried the heavy pails up into the bedroom, and there, sending all else to bed, with the pails of water and basins they washed the gold pieces and set them in heaps and began to count them. Even Will’s calm faltered when they found near a hundred pieces short and Pepys let himself go in the safety of the close-shut room into a rage beyond all describing.

“Take patience, sir!” Will urged anxiously. “It is very likely we scattered some in filling the pails. With the first glint of daylight——”

“Good God, you idle loon! The first glint of morning? I swear they heard us but now at the neighbours’, and are out scrabbling what they can at this minute. Down and out with us now or I shall go mad! I am not so far off it!”

There Will could agree, but there was no help. With slouched hats and dark lantern like Guy Fawkes they crept out again and with infinite care, feeling in the almost dark, gathered up forty-five pieces more, and so in to cleanse them, and at two o’clock in the morning lay down to sleep, leaving Deb to keep Elizabeth most unwilling company. He roused Will early.

“Out with us and dig all the earth near into pails. If any see they can make nothing of that, and then we can sift it in the summerhouse as they do for diamonds.”

With infinite care they made up the last night’s forty-five pieces to seventy-nine which came to about twenty or thirty of what he believed the true number should be.

“I bless God for it!” he said with solemn piety as he straightened his back after counting, “and I will bid my father make another count in the dirt. And, Will, to him and my wife make the most of the accident, for it should

never have been, and God knows I have not deserved it of them.” He paused and added thoughtfully: “And this shall remind me for my good how painful it sometimes is to keep money as well as to get it. It may be my old shepherd on the Downs was better off than I, all said and done. But God knows best!”

It was certainly made the most of to old Mr. Pepys and Elizabeth, who had much reason to wish they had had neither part nor lot in the matter, but the worst of the storm had blown over and there was a sign of reappearing blue skies. And so, the gold packed into bags and baskets was parted among them all for carriage to the coach, and set under the seats, and away to London!

He was mightily merry when they reached the house in safety with the treasure. It was as impossible for him to keep up anger as to avoid it, and Deb through concealing lashes watched and thought she saw signs of hope in his geniality. She summoned all her wits to aid her. She knew Elizabeth’s angers with him were mere folly if she wished to hold him. “I will not be a fool,” she whispered in her own heart. “No reproaches for me, but love and lifted eyes and kisses and to be his slave. Men desire slaves, and indeed I love him dear! It is not hard. Let me hold my tongue and be patient and I may yet sit where she sits. Her health is but crazy, and I am eighteen and she past twenty-six, growing an old woman! O, patience, patience, and I will cry alone and laugh when I am with him!”

She had her chance. Elizabeth, aching in every limb, went up to bed, and after Deb had carried up her supper she sat down with Pepys in great decorum while Alice served them. But when supper was done and the kitchen engaged on washing up behind closed doors she busied herself with lighting the candles for her master, pulling up his chair and shaking the cushions and getting the book, a little grave figure intent on household cares. But not so intent that she had forgotten to change her dress for a fresh lawn with little blue flowers sprinkled on it, and a round cap with little lace ears that set off her daisy face to perfection.

He sat in his chair and watched her as she took the comb out of its drawer to comb his hair according to custom. She had often done this in Elizabeth’s presence but never alone, and uncertain of his wishes her heart beat dreadfully as she handled it. He suddenly motioned her to him. The door was ajar so that they might hear the slightest motion of a descending foot on the stair if such should be.

“Pretty pigeon!” he said as she knelt beside him, motionless and daring no advance. “Did you think I had forgot you, Deb? Lord, no! But a man has much to think of these times. What has been in your little head?”

“Love, love only,” she said in a passionate whisper against his ear. He put an arm about her. If she had known how ready that arm was for such adventures the knowledge might have stemmed the tide of triumph that rose in her. As it was she shuddered with joy against his shoulder. He felt the thrill.

“Were you sad, girl? Did it make you happy? If so, no harm done.”

“Who can be sad that loves?” she answered. “I was lonely, but that must be, for I must respect my mistress. This I know.”

That indeed was a masterpiece. He turned in the warmth of his agreement with the sentiment and pressed his lips to hers in a long delicious kiss. After all, need the Almighty consider it more heavily than two children stealing jam? If He has made sweets are they to be resisted? The comb lay forgotten on the ground.

“I love you. I love you,” she whispered, clinging to him with lips and hands and arms and supple body. “When your dear eyes pain mine bleed! When you are wearied I weep, but you shall never see a tear, for I would make your life all sunshine if I could. Pity your poor Deb that loves you!”

As well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb was the uppermost thought in Pepys’s mind if he thought at all. The inevitable was upon them and both abandoned themselves to it. How could they hear a step on the stair or see the door behind them open?

Chapter Twenty

ELIZABETH stood there dumb as they sprang apart.

Deb fled instantly—no other way—and the two stood face to face, speechless. What had she seen or guessed? He dared not ask. Neither knew how long the pause lasted, but presently Elizabeth turned and went upstairs and into her bed, never looking to see what he did. He followed miserably and, undressing, lay down beside her, she, stiff and cold as a corpse, retreated into her own grief and the door barred against him. He touched her once with his hand, making as if to kiss her humbly, and she flashed a terrible word at him and bid him be silent. So they lay and the hours went by and in the end the silence took him and he fell into a restless sleep, but she lay staring at the dark, seeing the ruins of her world topple about her and none to help.

Marriage—the terror of it! There is no relation so intimate and therefore none in which such black treachery is possible. No crime in love's law-book stands beside it. She loathed the very sound of his breathing—the contact soiled her soul as he lay beside her and doubtless dreamed himself back again in his vile paradise. It was gross, unclean. She knew she could endure it no longer, for it fouled the very cleanliness of her body and she could smell pollution. Stealing out of bed lest she should rouse the sleeping beast she lifted a chair to the bedside and sat shuddering with inward cold as many thoughts crowded upon her in a maze where certain ones flashed like points of light upon a man passing swiftly. But at the end of all burnt this—How could she repay him as he deserved?

Not in the same coin—that thought was not in her world. Her clean flesh shuddered from the breath of it. But how? What would he feel most deeply? He had no heart or pity to be wounded and therefore it must be something to sting him in his hopes of advancement and terrify him for public consequences. She knew his fears and hopes and had the power to sting in the tenderest part as he had done to her. An hour went by and brought resolution. She touched him on the shoulder, and he sprang awake in great

confusion of mind to find her sitting by the bed, her face dim in the light of a flickering candle.

“You hid your secrets from me. I hid mine from you. I have one that will fright you to the bone when you hear it.”

She waited, and sick with fear he waited too. Whatever it was he could not reproach her now, God help him! But when she spoke the unexpected fell upon him like a thunderbolt.

“I am a Catholic and have accepted the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on it. When a woman has no comfort at home she goes to God. Make what you will of it and blame yourself.”

He put his hands over his face weeping into them. This was ruin. The Catholics were loathed throughout the country, blamed for the Fire, for everything that went amiss with King or Court or nation. Did he not begin now to guess that Rachel had put on the garb of their belief that she might guide the Duke through its dangers? Why, the very throne was endangered by the suspicion of the King’s Catholicism and, it might be, the succession of the Duke of York. Monmouth, the King’s young bastard, was already preparing to make a bid for power as a Protestant prince. Pepys knew he could no more hold his position with a Catholic wife than as if he had been one himself, and indeed in later years the very guess at it was to commit him to the Tower. Therefore there was nothing to say. All was over and he was at her mercy, beaten at last, found out and broken. And in her eyes was loathing.

There was a long silence—what use were words? Then suddenly she flashed into bitter speech corroded into poison with love turned hate. In his idle amours he had never had occasion to hear a woman speak against him; they had taken his kisses as lightly as he, and loved and jested to please him so far as reckoning had gone yet—but now he was to hear the truth and from the woman most necessary to him of all in the world and on whose action his whole future depended.

She began with a pitiable effort at self-control that soon broke down as she rose and stood grasping at a curtain for support.

“The girl leaves the house or I. Choose which. We must have terms between us, now all else is over, and I tell you for truth that I will no more stick at publishing your shame than yourself at breaking my heart. Why should I? I that have borne your shameful jealousies that showed the foul knowledge they rested in, I that refused my Lord Sandwich’s offers—you never knew that, for I would not break the peace between you, but it is true that he besought my love kneeling at my feet and as ready to deceive you as

you would him if you had desired my lady. And my Lord Hinchinbroke wooing me and others that I scorned, for I loved you. And what was my reward? To be miscalled and watched until I have scarce dared to see a man enter the house lest you should think I were his whore. To know that you were dallying with Knipp and painted Pierce and others not wholesome to touch, much less embrace, and at last to find you in the arms of a sorry serving-girl in my own house.”

He had never known Elizabeth could be terrible, but standing over him now in her long dress she seemed a very figure of Judgment to his trembling nerves. He had given her more cause than she knew, and the Puritan in him owned the justice of her cries of agony and condemned him. Not for a moment did he question her right to insult and revenge, and every word she said of her would-be lovers he knew for God’s truth.

He sat up leaning with one arm on his pillow, bowed under the pelting hail of cruelty, thinking only of himself and her at the moment, forgetting the wretched girl undone by his folly whom Elizabeth could ruin with a word. Who could expect her to have mercy where none had been shown to her? Who could measure her anguish at the household treachery? What need to record her words? Some of them half stunned him—she must have guessed much by instinct that he never dreamed she gave a thought to. He could have crawled to her feet, and it was only with an effort almost beyond his power that at last he got words out of him.

“My dear, hear me. If I give you in my handwriting that I will never see Mrs. Pierce more nor Knipp, will you forgive and believe in my true love for my wife that is more to me than any woman in the world?”

She broke into wild weeping, and said the one word “Love!” and no more. It gave him a gleam of courage.

“A man may do many indiscretions yet love his wife—a woman cannot. Consider the difference betwixt man and woman and have pity. I own your true heart and crawl in dust and ashes to think I could doubt you. You loved me. Is all forgot? Forgive your unhappy lover.”

“Forgot? My lover?” she said, and wept and would hear no more, only, when she could speak, declaring that the girl must be driven out, and so the long night went on in ravings and weepings no more to be chronicled than the passions of madness, and at last exhausted and in a kind of stupor unable to resist him he drew her into his “cruel arms,” for so she called them, and there she dropped into a sudden sleep as far from him in truth as if oceans rolled between them, moaning and quivering as she slept. Indeed it wrung his heart, for the man was not devoid of kindness, very far from it, and no

anger but a very great pity moved him for her agony, mingled with alarm for himself and pity now also for the wretched Deb. What could he do there? How get opportunity to warn her that he had stoutly stood it out that there had been nothing but follies? It was highly needful, for he feared lest in terror she should make most ruinous admissions.

He hoped in the morning that Elizabeth might lie abed, for she looked like a woman withered by death, and though he hoped it most for his chance with Deb and that gibbered behind his concern for her, her looks frightened him. Without any answer but a look of contempt that read his heart she got up and went down, he following, to find Deb slinking about her work, pale and furtive, not knowing how to carry herself, and Elizabeth's eyes on her cold as December stars. The whole household, even to the maids, was aware and awake. He could not delay though he trembled to leave them together, and so to his work, his head confused with the issues of an act which had seemed so easy and natural and now promised to bring his life to the ground. What to do he could not tell, and bitter affliction for the folly that had brought about this manifold trouble did not mend it, shot through as it was with a pang that he must be silent about the girl whom he had no mind to part with, and a great terror, honest in its way, that she should be undone by his insanity.

There followed two more days of confused pain and ignorance of where Elizabeth would strike, for strike he knew she would though he watched her face and words for hope. So at the Office, in great dread, he wrote a few lines to Deb, and slinking in when Elizabeth was locked in upstairs, thrust it into her hand and fled.

She read it with dismay that struck at the root of all her hopes.

This is to advise you that I have owned and admitted nothing but indiscretion, and for God's sake guard yourself in the same story. What I can do to help you I will but I foresee parting which must be. Burn this and shape the word "burnt" with your lips when we meet.

No signature, no word of endearment, no hope. A little cold light of anger burned in her eyes under dropped white lids. She saw he was afraid to the very marrow of his bones and even in her confused mind despised him, though what she had expected she did not know. She saw also that Elizabeth was the stronger and that the world is on the wife's side and the other woman but a backstairs amusement even in the lover's eyes. The wife is good opinion, success, and therefore money; the other but a slinking trull, all said and done. Who could appraise her heartbeat, her trembling hopes and

fears and passions, and do her the least little justice? Men would blame her, licking their lips, and women draw apart. As to God, she cared little—He was too far away and knew nothing of what she felt. So, pale and defiant, biting a trembling lip to keep in the tears, she went about doggedly, despising yet loving the man in her locked heart.

Pepys coming in to dinner felt Elizabeth watching on the stairs above them. Deb shaped the word “burnt” with mute lips and went frigidly by. It relieved him immensely. As a matter of fact the letter lay in her bosom at the moment, not for love’s sake—no!—but because—who could tell?

It was that day and the next that Elizabeth holding herself utterly aloof sat down to decipher what she could of a volume of his diary left behind him at the house for writing up last thing at night, secure in the certainty that no one could read it. It was the latest volume. She shut herself into her room and attacked it, safe because she knew he must not only be at the office but must also attend a council at Whitehall and the day was hers.

Unexpected difficulties confronted her. There was the cipher growing more irregular as his eyes weakened. That brought no pity; she worked with the fiercer intensity. But in certain passages, which she quickly learned to know as those she sought, it covered foreign words here and there and that was baffling for a while until she grasped his plan. The French, of course, not only gave her no trouble but helped with all else except very occasional Greek. That she must pass. Then came another trick, dummy letters interposed between each of the real ones, and this would have worsted her but for a device used in a French cipher which he had once told her they captured at the Navy Office. She could not make it all out and raged at her own impotence, but the quick wits inherited from her French father helped her, and when she had set down her gleanings they were damnation enough and, as she thought, the end of all between them. For there stood many of his amours, and as she saw herself wronged and cheated by women who ate her bread, by the lowest, such as Mrs. Bagwell and her kind, realized what his relations with women had been almost through their married life, her last remnant of belief and respect for him foundered in a raging sea of indignation and despair. Better if he had kept to them altogether and discarded her. That she could have borne, she thought; the other revolted her, body and soul.

She sat rigidly above the book for a long time, then glided downstairs and replaced it, and sat down to plan and purpose, the tears scorched dry in glittering eyes. Long ago she had told him in passion that he had a heart worthless and untrustworthy; now, and coldly, she repeated it to herself.

There was no holding ground at all—he must be watched like a malefactor for his own sake, because, if not, his lusts would ruin him and herself. The only thing left her now to value was her worldly position. She would secure that and lash him to the soul by the means she took. She must not storm. She must hold her wife's-right with repellent dignity and show she was his match and more.

He came home to supper, noticing Elizabeth's cold eyes on him to watch whether they strayed towards the pale and silent Deb who sat in her place swallowing a morsel seasoned with dropped tears now and then. Pepys's heart swelled with trouble of mind thinking, "She is indeed my sacrifice, poor girl, and Heaven send I can help her!" But only the swiftest glance was possible. A wretched meal and homecoming! And still Elizabeth hid her purpose and other tangled days of pain and fear went by. She was considering also whether she should show him the paper written at Woolwich long since.

At last, having gained what she needed of certainty, for she spent many hours over the diary, she called him upstairs one night after supper and sitting by the window in her bedroom motioned to a chair and began as she had resolved.

"I let the matter slide until I could clear my mind to some resolution of what I demand for our peace and well-doing in this world. And this is all wherewith I concern myself because love is dead between us as if it had never been. While my body was broke down with passion I could not speak my mind clear so as you would know me in earnest. But now I can and do."

They were sitting without candles, the moonlight extremely bright on her face, and this gave it a pallor and coldness very unlike herself and alarming to him so that when he would have spoke he could not.

She went on:

"You have known my suspicions of your amours, but not my knowledge, for often I watched and had you watched when you suspected nothing. Let me now say with brevity that I have known what took you to Deptford and your married wench there, and to Westminster Hall and a woman that is a shame to be spoke of. And could you not let Betty Michell be? And must you make a harlot of every woman you came near if her face caught your eye?"

She stopped as if for an answer, but he could make none. Her knowledge subjugated and terrified him and the more because he had no possibility of imagining how she came by it. He was dumb; a criminal before his judge. She looked at him with a kind of cruel triumph and went on:

“If I make your shame public you are a ruined man. These gambols are for your betters. But I will not—and this for my own sake—if you mind the terms I lay down. But mind them you must, for I am the conqueror and you know it.”

He laid a hand beseechingly on her knee. She let it lie there as if it mattered nothing, and continued, picking up a paper and reading from it:

“Here are the terms if we are to come to an agreement. You shall dismiss the slut downstairs as from yourself and shew your scorn of her while I am by, and this tomorrow. You shall vow to see nothing of her after that nor ever. You shall leave London with me till all this is blown over and your ties with these women broken, and you shall see none of them more. Come with me to France or where you will and break off and pray to God to make you another man in your heart, for if not you will have hell at home and ruin abroad.”

He sat stunned. What she demanded about Deb he could do, though with pity and shame that would make it very bitter to him. But go abroad—leave his office—his hopes—— Could she mean it? Would she insist?—because if so—— It seemed a long while before from a dry throat he spoke:

“I will send the girl away tomorrow. I agree. I see that it must be. It is not as you think, but thinking it is sufficient and I will rid you of her.”

“She is a slut and if you knew of her what I do—for there I have asked about also—you would bless God to be rid of her yourself. You shall call her what she is to her face and bid her go.”

He stumbled at that, refused, implored, yielded, intending to take some backstairs way to comfort the girl, but Elizabeth sat silent and then reiterated her terms. He promised, sick with shame.

“You have denied nothing of my charges,” she went on, “and if you did I have my proofs and can make plenty more if you will have them. Now, as to going from London——”

He broke in there.

“My dear, I cannot. Our all hangs on it. I have a secret for you that yourself will see overrides all the follies I have committed. I am chose to speak for the Navy Office before the Parliament, and it will be my making. If I leave it to another——”

His voice choked and he broke down in tears like a woman, his face covered with his hands. At the moment it did not move her—it raised the feeling in her that was habitual with Rachel Becke, a kind of cold contempt

for men and their tricks and toys that they put before matters of consequence. She could not reason like the other—but she felt his weakness and folly to be despicable. As a matter of fact also she was not sure she could believe a word he said. She therefore answered coldly:

“Since my wish is to save what is left for us I will wait till you have spoke before the Parliament if you will set your hand to it in writing that you will keep from women meanwhile. After, since you are in the King’s favour, you can plead your eyes and the need they have of rest, and if another can get leave to nurse himself so can you. If you can be so far honest I will trust you and be partners with you to save our worldly goods. No more.”

He caught at this concession thankfully and a paper was written and signed as she wished. It was a little the easier with him because he believed after such a success a withdrawal for a few months might even strengthen his position as making them feel their need of his knowledge. Anyhow it was a respite and she might soften.

But her hardness drove him in more upon the girl, and when next day she came into the room where he sat with his wife great fear filled him lest she should break out in some madness of reproach at her dismissal. But it seemed that all three of them were worn out with the mental struggle of the past three weeks, for Elizabeth sat like an image staring at the girl, and Deb stood there dumb with eyes on the carpet, and to Pepys his voice sounded strange as he said:

“Mrs. Deb Willet, I am now with your mistress’s wish and mine to discharge you from my service which you will do wisely to leave as soon as you conveniently may. There is no more to say. You have friends and must dispose of yourself. And I do not intend that you shall see me nor I you more while you are in the house.”

Tears were in his eyes while he spoke and he was in terror lest they would spill down his cheeks, she stood so small and young and forlorn, with her way to make in the world and none to help her. But she only curtsied to both and turned silently away, and as she did so his heart knew that Elizabeth or no Elizabeth he would find her again somehow.

She left two days later in his absence, and Elizabeth having let fall the name of Dr. Albon, to whom she had gone, he set himself to trace her. He knew it was madness, that he was breaking faith with Elizabeth and ruining the girl, but reason could not command him, and he went to her next day by coach and in the dark. She came into the coach and to his arms and kisses, cold and trembling as if nothing would ever reassure her. It touched every nerve of pity and romance in the man as the little quivering creature clung

against him with her head on his breast, dumb, no reproaches or pleas. Elizabeth at the moment seemed to him a pitiless tyrant and every deceit and subterfuge justified against her.

“Deb, Deb, I couldn’t help it. She would have me say it and Lord! I sickened to do it. But be a good girl. Have a care of your honour and fear God and all shall be well with you. Fear God and be good. Promise me! Promise to go with no other man as I have so ill taught you. And count on me if you are in need.”

“I promise”—that was all she would say.

“And, Deb, here is twenty shillings for you, and promise too, if you move, to leave the name of the place at Herringman, my bookseller’s, sealed. That and no more. And I will befriend you, I swear it!”

There was no pity for Elizabeth in his heart as he spoke this, clasping the girl to him in the coach as if he would never let her go. She promised again, and he stayed as long as he dared and then home, triumph and shame so mixed within that he could not tell one from the other. He made the day’s entry in the diary and after eating went up to his bed tired out and his eyes paining “like devils” as he put it.

Will Hewer was out and the maids in the kitchen as Elizabeth turned to the day’s entry in the diary, thanking God she had not disclosed the source of her knowledge. She read and closed the book and sat silent. Had the thing got beyond her? Was the man so besotted that there was no remedy? That he could go to his wench straight from her tears and anguish and their ruined lives! She recognized no mercy or duty to Deb—that was heavens above her—but only saw fierce and straight her own life and his. He little guessed her knowledge as she slipped quietly into bed beside him. Nothing must be said until after dinner next day, for that would allow time for her supposed enquiries and intelligence. Therefore he rose with a sense that the worst had blown over and the game was in his own hands and so to work.

It was not till noon that day that she told him she had had him watched and knew he had broken terms and how.

“And now since our treaty is no more I demand that you secure me an allowance of three or four hundred pounds and I will be gone this night and you can take your wench into the house in my place.”

Believing she could not know, he denied all frantically.

“Lord! Would I break terms made so solemnly? It is not true. I have not seen her since she went and never will.”—And so on.

She only uttered the one word "Fool!" and so sat until he had exhausted himself, then rose to put her things in order for going.

He fell on his knees at her feet with most perfect confusion of face, heart, and shame, in a terror he could not control, his own nerves tortured by the three weeks' strain, and there and then confessed the meeting and implored her forgiveness. Then with shaking desperate hands grasped hers:

"Now I have discharged my heart let me call Will that loves us both, and let him see me in the dust and plead for my forgiveness if I write that I will never see her again in life or death."

Elizabeth, at her own wit's end however she concealed it, agreed. She loved and trusted Will and instantly perceived the advantage of a witness to the contract. Will came into the room knowing of course all that was wrong both from former observation and observation of all that had been going on during the past miserable weeks. And before him, the tears running from the lad's eyes to see those he loved at daggers drawn, Pepys confessed his deceit and wrote and signed his promise, unable to lift his head for shame. Then Elizabeth spoke unlike herself, apart from them both, a disdainful goddess.

"It was never my wish to make Will privy to our differences, but since you have chose it, it must be a piece of our league that he goes everywhere with you that I cannot, for I have no trust in you nor a word you say, but Will I can trust that he will neither see me betrayed or you go to your ruin."

Pepys agreed eagerly. There was no humiliation he would not have agreed to and he faintly hoped Will would not be too stern a gaoler if there must be one. Never had wife so complete a victory, if such a triumph is victory indeed. At Will's request and in his presence when all was done she kissed her husband coldly on the cheek, and left them together. Pepys turned pitifully to the clerk.

"I am more than willing, Will, to this, being by the grace of God resolved never to do my wife wrong more. And, Will, I think you so honest and true a servant to us both and one that loves us, that I am not much troubled at your being privy to all this misery but rejoice in my heart that I have you to assist in the making of us friends which otherwise I despair of. And now, Will, for God's sake and compassion, go to Deb for me and tell her I have told my wife of seeing her lest she should deny it if my wife sends, for that will undo all."

Seeing Will's doubtful eyes at this very unexpected turn, he besought him also with tears, to which the young man answered steadily:

“Sir, if it is to help and not wrong you and my mistress I will do this, but must have assurance, for indeed to be plain with you I have long stood by and seen things go from bad to worse in this house and madam sick and suffering from it. It may be better the storm should break and clear the air—I cannot tell. But hear the truth. It is this one thing drives her to madness, and never woman deserved it less, for she is all fidelity and honour to you as a wife should. And a good woman.”

Pepys stared at him with eyes distended. So he knew this too? Was all known in the house and no escape?

Will continued earnestly:

“Sir, I can tell you this from my observation and what madam has confided to me when sore pressed. She has been besieged and tempted by many men (whose names I leave to herself)—tempted with great offers for her beauty and ways that none can resist, and yet always so loyal and true to you that never a thought strayed. Could she not have cheated you if she would? I swear she could. But night and day no thought or deed she need be shamed for. I speak that know. Be good to her, sir, for she deserves no less, and I tell you plainly her health breaks for sorrow. This I have long known. Now, having said this I say I will see Deb if you so desire and believe you act honestly in the request.”

Pepys turned away to hide his face from the young man so much older than himself in strength of purpose. At last he spoke with resolution and a gleam of hope:

“You have done me good, Will. Now go to Deb that this wicked business may be ended, and come abroad with me where I go that you may be my gaoler but a loving one, for I know your true heart. But tell me, you who know her better than I, is my wife truly a Catholic?”

For the first time Will smiled a little.

“Sir, she is whatever it is best for you she should be, for her religion is you and to content you that you and she may have peace together. Let that flea stick in the wall and I warrant it will not trouble you. All is in your hands.”

He went downstairs and to the office leaving Pepys lost in thought. He said slowly to himself:

“I do verily believe she fears God and is truly and sincerely righteous. And if so, I have done very much amiss.”

Late that night he made an entry in his journal:

I did this night promise my wife never to go to bed without calling upon God on my knees by prayer and I begin this night and hope I shall never forget to do the like all my life for I do find that it is much the best for my soul and body to live pleasing to God and my poor wife and will ease me of much care as well as much expense.

A characteristic entry enough. Downstairs Elizabeth with softer tears was burning the paper of complaints she had written at Woolwich. "I will never use it now," she thought. "All may yet be well."

Epilogue

Epilogue

THIRTY years later two men sat in the beautiful little library of a choice country house in the village of Clapham, near enough to London for convenience of coaching, far enough for quiet and green lawns and trees where nightingales sang in moonlight and peace swayed asleep in the boughs beside them. It was long and low with oriel windows and a glass door making it a part of the garden—a dwelling of stately comfort, which to those who knew both would recall (in little) Mr. Evelyn's admired house at Sayes Court near Deptford. It had a touch of the same mellowed colouring and the brooding look which a house may acquire in long years as if from habitual meditation on the lives lived by the human creatures who inhabit it and come and go between a first appearance and a final disappearance. The garden made a hermitage for the house's meditations, laid out in the dark silence of trees and tall clipped hedges of yew and juniper, with a winding drive which left the road far behind. The lawns and gemmed flower beds lay close under the windows like a last flicker of gay and coloured youth.

But this Christmas night all lay white and silent under a gazing moon with no footfall to sully the unearthly purity, every laurel leaf and fir bough bore its burden of sparkling snow and not a breath or whisper was astir.

Inside, shutters were closed and curtains drawn to shut out the cold splendour, more especially in the library, folds of ruby velvet veiling the oriel windows where birds tapped confidently in the morning for crumbs. A great Yule log resting on andirons sent out jets of blue flame and rosy warmth over the many rows of stately books glimmering dimly in gold, and pictures and marble busts were seen or mysterious as the flames shot upward or fell. For the candles in silver sconces were unlit and the good firelight had no rival to hinder with steady glare the flickering passage of ghosts and memory.

The two men sat in high-backed cushioned chairs taking their ease, a little table between them with wine and sweetmeats. The one was an old man nearing seventy and all but a prisoner to his chair, the other was a man of ripening middle age. The elder wore a great curled wig billowing on his

shoulders, and a mulberry velvet coat richly laced with gold; the younger, his own hair formally cropped. His face was grave and kind though it carried an unmistakable air of tight-lipped old-bachelorhood which the elder disowned with florid geniality and full-lipped ease. He wore a suit of grey cloth plainly but handsomely set off with silver loops and buttons. They talked with breaks of silence as the flames rose and fell.

Now this was the house which the famous Mr. Pepys, President of the learned Royal Society, Master of Trinity House, Baron of the Cinque Ports, Deputy Lieutenant for Huntingdonshire, Justice of the Peace, and Heaven knows how many more titles, shared with Mr. Will Hewer, his former clerk and close friend. Both had retired now from their several employments; both had affluence—in the case of Mr. Pepys so great that he could afford to disregard (as he needs must!) the very bad debt which the Crown owed him to the tune of what would now represent £140,000. Both had the same elegant tastes in the collection of books and works of art, though there Mr. Pepys had knowledge which Mr. Hewer never pretended to.

“A Christmas mighty unlike the good old days!” said Pepys lifting a glass of wine and looking lovingly at the ruby against the flame. “But, with such a pain of the colic taken by washing my feet and ears, what choice? And pretty to see how my friends remembered me with letters and gifts noble and enough to show that an old man no longer successful and honoured is not forgot. Life is a fickle jade but certain things are beyond her reach.”

“Of these,” Will Hewer answered thoughtfully, “memory is one, and I am apt to think, sir, that at this time, namely Christmas Day, ghosts harmless and kindly do walk and view us with tenderness and pity. Of this I have been very sensible today.”

“What ghosts, Will? They are more like to visit you than me, for I was always of the earth earthly but you of a thoughtful cast. You recall to me always that Major Walters, poor soul! who sat among us silent, though a most good-natured man, being a most amorous and melancholy gentleman under a despair in love. But he recovered mighty well after all and did marry a jolly widow.”

Will laughed outright.

“Despair in love never came my way, sir, though I love all good women, which I think the safer course. And as for ghosts—let us say they are but memories and flee at dawn. I have had many since dusk. Does your honour never see the Duke of York—or as I should say, the exiled King—stand and gaze at you with the sad look which I think all the Stuarts have. A good man

at bottom! And strange it is to consider how the country could stomach all his brother's vices yet spewed him out because he had too much religion."

Pepys smiled.

"Men understand the vices that have an answering itch in themselves, but religion is folly to them unless it is their own. Yes—I think of him often enough. Lord! who would have believed he should lie in poverty abroad, the French King's pensioner, and I sit here like a monsieur with everything handsome about me. Yet he was a great and beautiful gentleman for all, God bless him! He reaped his brother's crop of vices. And Mrs. Rachel—of all women I have known the wisest, Will. She would have saved him but could not and saw her work undone by his second wife and her priests, and what she had to live for was undone, and so she ridded him of her company and died. Yet had he heeded her he had not lost his throne. I owe her what, Lord know, I cannot repay."

He sighed and added:

"I had not sat here a man old and forgotten if she had lived and ruled him. A woman to move kingdoms. I had been one of the greatest men in England and a peer of the realm could she have survived—but it was not to be."

"Forgotten?" Will said looking on him with pride and love. "What? When Mr. Evelyn and the gentlemen of the Royal Society and all the literati and artists come to bow before Mr. Pepys and beg his opinion and approval? No, sir, I believe in truth you would not match your past honours against these and the peace of this long sunset of your days."

But Pepys was dreaming awake.

"Lord, Will!—those were good times! Do you remember the day I defended the Navy Office before the Parliament men, the most watched man alive and all hung on my poor powers? Lord! how young I was and frightened of this great man and that, that now I would not give a curse for! Huddling notes and thoughts together at the last minute and my legs shaking under me. And you went down with me to Westminster by boat—do you forget the mulled sack and dram of brandy that gave me courage to face them, and your eyes like an owl's for fright watching me?"

Will shook his head:

"Not for fright, sir!—Not I. I knew you would not fail. A great task greatly accomplished."

But Pepys heard nothing. In the flames rose before him the rows of listening faces, some mean and malicious, others hopeful, more, indifferent.

Again he stood at the bar with the Commissioners on trial before England for the failure of her right arm the Navy. He saw himself begin with not a trace of fear, acceptably and smoothly, continuing without hesitation, marshalling his facts with perfect mastery, gliding over the dangerous subject of King and Ministers, justifying his own superiors. He spoke as simply as at home and with all his reason about him, a born orator at the moment and so much master of his subject and audience that none could gainsay him. A magnificent triumph in the world's face.

He knew the victory won. He heard the King's cry when they met, "I am heartily glad to see you, Mr. Pepys, I rejoice in your success. None else could have done it." The Duke had pressed his hand silently, eyes glowing upon him; Rachel had written a letter—or rather a song of triumph. Sir William Coventry had shouted, "Good-morrow, Mr. Pepys that must be Speaker of the Parliament House!" Mr. Montagu had protested that Cicero was outshone, and he must kiss the lips golden with such eloquence; and so with more than he could reckon, all the great men concurring. Mostly dead now.—How dim and dry it all receded into the withered years! Yet it had been and those years could not undo it. Lord Sandwich and young Sir Philip had been the first to go, both gone together when Lord Sandwich's ship blew up at Solebay and Lady Jem a widow before she was twenty-five! It seemed to him that he had said all this aloud in the quiet room and that Will had listened entranced, but yet it was only now he spoke:

"Yes, if the Duke could have kept from his priests I might have been Lord Chancellor of England. Mrs. Rachel thought no less. Truly the Pepys family have some reason to look up to me, all said and done! I shall be remembered."

"Most truly, sir. But sitting here on Christmas night, it appears to me that worldly honours pass and——"

"Mine faded even before the Revolution," Pepys mused, refilling his glass. "When you consider that I have even the distinction of being sent to the Tower on a most malicious persecution——"

"It did but exalt you the more, sir, in all honest men's eyes. And had you been Lord Chancellor that too would have passed. All passes. But may I make bold to ask is there an account of these matters in your Journal that no eye but your own has seen? For I note it is bound and preserved in volumes with the care that befits its value. Is this your gift to posterity?"

Pepys laughed with a humorous chuckle like the running of old wine.

"Why, no, Will. I keep that for a whip to memory of idle doings as well as grave, but there is nothing in it worth a wise man's leisure. When my eyes

can bear the script I look into it sometimes to recall my youth. My name should be remembered by no idle rogueries but by my written journeys to Scotland with the Duke and to Tangier and my handsome gift of books to my mother Cambridge and my college of Magdalen, and my gift of the great Kneller portrait to my aunt the University of Oxford. Thus should a man be remembered, and this sad stuff of my Journal shall like enough decrease before me. Scholars shall be mighty glad I lived and had my day. None else, save that the Navy may not grudge me a memory when my papers are looked into. I have earned that much from them.”

He fell into reverie again. The past possessed him at mention of the Journal—Castlemaine haughty and handsome, with passionate eyes and full lips, rose-petalled for a kiss whether from King or player, swaying sumptuously through the dance. Pretty witty Nelly, all smiles and sparkles and arch retorts. Knipp, sweet-voiced and impudent, curling up to him for kisses. He had soon wearied of her when there was none to hinder those kisses and closer embraces. Merry Mercer with seductive eyes and jiggling feet and smiles of invitation touched with irresistible suggestion. His thoughts lingered a little on Deb. Lord! the relief when at last she had married an able citizen of Cornhill and a wedding present ended the business for good and all.

Women palled. At fifty he would sooner have chosen a meeting of the Royal Society with their curious experiments than the most beautiful woman in England in his arms. They were all alike. A man must follow them while young and there an end. The finest was not worth the ecstasies of wind-music ravishingly played to the sighing of celestial voices. Of his wife he seldom thought. A girl, dead in her youth and beauty—a fretful child, jealous and overpassionate, what could she mean to an old man charged with all the interests and values of a long life? He did not even recall her now as life’s procession passed before him, and considering its variety and ending he said aloud:

“Strange!”

The word fell in with Will’s mood as the old man continued:

“And this is Christmas night! Lord! The Christmases I remember, and the dead tunes and spilt wine! All gone—done—ended. All ends.”

There was a short silence. Then Will said suddenly, fiercely:

“Is all ended? Never while memory lasts!—If I live to be a hundred I can never forget the beauty of Madam and her gracious ways to a poor lad like me that loved her. When she died——”

Pepys stared at him in a kind of consternation—then again at the fire. This broke into his meditations like a wild waft of youth's perfume, unwanted, alarming. She had slept all these years under a weight of marble, and suddenly he saw her sparkling glance through arrowy lashes; suddenly in Will's words she lived. But no—the marble and its Latin inscription were her place now. He took a few moments to recover himself.

"I thank the Almighty," he said piously, "that marriage being ordained for the infirmity of man and the mighty difficult state it is, my wife and I lived together in harmony and mutual content for fourteen years, and yourself knows my natural affliction on her departure."

But this Will only half heard. His heart remembered her trembling hope when Pepys had the King's leave to go abroad to rest his worn-out eyes, her happy letters when they strengthened, and beneath this the unexpressed hope for Will's reading that all her troubles were left behind in London never to raise their heads when she returned. There she was right: they never did. The fever took her and she died soon after they reached home. He remembered on the day she died, how, when he stood beside her bewildered with pain, she clasped his hand in feverish palms:

"Be good to him, Will, do not desert him. He will be broken-hearted and the house a grave. I was a fool. I missed the way. He could have been faithful if I had been kind; I was clutching and jealous. I am too wearied now to do better. But promise, Will. He has seen. He knows."

Will promised and kept his word. Could he grieve that she had departed after that brief interval of perfect content when she could believe her married life built at last on sure foundations, hedged in and secure, the storm past, a rainbow of hope shining in tearful skies as a covenant between them? He could not, for he who knew all concerning them knew that it was not as she believed. After a few weeks of compunction he saw the old courses begin, the old seductions followed, and foresaw as surely as she lay there that the old sorrows had awaited her. Now she had escaped them forever. He had had a moment alone with her as she lay there with flowers about her, dark lashes asleep on marble pallor and the faint smile of the dead whom life troubles no more. He permitted himself then to stoop and kiss her brow in memory of her sweetness and his boy's worship for a thing so beautiful. But he did not sorrow; he was glad, and since Pepys must be what he must it was best for him too that he should take his way until disillusionment met him face to face and life accomplished its own ends in him. He could understand his master's side of the eternal quarrel also knowing the temptations of his warm youthfulness of enjoyment, his deep curiosity in the lures of the

world, the sensual romance that was himself. They made him lovable;— even to Elizabeth, had she known it, that was his charm. Very woman of very woman, she could not allow for the defects of his qualities and so an end of peace between them. Will's love, wiser and untroubled by sex, saw through the accidental to the essential and could bear with what in its nature must be transitory as a cloud in blue heavens.

But though he loved Pepys he adored her. She was to him, all unknowing, a symbol of the mystery of life, the unsatisfied craving that lives in lonely twilights and weeping dawns, the hope ever on before, ever disappointed, the question unanswerable, romance never to be realized otherwise. But all this lay deep in him and far below any source of words, and the only repayment he could make to her and to his distrust of life was his devotion to the old man beside him whom they had both loved. Nothing else earthly was left of Elizabeth's broken hope, and in this he would not leave her unsatisfied.

Pepys reached forward and put a new log on the andirons. Flame sprang up shooting beauty in the darkness; Will in a dream could think he saw her plainly and caught his breath for a vanishing moment. She stood with hands lightly clasped, smiling but not at him but her husband. Did she know—did she care now that he had forgotten her so soon and with so many? Are the dead as careless as the living; do they change and forget as easily?—Or do they comprehend all at long last?

“Lord!” said Pepys, “to see what a mighty strange thing life is!—that here we sit with our bottle of good wine and eat our food and enjoy it, and so many gone that loved mirth as well as we. Poor souls, I could be as willing as any to remember them, but man is not made so and the Lord knows best. But for all, life is a mighty fine play, and I bless God I had a good seat to see the show and loved it mightily for all the rubs and knocks. And if I could be born again I would, God forgive me, choose it before any Heaven promised in the sermons, though I thank God my hopes of immortality are well founded and second to none.”

There was no reply. Will's eyes were fixed on a receding figure and through it on life itself, a vanishing and mysterious beauty. He had no words for his own experiences. Pepys had many.

Outside the snow glittered to the moon and there was a great silence.

“This is good wine,” said Pepys, “I never drank better. Fill the glasses, Will, to the memory of past pleasures.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Great Romantic (Being an Interpretation of Mr. Saml Pepys and Elizabeth His Wife)* by Elizabeth Louisa Moreseby (as E. Barrington)]