

LIZ DUFFY ADAMS & DELIA SHERMAN

Whitehall

SEASON ONE • EPISODE I

Embarkations



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BY

LIZ DUFFY ADAMS &
DELIA SHERMAN



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Whitehall

Welcome to Whitehall, where the true history of Catherine of Braganza and her marriage to King Charles II of England is brought to life with all its sensual scandal and political intrigue. Venture back in time to a place where the games of royals affect the lives of all.

Whitehall

Season 1, Episode 1

Embarkations

by Liz Duffy Adams and Delia Sherman

May 1662

The Infanta Catarina of Braganza rode toward Lisbon Harbor through streets of celebration. Bells rang and pennants snapped in the spring sunshine. What looked to be the whole population of the capital lined the streets and hung from the bridges and leaned out the windows, cheering and singing and throwing bouquets of wildflowers under the wheels of the coaches to perfume her passage and bid her farewell.

After long negotiation, the English king and his English ships stood with Portugal against the might of Spain. The people were safe from the hardships and depredations of war. And it was Catarina who had saved them, by becoming Queen of England.

Catarina sat very straight, her back not touching the gold silk cushions, her gaze on the coachman's liveried back, her expression (she hoped) dignified. Behind the stiff bodice of her gown, her heart beat painfully—from grief, from pride, from excitement, she hardly knew which. The shouts of her people rang in her ears: *L'Inglês! L'Inglês! Viva o rei da Grã Bretanha! Viva a Infanta!*

Her brother, King Alfonso, lounged upon the seat beside her, throwing smiles at the pretty girls waving from tapestry-hung balconies. Despite his neat beard and gold-laced hat, he looked very little like a king, she thought, and very much like a boy on the edge of manhood—a mixture of uncertainty and braggadocio wrapped in watered silk and jewels. She was going to miss him. To her, he was still the wide-eyed child she'd dandled when she was six, before he was struck by the mysterious illness that had robbed him of the use of one arm and his sweet temper, leaving him prone to fits of rage. Even now, at eighteen, he was much given to brawling, to sudden extremes of passion, to fast company, to drinking and loose women and . . .

"How your people love you, sister," he told her now, his own teeth flashing under his narrow mustache. "See how they rejoice in your joy!"

On the facing seat, her youngest brother, Dom Pedro, snorted. Even at thirteen, he showed signs of being as ambitious as their mother Queen Luisa, who had pushed their father to revolt against the Spanish and declare himself king of an independent Portugal. He was nearly as wild as his older brother, if more circumspect in his roistering.

Now he said, "They're rejoicing that the Spanish army retreated as soon as the English warships sailed into Lisbon Harbor. They haven't seen enough of Catarina to know if they love her or not."

"Of course they love her," the king said. "How could they not? She has saved Portugal."

He cast Catarina his charming smile. She pressed her lips tightly together and prayed silently as the nuns had taught her, until the urge to weep had passed.

A queen does not weep, her mother had murmured as they embraced on the palace steps. A queen holds her head high and does that which God has given her to do—her duty. *And so I do*, Catarina thought, *and so I will, with the help of Mary and the blessed saints.*

A spray of jacaranda, newly blossomed and smelling of honey and sunlight, landed in the stiff folds of her wide skirt. Did they have jacaranda in England?

Alfonso picked it up and thrust it at her. “Wave to them!” he insisted, much agitated. “Let them see your joy! As your king, I command it!”

Catarina took the branch. “All right, dearest. Yes, all right. I will. Watch me.”

She took a deep breath of jacaranda-scented air. Her head was ringing with the noise, her heart swelling with love. Love for her wayward little brothers. Love for the formidable mother who had bid her farewell at the palace, straight-backed and serene, the only sign of what the parting cost her the trembling in her lips against Catarina’s forehead as she blessed her. Love for Lisbon, for Portugal, for the father she missed so painfully.

Catarina turned from her brothers and leaned toward the window, letting the sun fall full on her face. She raised the spray of jacaranda and tossed it out to the people crowding the route, saw a woman catch it and brandish it, her round face triumphant. The crowd’s cheers swelled; her own name battered her ears. She found herself smiling at them through a blur of unqueenly tears, smiling at her people, whom she was about to leave forever.

• • •

The procession moved on through the streets, slow and stately as clouds across the sky. As it emerged into yet another crowded, noisy square, Dōna Maria de Portugal, Condessa de Penalva, adjusted her black silk fan to keep the sun from her eyes.

The coach lurched and the scent of oranges filled the air. Dōna Maria clutched her rosary and prayed for patience. Though processions were a necessary part of court life, she hated them and avoided them when she could. Dōna Maria was notably shortsighted, and public processions meant shouting crowds that made her head ache and sights that went by in a brilliant blur. She preferred the shadowy rooms of court and convent, where the days unrolled in a predictable round of tasks, meals, walks in the garden, and prayers measured out by the tolling of church bells.

Will there be bells in England? she wondered. *Will there be peace?*

Beside her, her brother Dom Francisco de Mello, Conde de Ponte, ambassador extraordinary to the Court of Charles II of England, nodded and waved cheerfully.

Francisco had always liked people and balls and entertainments and light and noise, provided they did not involve gunpowder or swords or angry shouting. He had ever been one to conciliate and bargain and flatter, more like a shopkeeper, their father had said, than a scion of a noble house. On this point, if on few others, Dōna Maria had always secretly agreed with her noble parent. Diplomats might be necessary, but they were not truly manly.

“You might,” Dōna Maria observed acidly, “have the decency to appreciate my sentiments on this occasion.”

The dark oval of his face turned, shaded by the cloud of plumes affixed to his stiff-brimmed hat. “Dear Maria,” he said with what sounded like genuine affection. “How like our poor mother you sound, may she rest with the saints!”

Dōna Maria sketched a cross on her black silk bosom. “Amen, though I fear you only mean to tease.”

“Indeed, sister, you make too much of a little thing,” Dom Francisco said. “The journey will last a fortnight only, if the seas be smooth. And if they are not, well, the Lord Admiral is a doughty sailor and has made this voyage before with no loss of life or limb. Why, I myself have endured it half a dozen times and you see I have taken no harm.”

Except, Dona Maria thought, to acquire a vocabulary of English words you refuse to translate. She said, “But you have always sailed back again. I sail to return no more, leaving home and the graves of our ancestors and my husband behind me.”

Her brother’s plump, cheerful face came into clear focus as he leaned over her wide farthingale to pat her hand. “I do know, sister. I honor you for your courage and, above all, for your devotion to our Infanta.”

Pleased, but unwilling to show it, Dōna Maria took refuge in dignity. “I know my duty, I hope,” she said. “As does the Infanta. It is only,” she continued almost in spite of herself, “that we will be surrounded by godless Protestants, who drink ale at breakfast, I think you said, and eat roast beef on feast days.” She shook her head. “I fear for our immortal souls, living in such a barbaric land.”

The coach rumbled forward a few yards before Dom Francisco answered her. “Not so barbaric, dear sister, except for the climate, which I grant you is unspeakable—cold and damp as the worst of winter nearly all the year. But the English are God’s children no less than we. It’s true their manners are more free than ours, to be sure. Ladies and gentlemen kiss upon greeting, which I confess I find charming. The king is mad for dancing and sport and theater—there are entertainments nearly every night.”

Dōna Maria’s heart sank. Entertainments every night! But for little Catarina, the daughter of her heart, she could bear worse torments than glaring torches and unfamiliar faces. After all, she would have the familiar faces of the queen’s ladies, her tapestry work, and—most comforting of all—the rituals of her faith to sustain her. As would Catarina, if only she were allowed.

Her gaunt fingers clutched her beads. “When will her highness have a moment to hear the holy office, among all these entertainments?”

“There will be time.” Dom Francisco’s voice was firm. “It is in the marriage agreement, along with a chapel in each house where she resides, for her use and her ladies’. All will be well, sister. I swear to you.”

Another turn brought the coach into a broad plaza full of light and heat and noise. Dōna Maria shaded her eyes with her fan and sighed deeply.

“Take heart, Maria,” Dom Francisco said gently. “This is a moment of triumph—for the house of Braganza and for all of Portugal.”

“And I suppose,” Dōna Maria snapped, “that you take all the credit upon yourself?”

Teeth flashed in the sunlight as her brother grinned. “It would be no more than my due if I did. Five years I worked on this marriage, five years of sea voyages and tasteless

food and delicate conversations where nothing was said and all was implied. Five years of waiting for England to come to her senses and restore Charles to his rightful throne, and once they did, persuading him that our Infanta would be a richer and more advantageous match than any Protestant princess in Europe. Yes, I labored long to bring this day to pass, and this”—his gesture encompassed the trumpets and shouting, the colors and the flowers—“pays, and more than pays, for all.”

Dōna Maria would not be distracted from her grievance. “Such promises you made him! A dowry of five million gold crusadoes!”

“The richest dowry ever brought by a princess to England,” her brother said happily.

“You must know the queen regent can never pay the half of such a sum, not and keep up the army!”

“It was she who suggested it,” said Dom Francisco.

And now Dōna Maria came to the source of her greatest fear. “But what if King Charles should take offense at the spices and sugar we have sent him instead of gold and send the Infanta packing back again?”

“What if the sun were to set in the east?” Dom Francisco replied. “Do not forget that we have given him the ports of Tangier and Bombay as well, which will bring him gold enough once trade is established. Charles is a fair man, Maria. His word, once given, is given forever. Let the Infanta only set foot in England, and she’s as good as wed. Why, she’s as good as wed already. Did you not see the letter, writ in his own hand, calling her his wife and queen?”

She had, for Catarina had shown it to her, as was proper, along with a miniature portrait of a long-faced man who looked more like a Spaniard than like any Englishman the Condessa de Penalva had seen. Catarina had treated both portrait and letter with reverence, hanging the one around her neck and carrying the other next to her breast. Poor child, was she hoping to fall in love with this florid monarch, with his dark curls and his petulant mouth? Did she expect him to love her in return, as her father and mother had loved, living and ruling in harmony?

But love, as Dōna Maria well knew, was the exception in noble families. She herself had not positively disliked her husband, and had felt great affection for her children when they were small. But her duties at court and her service to the Infanta had transformed them all to polite strangers who bowed and murmured upon meeting. Now her husband was dead, and all her devotion and her love belonged first to the Blessed Mother and Holy Church, and then to her royal mistress, the Infanta Catarina de Braganza. Whom she had brought up to be mild and obedient, and who knew nothing of men and their ways.

• • •

Time, that had plodded like a tired horse through the endless ceremonies of dressing and the public farewell, the high mass at the Cathedral of São Jorge, and the long, slow procession through the city, seemed to stop, then speed to a canter. The crowd fell away as the royal coach broke from the line and entered the pier the king had caused to be built for the occasion.

They rolled briskly through a newly laid garden, and then the coach had stopped and Catherine was alighting from it, half-defeated by trumpets and cheering. A moment later she was in the royal barge, sitting between her brothers, gliding over the sparkling water toward the towering bulk of the English flagship the *Royal Charles*. A moment of uncertainty as the Lord Admiral himself, the Earl of Sandwich, tall and broad as a peasant, assisted her onto the swaying companionway. The shock and noise of the salute of twenty-seven guns, fired in her honor. Alfonso's exclamations when he saw her cabin, furnished all in carved and gilded wood and draped in crimson damask and velvet. The sudden silence as he realized at last that his sister was leaving, and that it was unlikely that he would ever see her again.

A queen may not weep, but a king may, and did.

A knock at the door heralded Lord Sandwich, who made a reverence and said that it was time for His Majesty and Dom Pedro to return to shore. He knew no Portuguese, but his Spanish was good, if hesitant. She wondered, not for the first time, how well her husband spoke Spanish. His written language was correct, though a little stiff.

Catarina touched her royal brother's embroidered sleeve. "I will go up and see you off."

Alfonso, pale and solemn, shook his head. "You must keep to the cabin, among your ladies, sister. Mamãe would say it is not proper for you to show your face on deck."

"What have you ever cared for what Mamãe would say?" she asked.

"I care now," he said, and left, taking Dom Pedro with him.

Catarina ran to the great gallery window to watch their departure. Realizing that the bulk of the ship blocked her view, she hurried to the door and out into the corridor, ignoring the shocked cries of her ladies.

She gained the deck as the royal barge was drawing away from the ship. Her brothers stared up at her from the stern of the barge. Dom Pedro smiled, but the king's face showed signs of a coming storm. "Go below at once!" he shouted. "Your king commands it!"

"No doubt Your Majesty will wish to pray for the health of His Majesty King Alfonso and the Infante Dom Pedro." It was Dõna Maria, slightly breathless, standing at her elbow.

"Yes, of course," Catarina said. But still she lingered, looking with greedy eyes upon the city of Lisbon—the welter of warehouses and boats along the quays, the church towers raising their crosses above the tumble of red tile roofs, the Castle of São Jorge on the hill, the flags flying—and the golden barge carrying her brothers out of her sight forever. Then she turned and led her duenna back to her cabin.

A little while later, Catarina knelt beside her confessor, Father Patrick, the polished ebony and silver beads of her rosary slipping through her fingers to the accompaniment of shouts and the heavy rattle of chain as the anchor was weighed. She clutched the ebony beads tightly, struggling to keep her countenance. Portugal depended on her. Her household depended on her. She was a queen now. She would not give way.

The ship rocked and swayed. More shouting, more rattling. Father Patrick's prayers grew louder and his Irish accent more pronounced.

Lord Sandwich entered hatless, his beard and hair ruffled. "The wind has turned against us, Your Majesty. We cannot leave Lisbon Bay until it shifts again."

Catarina closed her eyes briefly, hardly knowing whether her sudden dizziness was relief or disappointment. “It is in the hands of God,” she said, and pressed her rosary to her lips.

She sat by the long gallery window, filling her eyes and her soul with the sight of Lisbon Harbor, sewing, praying, listening to her ladies chatter. She was sitting down to dinner when she received a note from her mother: “Winds shift without warning. You are England’s now. We will not meet again.”

When darkness fell, she watched the water carnival Alfonso had hastily arranged for her entertainment. Enchanted, she sat on the quarterdeck, watching rockets and squibs of white and colored fire roar across the dark heavens.

Queens do not weep, at least not where anyone can see them. But when the red damask curtains of her great carved bed were drawn, Catarina shed quiet tears of grief and frustration.

Next day, the winds continued contrary. That evening, the king and Dom Pedro rowed out on barges with drunken young nobles and all the court musicians to serenade her with viols and guitars. When they played songs composed in honor of her coming marriage, she could not hide her tears, and even the Condessa, stern taskmistress as she was, forbore to chide her.

On the third morning, the winds relented. As Catarina sat in her silken pavilion, her face toward England, she felt the *Royal Charles* surge beneath her like a spirited horse, bearing her to her husband’s arms. She touched her breast, where she carried his letter next to her heart. *My Lady and Wife*, it began, and although his tone was formal enough to please even her mother’s sense of propriety, he had expressed longing to see her beloved person in his kingdoms and signed it *The very faithful husband of Your Majesty, whose hand he kisses*.

She had done her duty, she thought, and brought desperately needed military succor to her people. What though the king’s countenance was saturnine, heavy in repose, and not altogether handsome? Might God not reward her piety with the same happiness her parents had known? And children, of course—healthy sons and handsome daughters to secure the throne of England.

A gust of wind blew athwart the ship, snatching the knot of ribbons pinned to her hair and sending it flying over the ship’s rail. Dōna Maria cried out in real horror and ladies screeched like sea birds. They were astonished when Catarina de Braganza, Infanta of Portugal, began to laugh aloud.

• • •

Barbara Palmer, Countess of Castlemaine, reclined naked in a luxuriously ruffled bed, lit by a single candle and a flood of moonlight. Her mass of chestnut hair, released from its usual ornate confinement, rioted across the linen bolster; one hand rested on her swelling belly. She was the very picture of satiated bliss, an English rose at the height of youthful bloom. Through half-closed eyes, she gazed across the room at the tall man who stood naked at the window, looking out at the midnight garden.

His thirty-two years sat lightly on him, though here and there on his moon-silvered skin, a scar gleamed, the kind got in war. His olive complexion, courtesy of his Italian grandfather, was far from the English pink-and-white ideal, and his long face, with its wide mouth and curling lips, was generally considered imposing but rather ugly. Barbara, however, found his every atom erotic. He was the brilliant Minotaur who did not rend her, dangerous as he might be to others. He was the King of England, and he was hers.

A church bell began to toll, and then another. Three spaniels, curled up together on the edges of the puddled curtains, woke and began howling. Startled, Barbara leaned up on one elbow, but before she could speak, there was a knock at the door.

“Be still,” he said to the dogs—who quieted, but came wriggling up to him to be soothed with a stroke and a tug on their ears—and then called out, “Enter!” A young page came in, looking as though he’d been roused from sleep to bring the note he handed over with a little bow, quite unabashed at the nakedness. The king read, and nodded at the boy.

“Tell Lord Clarendon I’ll set off as soon as may be. Now back to bed with you, Ned.”

The boy grinned and bowed again, and hurried out, not without a sidelong glance at Barbara, who was sitting bolt upright.

“What is it about?” she asked.

Charles II looked back at her from the window. “It seems I am about to be married.”

They looked at each other as the bells rolled on. She couldn’t read his face. She dropped her gaze and bit her lip. Then she threw back her shoulders and cast him a smile brimming with love, valor, and wry humor. The candlelight fell full upon her face; she knew when she was in her light as well as any actress might.

“Well, darling,” she said. “I hope you aren’t going to be fanatical about it.”

A risk, a calculated risk. He might take this moment to turn serious; Barbara never knew when that side of him might emerge. He stared at her, his dark eyes widening. Then he tipped his head back with a shouted laugh, and came striding back to her bed.

• • •

The candle guttered out with a hiss, a puddle of wax with a smoking wick, and Barbara woke curled with her back to Charles. While they had sported, the treacherous English weather had sent clouds scudding in to cover the moon, and now the day was dark, with a steady hissing rain. Turning, she saw him awake, one arm behind his head, gazing across the room at nothing.

She said, “Are the cares of married life oppressing your spirits already?”

He laughed shortly under his breath, then sobered. “Can’t help wondering what I’ve let myself in for. A pious little Infanta. Doesn’t even speak English.”

“So much the better. She’ll bring all that lovely Portuguese gold, and lovely little legitimate heirs—and you won’t even have to talk to her.”

She had meant to make him laugh again. But he reached out and palmed her belly, looking serious.

“You know I would legitimize your children if I could. Our children,” he corrected himself.

“They are legitimate,” Barbara said. “Legitimate little Palmers, with generous royal titles.”

“It’s both the most and the least I can do. Thank goodness your husband is the complacent sort.”

“He ought to be; he’s well rewarded.”

In fact, though she didn’t want Charles to know it, she worried that Roger’s complacency was growing threadbare. He’d been making discontented noises of late, bemoaning her absences and his equivocal position, though he should have known how it would be when he agreed to the arrangement.

As the only child of a viscount she might have looked higher for a husband. Sadly, the Villiers family fortunes had fallen during the years of Charles’s exile. They’d married her off to Roger—respectable enough, a wealthy lawyer—three years since, briskly if not brilliantly.

But Barbara was the beauty of the age, and not one to be satisfied with a dull country estate and a dull bookish husband. Roger should be honored that his wife had become the unofficial queen of a glittering court. In fact, he *had* been honored. Scarcely a year ago, the king had made him Baron of Limerick and Earl of Castlemaine. It was unfortunate that the title could only be inherited by Barbara’s children. It was rather too obviously Charles’s way of looking after his own, and left Roger torn between pride—after all, he was a Royalist, and it was something to be recognized by the king he’d championed—and humiliation. Which, to be fair, could not be comfortable.

But Roger’s hurt pride, she reminded herself, was an old worry. This morning, she must confront the more present worry of her lover’s new wife.

She cupped Charles’s hip as he turned to her, ran her thumb along the curve of the bone, smiled sleepily. No wife, she thought, could hold more sway over a man’s soul, heart, and bed than a mistress such as she. Surely a rich little foreign Papist was no real threat. And yet . . . there were those bells, quiet now, but still ringing in her head.

She said, “I daresay a wife will prove no more difficult to manage than a husband. Or a good deal easier, I should think.”

Charles bit the corner of his lip. “I believe she’s exceptionally good-natured. Trained up to be mild and biddable.”

“Unlike me?” Barbara teased.

“Oh, you’re biddable enough for my taste,” he tossed back, “when you’re bid to do what you wanted at the first.”

She laughed, a low murmuring sound. Pulling her in closer, he went on talking, his breath warm on her neck. “She’s had a monstrous sheltered life. Raised among a pack of nuns, I understand. Never set foot out of Lisbon before. I don’t want to offer her any insult. Or shock her into fits, for that matter.”

Barbara shrugged. “Oh, well. Even in pious Portugal I don’t imagine they expect kings to be chaste.”

Charles went still.

Damn. She’d struck a wrong note.

He detached from her under the pretense of sitting up and reaching for the wine.

He drank, then set the cup down again and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. Curled near the foot, one of his dogs—she refused to learn their names, she would have banned them from her presence if Charles would go anywhere without them, the damnable, shedding, barking, slobbering creatures—raised her head. The other two, sleeping on the floor, sat up with a little scrabbling of claws and watched Charles attentively, ready to follow him.

Barbara reached out and touched his shoulder. “Going so early, my darling?”

“She’s landed at Portsmouth. I must go.”

She let her fingertips slide down his back. All of his scars were in front, of course. He wasn’t a man who hesitated. If he really wanted to go, he’d have been up and dressed by now.

She lay back again, letting the bedclothes fall away from her body. “Of course. Of course you must go. Poor thing, the weather off the coast has been vile; it must have been a nasty crossing. She’ll be as sick and bedraggled as a little wet . . .” She thought better of saying *rat*. “Well. I should think she’d be glad of a little time. As a woman. To look her best.” *Such as it is*, she thought but didn’t say. According to the Spanish ambassador, she was a dark, ugly, dwarfish creature, though he was undoubtedly prejudiced.

“And speak of the weather,” she went on, “only listen to the rain! The roads will be dreadful. Mud up to the horses’ knees, I should think. I hate to think of you struggling through it all the way to Portsmouth; it will take you days and days. You’ll get there just as soon and far fresher if you wait till it’s dry.”

At the word *wait*, Charles gave a little shake and sat up straighter, as though resisting temptation. “I know, I know,” she said hastily, “how can you wait? You’ll be as restless as a dog who hears the hunting horn, now you know your duty calls you to Portsmouth.”

He half turned his head. “Call me a dog, do you?” he said.

She heard the humor in his voice, but did not take up the joke. “After all, it’s not as though James weren’t already there to greet her and honor her and make her comfortable. And it’s not as though she’d expect you to be at the dock whenever the winds chose to deliver her—you’re the king, not an idler with nothing better to do than wait upon women! And . . .”

“And?” He turned right back around to look at her, and seeing her yawning, widened his eyes in mock offense.

The yawn turned into a laugh as she raised both arms above her head lazily, showing her breasts to advantage—naked, warm, and ripe. “Forgive me, darling, you don’t let a girl get much sleep!”

He reached out his hand to her.

“*And*,” she said, playfully capturing his hand in hers, “Tom Killigrew has a new comedy up this afternoon. He’ll be grieved if you miss it. Honestly, what are the odds? Why mire yourself on the road when you can ride dry and quick tomorrow? Or the next day?”

He growled, “Ned you seduce me from my duty, wanton thing?” But she saw the look in his eyes, and knew she’d won. She let her heavy lids lower, and looked at him under her lashes with the most tender sincerity.

“Never, my dear, never. Even if I could.”

And he was back in her arms, his weight pressing her into the bed, and all was well. As he knew from her first pregnancy (with little Anne, safe with her nurse), Barbara's swollen belly was no impediment to love. She kissed him, digging her fingers into his hair and taking advantage of his distraction to nudge the spaniel bitch off the bed with one foot.

I will not let her take him, she thought as his mouth moved warmly from her lips to her neck. The little Portuguese may have the title, she may have the rank and place and honors, she may have his marital duty and his royal heirs. But she won't have his love. I swear I will hold that for my own.

• • •

A month after setting sail from Lisbon, the *Royal Charles* sailed into the harbor of Portsmouth. The sea, if not exactly calm, seemed still as a pond after the long, stormy crossing. The Infanta's household, weak and weary from seasickness and terror, rose from their cots and helped their mistress prepare to greet her royal bridegroom.

In the Infanta's cabin, ladies in wide farthingales bustled about like bees, laying out their mistress's clothing. The atmosphere was redolent of sickness and the scented pastilles burnt in the faint hope of sweetening the air. Catarina sat in the center of the room in her shift and loose gown, her rosary in her lap, while her barber dressed her hair over its wire frame and a waiting-woman brightened her sallow cheeks with cochineal. She was still queasy, but she was in England, thank God. She was more than ready to see this new country where she would be queen.

Her hair finished, she rose to be dressed. Dōna Maria, yellow and tottering, but determined to do her duty, gestured to one of her ladies to bring forward the black-and-white Portuguese gown the Infanta had worn to leave Lisbon.

"What is this?" Catarina exclaimed, astonished. "I had chosen the white silk English gown, with the silver lace!"

Dōna Maria's thin brows rose disapprovingly. "Your Majesty is pleased to jest. That gown is quite unsuitable."

Her tone was tight, confident, disapproving. Catarina had heard it all her life, from Mother Superior and the royal nursemaids and from her mother.

Almost she acquiesced, out of habit and affection. And then she lifted her chin. "Since my mother caused this gown to be made, she must have thought it suitable. It is an English gown, after all, and I am an English queen."

There. That caught something of her mother's tone, she thought. Courteous, a little surprised that she should be forced to say anything so obvious. Dōna Maria stared at her, then primmed her mouth and lowered her eyes to sign her complete, if reluctant, obedience. It was a look Catarina had never seen directed at her, and she was forced to tighten her own lips to keep herself from apologizing. She was a queen now; she could not allow herself to be treated like a child, even at the price of defying one who had been a second mother to her, combing her hair and comforting her sorrows and hearing her catechism when her queen mother was occupied with state matters.

The tense silence drew out, and then her duenna said, "Her Majesty will wear the white and silver. Though," she went on stubbornly, "I still cannot think it seemly."

Later, when Catarina examined herself in the dressing glass, gowned and jeweled as befit a Queen of England, she thought Dōna Maria may have had the right of it. Her reflection stared back at her, pinched and sallow, thin shoulders and narrow chest uncomfortably at odds with the low neck of the English gown. And the stiff, wired wings of hair that so exactly echoed the lines of a farthingale were not suited to loose, billowing skirts.

Charles would not see her truly, she feared. And she was too uneasy, both in body and in spirit, to see him. It would be a meeting of two dolls, not the meeting of minds and souls she had dreamed of as the *Royal Charles* tossed and groaned through stormy seas.

Time enough for true seeing once we are truly wed. Today is for history. Tomorrow will be for us.

After some time, Lord Sandwich was announced, and her heart quickened, wondering if he heralded the arrival of the king. But as soon as he entered, she knew he bore bad news. Their faces were like glass, these English. They were bluff and eager, blundering through the formal measures of her mother's court like mastiffs, well-trained, but with incomplete control of their tails and paws. Just now, he looked like a mastiff standing over the shredded remains of a costly pillow.

"Good morning, Your Majesty. I'm afraid I must tell you—that is—I regret to say it but the fact is, His Majesty—well, the short and the long of it is—the king's not yet here. Delays. Affairs of state, you know. And we were such an unconscionable time at sea—" He broke off, uncertainly.

Only the training of the convent and her mother's court prevented Catarina from betraying her disappointment. "Did you not send a messenger from the Isle of Wight?"

"He hardly will have reached there in the time," Lord Sandwich said. "The roads are mired, Your Majesty. Rain, you know, mud thick as anything. But it won't be long—say, three more days, or indeed perhaps less, for His Majesty to prepare himself and travel here by coach. But his brother is here, the Duke of York, you know—he's come aboard, and begs you to receive him."

Catarina raised her hand. "Thank you, Lord Admiral. Let him approach."

Sandwich bowed and disappeared, leaving behind him a shocked silence, which broke into a spate of excited whispers cut short by the Dōna Maria's minatory glare. Catarina had time to say a Paternoster and a Credo before the door opened and a troop of impossibly tall gentlemen in cloth of gold doublets poured into the cabin.

The tallest of the gentlemen stepped forward, very handsome, with long, light-brown curling hair. He removed his feathered hat and knelt. She stood, took his hands to raise him to his feet, and, feeling very bold, presented her face for the kiss her godfather the Conde de Ponte had said the English used in greeting. The duke grinned, kissed her hand with a flourish, and began to speak. In English.

Catarina had very little English. She and her future husband had at least two languages in common—Spanish and Latin—and her mother had not thought it necessary for her to acquire another. She would have her household to speak to, Queen Luisa had said, as well as her godfather and his servants, and Father Patrick was an able translator. Privately, Catarina had thought she would like to learn something of her husband's native tongue, and would have done so during the journey, had Father Patrick been well

enough to teach her. Still, she understood a few words here and there: “His Majesty,” “wife,” “sister.”

To her great relief, Dom de Mello stepped out of the bright throng. “If you will allow me, Your Majesty?” he said to her, then spoke in English to the Duke of York, who flushed scarlet.

“I crave your pardon, madam.” Her new brother-in-law’s Spanish was serviceable, if oddly accented. “I was explaining that my sister Catherine must save her first kiss for her husband, His Majesty the King, who is even now in London, awaiting the news of her arrival. For my own part, I welcome you to your kingdom, and tender the good wishes of my wife. Lady Anne is in the country just at present, awaiting the birth of her child. Yet I trust we will contrive to make you tolerably comfortable.” He smiled under his thin mustache. It was a charming smile. “His Majesty is most anxious that you feel yourself at home.”

The English name stood out from the surrounding Spanish like a rock in a stream: Catherine. That was who she was now. Catherine, sister to James, Duke of York. Wife of the King of England. Catherine. She would not forget.

James was looking at her, his dark eyes anxious. She must respond. “Thank you, my brother,” she said in halting English.

He smiled. “You’re very welcome,” he said, more confident. “You need not feel obliged to adopt our English ways all at once, you know. You’ve brought your own cooks, I understand?”

Catherine nodded.

“Good, good.” The Duke’s gaze fell upon the snowy gown. “And if you prefer to wear your native dress, I promise you no one will take it amiss, least of all Charles. I’m sure you look charmingly in it.”

His voice and expression were kind, indulgent. *Like a man talking to a stranger’s child*, she thought. For a moment she could not think what to say. Her head ached fiercely. “Too kind,” she murmured, and then, more strongly: “Now, will you not be seated? I wish these gentlemen to be made known to me.”

• • •

The day after the *Royal Charles* sailed into Portsmouth Harbor, the Duke of York’s household gathered in the forecourt to give the new Queen of England a proper English welcome. Fanned down from the front steps in neat rows, men to one side, women to the other, they stood in the bright May sunshine, brushing specks from their livery, adjusting caps and sleeves.

In the last rank of women, among the other chambermaids, stood young Jenny Martin, atwitter with anticipation. She’d starched her cuffs and pressed her apron and tucker. If the queen’s eye should chance to fall upon her, she wanted to be sure that it found her neat and brisk.

Jenny had ambitions. Other chambermaids might be content to spend their lives cleaning night pots and making beds, but not Jenny. Someday, Jenny meant to wait upon

a great lady, with absolute power over patch box and hot tongs, ribbons and laces. To this end, she studied the mode, and though she was only fifteen, had opinions about busks and sleeves and lace collars. She knew how to dress a head and wire a curl so that it wouldn't droop at the first sign of rain.

Trumpets sounded outside the gates and menservants ran to open them. Everybody straightened and put on their best solemn faces as a line of carriages rumbled into the forecourt.

The first carriage held the duke and a slight, pale girl wrapped up in a velvet cloak—the new Queen of England, Jenny realized with a shock. *How tiny she is!* Jenny thought as the duke handed her ceremoniously out of the carriage. How dark her hair and eyes! And none too steady on her feet, Jenny noticed as she passed, lips pressed tight, clinging to the duke's arm. *Why, she thought with sudden pity, the poor lady's sick as a parrot.*

And then duke and queen were inside and the foreign ladies-in-waiting were descending, the wide wings of their old-fashioned farthingales swinging and bumping, dark as crows and solemn as deacons. Jenny slipped into the front hall, where the queen was speaking to the duke in—blessed be all the saints—Spanish! The duke, clearly dismayed, turned to the lackey by the door.

"The queen asks for tea," he said. "Send someone around the coffeehouses to find if some tea may be procured. Best bring up some small ale first. Well, hurry, man!"

The lackey bustled off, reappearing a few moments later with a silver tankard on a salver. Behind her pillar, Jenny watched the queen take it and sniff it gingerly. "And what is this?" she asked in Spanish.

"Small ale, Madam, an English drink. Very refreshing," said the duke.

Doubtfully, the queen took a sip, made a face, then choked and turned an unhealthy yellow that showed crimson spots of cochineal blazing on her cheeks. A elderly lady in black swam forward to support her just in time for the poor girl—Her Majesty the Queen, Jenny corrected herself—to spew the ale and whatever she'd eaten that morning over the black-and-white checked tile of the hall.

There was a moment of stunned silence, then an uproar of women's voices gabbling in what must be Portuguese and the duke shouting for a physician and what sounded like smothered laughter from the younger members of the duke's entourage. Jenny started forward to kneel before the little queen and mop up the floor with her own apron.

The lady in black cuffed her soundly, only to be reproved by a faint, sweet voice. A moment later, the same voice, in hesitant, oddly accented English, said, "Zank you."

Jenny flushed, ducked her head, wadded up her filthy apron, and flew to the kitchen on the wings of excitement. The queen had thanked her. And the poor lady was ill—anyone with half an eye could see that. Trust a sailor to thrust small ale on her when what she needed was Jenny's mother's infusion of whortleberry leaves and licorice, well-seethed with honey. Surely Cook had the leaves in her store—they were sovereign against cold vomits.

A little time later, Jenny, in a fresh apron and her best lawn tucker, carried a steaming mug to the door of the queen's apartments. She tapped and entered a scene of considerable upheaval. Open boxes and scattered clothes bore mute witness to a fruitless

search, undoubtedly for tea. The flock of black swans fluttered and honked anxiously around the queen, who lay shivering in the great, curtained bed.

Poor mite, Jenny thought as she approached. They'd managed to get her out of her stained gown, at least, though her hair was still dressed over what looked to be a birdcage.

The lady who had cuffed Jenny seized her arm. "What are you doing, girl?" she demanded in Spanish.

She clearly did not expect to be understood; her mouth gaped in astonishment when Jenny answered her in the same language. "Your pardon, madoña. It is only a little tisane to settle Her Majesty's stomach."

The lady frowned—she had a good face for frowning, narrow and sharp under her headdress. But from the bed, the sweet voice said, "In the names of all the saints, godmother, let me drink, before I perish of thirst."

The lady seized the cup, sniffed it, tasted, nodded, and handed it to the queen, who drank gratefully before lying back among her pillows with a sigh. The large dark eyes glanced up and around, searching. "Where is the girl?"

The lady gestured impatiently to Jenny, who stepped forward and sank into a deep curtsy.

"What is your name, child?" the queen asked. "And how does it come that you speak such excellent Spanish?"

Jenny swallowed. "My name is Jenny Martin, so please Your Majesty, and my mother is Spanish. My father met her when he fought in the late Spanish wars."

A wan smile. "We have something in common, it seems. My father, too, fought the Spaniards and took a Spanish wife."

Titters from the flock of black swans. The blood rose to Jenny's face. "If Your Majesty pleases, I will take the gown to be cleaned."

"Yes, of course." The great dark eyes moved to the stern lady, who was scowling. "Give her the gown, Condessa, and a gold piece. Her queen's gratitude she has already." She smiled again. "You have a quick wit, Jenny. We will speak again."

She pronounced her name "Zsonna," in the Portuguese manner, but Jenny understood. Charmed and awed, she rose, snatched up the gown, and fled to the laundry, singing.

• • •

It was raining still when Charles swanned into the Theatre Royal with Barbara at his side and a pack of courtiers at his heels. The house was only half full, but it rang with the cheerful noise of Londoners milling about the benches in the pit and up in the galleries, chatting, intriguing, flirting. In the gloomy afternoon light filtering through the glass dome overhead, the plain wooden thrust stage had a forlorn, abandoned air, biding its time until the actors stepped out upon it and spoke, when all would spring to glorious life: the invariable and inexplicable magic of the theater. It was a magic Charles never tired of. Reviving London theater had been one of his first acts upon regaining his throne, and vastly popular.

Just inside the entrance, Charles saw his impresario, Thomas Killigrew, chewing on his moustache. He caught the man's eye and the shadowed face lit up as he bowed in welcome.

"Thomas!" cried the king. "You've something new for us today, I think?" and swept him along with an arm under his, Barbara at his other hand, looking as splendid as any queen. Behind him, his followers—lords and ladies, poets and wits—were a comet's tail of jewels, satins, bright colors and gleaming hair. As the house rose and greeted him with noisy cheers, Charles waved his hat and bounded up the steps to the royal box, where he and his friends made themselves comfortable, his page pouring and passing wine.

The crowd returned to its idle pleasures below and about him, but with a difference, a heightened glow, a giddiness in the air, because their king was there.

It would have been unheard of in the old days, he knew. His late father wouldn't have dreamed of lowering himself to go among the common people. If Charles I wanted to see a play, he sent for players to come to him.

Charles drank from his glass, and lowered it to find Killigrew looking at him anxiously. "Well, Tom? Why all a-gloom?"

"Your Majesty," Killigrew began, giving rather an impression of having planned his speech, "you know me of old. You know that I love but three things in this world: my king, my city, and my theater."

"Why, what of drink and doxies?" Charles interjected with an air of innocent inquiry.

Killigrew gestured loftily. "Common necessities, sir, we may take them as read. Now my king is restored, praise God; our city is recovering, by your grace. But my theater is in crisis once more, and this day may doom it or raise it to a glory to rival all the history of the English theater. And all, all is in your hands."

"What eloquence—you should put it in a play and mend your fortunes that way."

Killigrew ignored this mild sally. "Sir—it is the playhouse!" he said earnestly. "We are already sadly out of date, out of fashion—His Grace the duke's theater has all the latest and left us standing—we must have a new house, it is a matter of the prestige of the English theater! The prestige of *your* theater, your gift to the people after the long banishment of not only your royal self but of the noblest of arts by that most joyless of killjoys, Oliver Cromwell. Does not such a gift—such a matchless gem—merit an equally wondrous setting? Indeed—"

To stem the flow of Killigrew's eloquence, Charles held up his hand, laughing. "My dear fellow, enough! Never fret yourself—come to the palace tomorrow and go over it all with Wren."

Killigrew's fair hair all but stood out from his head. "Wren? Christopher Wren? Your own builder?"

"I believe he prefers *architect*, but yes. Od's fish, do you think I haven't noticed how behind the times the King's Company has fallen? My brother's theater outshine us? That won't do. No, you come and explain what you need to Wren. There's a spot in Drury Lane will do you very well, I believe. And we'll have all the latest in scenery and cunning devices to make them stretch their eyes."

The still-soldierly impresario's chest seemed to expand; he could hardly find words to express his elation. Charles gazed at him benevolently. "Come, Thomas. What would I not do for any man who shared my exile?"

Killigrew raised his glass to Charles. "Your health, dearest Majesty." Flushed with his success, he went on, "Speaking of your brother, where is His Grace today?"

Charles looked out over the crowd as though an unwelcome thought had come upon him of a sudden. "In Portsmouth." He shot Killigrew a wry look. "Meeting the money for your new playhouse."

• • •

Barbara was enjoying the rapid wit of the wild young lords known as the Merry Gang and the Ballers—wild Sedley, rich and haughty Buckingham, quarrelsome Dorset, gentle Etheridge the poet—who had invited a few favorite actors to join them for a drink before the play. They would all drink deeper afterward, but Charles had made it clear from the first day he reopened the playhouses that his friends were not to become excessively rowdy before or during the performance. The king actually liked to hear the plays. He even left his spaniels at home so they would not bark and mar a scene.

Barbara was holding out her own glass to be refilled when she noticed the Lord Chancellor making his ponderous and determined way toward Charles. He was a magisterial man beginning to stoop, his hair and little pointed beard going gray now. He had been Charles's counselor since he was a young prince and had stood by him through everything; Charles trusted him completely. Barbara did wonder if he ever might begin to chafe at Clarendon's domineering airs. But perhaps that was wishful thinking.

She stepped away from her friends and deftly intercepted him. Unwillingly enough, he stopped, took her offered hand, and bowed as she said, "Cousin! I am surprised to see you here."

"How, surprised?"

"Only that you surely have weighty matters to contend with that should keep you from this scene of frivolity."

His thin lips pursed. "It is true that I do not take joy in watching the court disport itself so frivolously when, as you say, weightier matters face the country."

"But you don't begrudge the king his pleasures? He has paid for them, would you not agree?"

Barbara watched Clarendon's narrow eyes glance toward the king, who had turned from Killigrew and was chatting now with that silly child, Frances Stuart. A distant relation of some sort, shipped over from Paris by the king's mother to be a maid of honor to the new queen. She had a sly look of innocence about her, like an unblown rose. Barbara thought her insipid.

"Uncommonly pretty, the Stuart girl," said Clarendon. "All that spun-gold hair. You are quite right, to be sure; the king has earned some pleasures."

Well! That was pure cattiness, but it would take more than such an obvious barb to provoke her. She gave Clarendon a disdainful look and he frowned, as if annoyed at himself for stooping to bait her.

“To be honest, my lady,” he went on, “I had hoped to divert the king’s attention to business, and to his setting off to Portsmouth. I am at a loss to understand his delay.” A dark glower gave the lie to his words. “His marriage is a great endeavor, a great event, after all. Much depends on it. We have long felt the want of a gracious queen in this land.”

“Indeed,” Barbara said. Her irritation was becoming difficult to conceal; her fingers itched to slap his great, fat jowls. “Marriage is always a great affair, and most especially in princes. We all marveled at your skill in maneuvering your own daughter into marriage with the king’s brother, for example. A future queen, if the king were to have no sons. How proud you must be!”

There, that should hit the mark. And indeed, the look on Clarendon’s face and the stiffening of his spine were all she could have hoped for.

“I think you must know, my lady, that not only had I nothing to do with that union, I would have stopped it if I had had the slightest idea of it.” His fleshy cheeks quivered with indignation. “My own daughter secretly marrying the duke, when all the world might think I encouraged it!”

“Oh yes, I can imagine your feelings, especially when James thought better of it and attempted to cast her off, despite her being with child. She must be an admirable horsewoman, not to have been unseated when he bucked!”

Clarendon’s color heightened. “What is this insolence? Have you no respect for your own family?”

“No more respect than you have for me,” Barbara hissed. “Do you think I do not know you counsel the king to throw me off?”

“I do not scruple to admit I do; you are scandalous! Greedy and licentious and likely to bankrupt the nation—those jewels you are wearing would finance half a war!”

Behind her, the Merry Gang had fallen suspiciously silent. This was getting out of hand. Barbara laughed and playfully tapped the Lord Chancellor’s chest with her fan.

“Tush, cousin, your passion carries you into gross exaggeration. The king is generous, and rewards his friends. Which I have ever been. I may have no wealth of my own, but I am proud to be rich in the king’s regard. As you see, he is not disposed for business today; I suggest you try him on the morrow.”

Clarendon stepped closer and lowered his voice.

“My lady, take heed. It is one thing to dally with an unmarried king. But now he is to be wed, I give you warning. I will use all of my influence to see Catherine of Braganza is the only queen in England.”

Barbara raised her head, and gave him a steely smile. “I wish you joy of your influence. But I think you’ll find the counsel chamber less decisive than the bedchamber in such matters, after all.”

Their eyes held for a moment, testing, warning. Then Clarendon gave her the briefest and coldest of bows, she nodded, and he withdrew from the field of combat. She gestured to the page for more wine. She’d had the final word, but was not at all sure her victory had been as decisive as she could have wished. She must oust her cousin from Charles’s affection and trust, if ever the opportunity should present itself.

As she turned to rejoin her friends, she bit her lip as she saw Clarendon greeted by Charles and drawn aside for a more private conference.

• • •

Charles had half-listened to Barbara and Clarendon's sparring even as he gazed at the beautiful Lady Stuart. Chatting with the girl took very little of his attention; her wit flickered where it should sparkle, but one couldn't help but admire her looks. She seemed extraordinarily innocent as well, but knowing she'd grown up in the French court, he thought that must be a protective device, an appearance of perfect virtue to ward off unwanted suitors. As a novelty, it was rather charming.

Charles's attention strayed out over the theater. He noticed an orange girl staring at him and rewarded her with a wink. There was Pepys from the Admiralty with his wife—a deferential bow from them both, acknowledged with a nod. Useful man, Pepys; James thought a lot of him. There were the happy people in the pit, glad to be idle enough of an afternoon to see a play and the king. He liked their cheers, he liked to be loved as much as any man. But he did sometimes wonder whether the same crowds had cheered as loud when his father's head had been cut off before their eyes. Oh, he'd been told a "great groan" had gone up. But then, they *would* tell him that.

He knew he was thought cheerful, even frivolous. He went to some pains to give that impression; it was part of this new age, after all, to replace the dour Puritan with a merry king. He thought no one, not even James, certainly not Barbara, had any idea how shallow his merriment went. Which was as it should be. He'd fought a great war, starting in his beardless youth; he'd been a penniless mercenary, a desperate exile, a poor relation in a foreign court, a pawn in other men's plans until he'd learned to shake off outside influences—though both Barbara and Clarendon cherished illusions on that score. Now he was home at last, having resumed his place in the world and avenged his father (modestly enough—no more than a dozen regicides executed, though no man would have blamed him for unleashing a bloodbath). He couldn't complain that even his nearest friends did not guess how a lifetime of longing had left him ill-fit to enjoy what he'd regained. It created in him a restlessness that he physicked with near constant activity: riding, dancing, swimming in the river, a furious speed of walking and a ferocious style of tennis. And, of course, a great deal of love-making. With the edges of his restlessness blunted, he was better able to address the business of being king in this demanding, complicated, fractious age.

Which, whatever the disapproving Clarendon might think, included making a glorious and expensive show of merriment.

Feeling his Lord Chancellor's eyes on him, he sighed inwardly and turned. Better let the dear old nuisance have his say. "My Lord Clarendon, I am surprised to see you here."

Clarendon bowed heavily. "Your Majesty, I am sorry to intrude upon your entertainment, but having found you not at Whitehall, I felt compelled by duty to follow where you are."

"But you don't sound at all sorry—in truth you sound downright cross. I heard Barbara flying out at you. You mustn't take it to heart, you know."

“I take nothing to heart but your interests and the interests of the nation, which are one and the same. No, I came not for her sake but on quite another business. For I must ask you, Majesty, why you have not set off for Portsmouth as I had thought you intended.”

“Portsmouth?” Charles said with dangerous lightness. “Why, what’s in Portsmouth?”

Clarendon scowled, at a loss for words, and Charles went on, “Oh, yes, yes, quite. The queen. But I daresay tomorrow will do. Or the next day.”

Charles watched the vein on Clarendon’s forehead that always stood out when he was vexed throb visibly. “Sir, I must urge you to greater diligence in this matter. The Infanta is waiting, an insult to the Portuguese nation would be—”

“What?” Charles broke in impatiently. “Injurious to our pockets? You do not suggest they would cheat us of her dowry? The greatest ever to come with any princess to her needful bridegroom? That would be a disappointment, to be sure.”

Clarendon hesitated, hearing the sarcasm. “Your Majesty—”

But Charles went on, allowing his irritation to show in his voice. “Not her fault, of course, poor thing’s but an instrument in the hands of that mother of hers. But they’re in no position to reproach anyone. Scarcely half of it paid, I’m told, and half of that in sugar and spices! What good are sugar and spices to me? I do not wish to appear venal, but one cannot build a navy out of sugar and spices. Nor make the kind of showing the people expect. Nor,” he said, unable to resist the opportunity to tease, “keep one’s mistresses in outrageous luxury.”

Clarendon puffed out his cheeks. “Sir, I beg you to consider all the long efforts that have brought the Infanta to our shore. The gold is not yet all paid, it is true, but the ports and trade routes will yield great riches in time. And, more, there is the urgent question of children.”

Charles looked to make sure Barbara wasn’t within earshot. “I have children.”

His tone was brusque, but Clarendon was not cowed. “Indeed. Which is our assurance that you will soon have *legitimate* heirs. With only one brother living, the succession cannot be counted secure. There is not a moment to waste. Come, Your Majesty, why this reluctance? You had a hand in choosing her; there is no reason to believe you will not like her.”

“I like her already. Tangier and Bombay may have decided the matter, but I’ve seen her portrait. There’s no doubt she’s pretty, and if I have any discernment in the reading of character in a face, she is as good a lady as ever breathed.”

“And therefore you are upon the road to Portsmouth as we speak? My eyes deceive me by seeing you disporting in the playhouse instead?”

This clumsy attempt at wit made Charles laugh. “Has any monarch in history been harassed and harried as you harry me? Business, Clarendon, I attend to business, as you ought to know. I was all morning closeted with Parliament, and I must to them again on the morrow. Months ago I ordered them to prorogue sessions for the spring to allow me to get married in all decency, and what in their grateful humble duty do they answer me? ‘Yes, of course, good sir, except no, good sir, if it please you or if it please you not!’ I am fighting them tooth and jagged claw just now, and must stay the course.” His tone grew suddenly bitter. “That so-called Code with your name on it—it is a rebuke to all I promised at Breda.”

Clarendon suddenly looked ten years older.

“My name is on it, sir, but not all my heart in it. They think to enlist me to their cause, and indeed I believe you go too far in your ideas of tolerance. England is, and must be, an Anglican country, unquestioned and undivided. The Dissenters have lost, and they must be made to know it.”

“And what of the Catholics? Are they not to have freedom of conscience?”

“Aye, sir, aye. But your people have been through much, and memories of past wrongs run deep. We have much to do yet in reestablishing proper order; this is no time for new ideas of tolerance and embracing of what-you-will.”

“It is exactly the time for it,” Charles snapped, his temper rising. “But enough, good my lord, enough of that for now. The queen must be patient, and there’s an end on it.”

Yet as he spoke, he wondered at himself. Why *was* he lingering in town, when his bride awaited him? Parliament was still sitting, that was true. And yet he could take up the battle again on his return. All that about the muddy roads was true enough, too, but he’d waded through worse in a worse cause. And then there was Barbara—he was sure Barbara took great credit for his staying, and she did make it very easy to stay. Still . . .

“I am aware . . .” He spoke more softly, quite without realizing, and Clarendon stepped in closer to hear him. “I am conscious of an uneasiness . . . now that my marriage is upon me in truth. My mother . . .”

Clarendon put a reassuring hand on his monarch’s sleeve. “I understand you, sir. But I promise you, I have made careful inquiries. The Infanta is cut of quite another cloth than the queen mother. She is foreign, yes, and a Catholic. But she has nothing of the managing in her nature; she will be content to keep her own conscience and let others keep theirs. You need not fear a repeat of the meddling that caused you and your father—and, indeed, the realm—so much distress. She is no Henrietta Maria.”

Charles nodded uneasily. It wasn’t Catherine in particular, of course; he hadn’t even met her yet and surely, surely he had reason to think he would like her. And still . . . He shrugged. “Well, let that be as it may.”

Clarendon didn’t take the hint. “So you will go, sir? I will give the order for your coach; you may be there on the morrow, though you must break your journey in—”

Charles held up his hand. “My lord, I beg you, let the matter rest. I will go, I will bring the bishop, we shall have all proper ceremony and I will do my husbandly duty and supply England with a reassuring army of princes.” He paused and dropped his bantering tone for the warning of a king, not to be mistaken or gainsaid. “And I will do it when I choose.”

Clarendon met his look, understood, and bowed.

• • •

Barbara saw Clarendon withdraw from Charles’s presence. The Lord Chancellor didn’t look happy, which was all to the good. But then, neither did Charles. Damn the meddling old stampcrab for upsetting him! She frowned absently into the pit, wondering how to restore the king’s spirits, when her eye was caught by the sight of a slender young man, his long

blond hair tumbling down his back, sitting in the farthest, dimmest corner of the pit. He had one arm around the waist of an orange girl, and the other on her knee; he did not look to be bargaining for oranges. The girl laughed at something he said, and he laughed too, lifting up his head so Barbara could see his face quite clearly.

The young Earl of Rochester. Perfect.

Barbara touched Charles's sleeve lightly, and he turned instantly to her. "Darling," she breathed. "Look who's here."

Charles followed her gesture, narrowing his eyes, then widening them in recognition and pleasure. He spoke a word to his page, who went running down the stairs and through the pit to bow to Rochester. The young earl sprang to his feet, releasing the orange girl (who went off about her business again), and—looking up to the royal box—caught the gaze of the king and made his reverence. Charles smiled, beckoned, and a moment later, Rochester was in the royal box, as all the rest made way and watched with interest.

"Dear boy!" the king greeted him. "Back from your tour of the continent already?"

"Forgive me, Your Majesty, I arrived only today and would have come to you tomorrow—"

"No matter, no matter, come and do it properly at Whitehall tomorrow if you like, but shall I stand on ceremony with your father's son? I regret his loss immensely."

Rochester looked blank, and then assumed a somber look. Barbara was quite sure the pleasure of coming into the title and what little money the battered estate offered more than offset the loss of his father, a man he'd scarce set eyes on since he was a small boy, and who had been, by all reports, an unpleasant drunk. Charles, of course, would never hear anything against him: the man had personally helped him escape from England and intrigued tirelessly for his return. Pity he had died just two years before he could be rewarded by the sight of his king returned to his rightful throne. But here was the son, ready-made to be loved in his stead, and a good deal more apt for it.

"Well, well—and here you are," the king was saying. "You made the most of your travels, I'm sure?"

"I'm sure I tried, sir. A mob of Frenchmen tried to murder me in an opera house but I wasn't having that. I told them I had an engagement with the greatest man alive or dead in England save one and begged them to pardon me at the point of my sword."

Barbara caught her breath. Rochester was recovering quickly from the awe of Charles's presence—all too quickly. He had ever been a perverse boy. Would he ruin his chances in this first meeting?

"Save one?" Charles asked, unsure whether to be amused or offended.

Rochester gave him a sidelong look that would have been, in a woman, rank flirtation. "Forgive me, I defy the world to find one who loves Your Majesty more than I, but I must speak the truth or I am damned. Could there be a greater man in all the history of our benighted world than one Oliver who died and thus removed all obstacles from Your Majesty's triumphant return?"

Charles stared. Barbara and all the courtiers and ladies held their breaths. And then Charles laughed. "Quite right—if there can be a sort of negative greatness. I'll own it was greatly accommodating of the fellow."

Well done, Rochester, Barbara thought with relief as everyone laughed along with the king. *Should have known you'd bring it off.*

Charles raised his glass to the young earl in an approving gesture. "Yes, come to court tomorrow, my boy; we'll find you something to do," he said, then turned away to speak to one of the Merry Gang.

Rochester snatched a glass from the page and drank it all down in one fluid pull, lowering it to find himself face to face with Barbara. She smiled and offered her hand, murmuring, "Well. You do know how to make an entrance."

The beautiful youth pressed her hand to his lips. "Queen Barb'ry, well met. I would say you are in wondrous good looks, but that would be to tell you what you already know."

She withdrew the hand. "Hist, mad thing, do not call me that."

"What, Barb'ry? I think it suits you."

"You know that is not what I mean." She shook her head, half laughing and half cross.

"Oh, you mean *queen*?" he stressed the word slightly. "An honorary title merely, though perhaps without the honor."

Barbara gave him a steady look. Being Rochester's friend was like walking a tiger: One never knew when the claws would turn one's way. But Barbara, Lady Castlemaine was no man's prey. "You will not change allegiance, will you, Rochester?"

"When the girl from Portugal turns up, do you mean?"

He meant to bait her, but she would not be baited. "Remember, dear boy, how much good I can still do you. You may need a friend at court. And I don't think a proper little religious like her will take to you, do you?"

"I thought the king was my friend at court. No, I do take your point; but be assured, my friendship is not and never has been for sale."

The music sounded a fanfare and Barbara turned to Charles again, only to find him once more bending his attention to Lady Stuart. She felt a tiny prickle of fear, even while she acknowledged its true source. Frances might or might not be dangerous—though if she proved to be, Barbara could manage her. But the approaching queen was another order of threat entirely. Was Barbara not standing on the thinnest ice that ever veiled the winter Thames? Could she not be swallowed in the murky water of history, her name forgotten and her bed cold?

The fanfare grew louder. Charles straightened, and reached out for her hand without looking. She put it into his and together they turned to face the stage as the chandeliers were lowered to brighten the actors' faces. Their movement caught the eye of someone in the pit below, who of a sudden shouted, "God save the King!" At that, all the audience stood to cheer, a spontaneous salute. Charles shouted back, "England and Saint George!" and a roar of approval went up from all the house. And then another voice from somewhere in the pit topped all, crying out, "And God save our Lady Castlemaine!"

Charles smiled down at her. Standing by his side in all her glory, her hand held up in his as his consort, her swollen belly proclaiming his love before them all, Barbara felt her apprehension pop like a soap bubble. She was encompassed in the love of the people for this new golden age and its king; she shone in its light and dressed in its borrowed radiance, and there was no need for that to ever change.

They sat to let the play begin, Charles holding her hand warmly on his be-ribboned knee, and she thought, *Such happiness must be enough, it is enough, and it always will be so.*

• • •

The day after she set foot on English soil, Catherine of Braganza fell seriously ill.

Her indisposition set the duke's household aflutter. Her attendants ghosted about the corridors in their black clothes, conferring in hushed tones. Her trunks of holy relics were unpacked, and the reliquary with a sliver of the True Cross set upon her traveling altar. Her cooks labored over pots of sharp-smelling soups, hoping to tempt her appetite. The Duke of York was so concerned, he sent his own physician, who was turned back at the door by the dour Condessa de Penalva.

From the fuss, anyone would have thought the queen was at death's door. But the English servants observed the omens available to those who clean and carry and serve and drew their own conclusions.

"You can hear her sneezing through the door," said Nan, who did not like Catholics and found excuses to stay out of the queen's apartments.

"She's caught a chill," was Cook's opinion. "And no wonder, bucking about on the sea for so long with the winter hardly over."

"Just as well our Charlie is dragging his feet, then," sniggered the scullion, and had his ears boxed for insolence by Cook, whose temper was short since the queen's arrival had set everything on its ear. The queen and her attendants had not made themselves popular. They had made a great deal of work for the duke's household, and promised to make more. Her Portuguese cooks had invaded the kitchen and her ladies had infiltrated the laundry, upsetting the washerwomen and knocking into the tubs with their wide, swinging farthingales. And now she'd brought sickness into the house. The general opinion, among the servants, was that the omens were against her.

As the days passed, the weather sweetened and the queen's chill lifted, and still the king did not come. The gossip below stairs grew sly. In the stables, the men exchanged lewd jests concerning His Majesty's fondness for hobbyhorses and how Mistress Babs kept the royal scepter polished. In the kitchen, the household servants gathered to exchange complaints.

"Such a little dab of a thing!" one of the maids exclaimed, not for the first time.

"And her teeth!" Nan plumed herself on her wit, but Jenny thought her merely ill-natured. "Bite into an apple at arm's length she could, if it were not for her nose getting in the way."

"She's an altar set up in her apartment," said a severe young woman, misnamed Charity. "Statues and relics and all manner of Popish folderols. I saw it when I was handing in the breakfast."

"I'm not surprised she's not eating," Nan went on. "Between the stink of the food and the stink of the incense, it's enough to turn an honest woman's stomach."

The scullion snickered. "It's because—it's because we have no human flesh to give her!"

Jenny seethed. "Catholics do not eat human flesh any more than you do. And if the king doesn't object to his queen's religion, I do not see why you should. As for her looks, she's perfectly lovely to look upon, now she's recovering, and has a very pretty color!"

"She paints," said Charity, shortly.

It was true. The queen did not seem to consider herself dressed without a coat of pearl powder and smear of cochineal on either cheek, nor did any of her ladies. Strange it was, when they dressed so old-fashioned, to see them all painted up like tarts at a fair. Jenny sighed. "Well, she's a kind, sweet-natured lady in any case, and I, for one, pity her. Think to yourself how it would be, to travel so far from home and find your husband not there to greet you."

The group by the fire exchanged glances, few of them sympathetic. "Of course you like her," Nan said. "You're half-foreign yourself, aren't you? And making the most of it, too, taking trays up when it's not your place and hobnobbing with that Jew perfumer and—"

Too angry to speak, Jenny rose up and slapped her, then swept out before anybody could stop her.

• • •

On the seventh morning after the queen's landing, a messenger thundered into the forecourt, leapt from his sweating, muddy horse, and demanded to be brought before the Duke of York. As the duke was with his barber, he was received by the Earl of Sandwich, who listened to what he had to say, then called for his man to rouse the household. It seemed that the king had lain at Guildford the night before and was even now taking horse to ride to Portsmouth. He would be there, the messenger said, within these two hours.

• • •

Catherine looked very small in the massive bed, with its carved mahogany posts and looped-back hangings of heavy crimson silk. The immense bedchamber was at this moment thronged and humming with absolutely everyone in the house who had the slightest excuse to be there. She sat very straight, her back scarcely touching the bolster, clad in layers of intricately embroidered white-on-white nightclothes with a delicate white embroidered cap covering her hair, which was carefully arranged to look easy and *dégagé*, and tried not to stare expectantly at the door like a dog who thinks his master is just on the other side.

The long-awaited meeting was upon her. Over the past week, she had been anxious for it, then more anxious, then very anxious indeed. Now she was conscious of resentment. Though she'd been put off and explained to and mollified, she was perfectly able to do the simple-enough sum: one day for a messenger to reach London, two days by carriage from London, perhaps a day between for preparations or affairs of state (but was their wedding not an affair of state?) equaled four days. Allow one more day perhaps for bad roads, on account of the rain. That left two days, two days at the very least, of inexplicable delay.

Which equaled . . . exactly what, she could not know. Nothing good. Why had she been left sitting here for a full week, like a forgotten doll? Now that he was here, was she meant to forgive the insult and throw herself into his arms?

She looked down at her hands, folded idly on her lap. The aftermath of her terrible sea journey had taken its toll, and though she had insisted her chill was nothing—the merest scratch in her throat, the slightest fatigue, she took no notice of it!—it was strongly represented to her by Dōna Maria and her ladies that it would be best, at this interesting matrimonial moment, to err on the side of coddling a slight indisposition. Catherine had seen her mother receive in her bedchamber thus, doing great business of state and entertaining with perfect equanimity, though it felt an odd way to meet a husband for the first time. At least it solved the question of what to wear.

A footstep in the hall, and every head in the room jerked up. It was only a servant, bringing more wine. Everyone subsided, went back to their conversations, like doves shaking out their feathers and resuming their roosts. Catherine stirred abruptly, pushed back the bedclothes, half tucked her legs under her as though about to rise. All heads turned to look, and Dona Maria, who had been sitting by the bed, said, “Catarina, compose yourself, what would you?”

“What would I?” Catherine said. “I hardly know! Waiting is terrible; I want to be doing something.”

Dona Maria descended on her in a rustling of skirts, tsking and patting her back into place, resettling the heavy comforter over her legs, tidying her already tidy cap. Catherine let her. What else could she do? She had waited for years to learn her fate, then waited again through months of negotiations and weeks upon the *Royal Charles* as the winds opposed her. Now she waited and waited to meet the man—probably a dreadful monster of a wicked bridegroom, despite everyone’s reassurances!—with whom she must be yoked for all her life, and who—to judge by his lamentable lack of haste to come to her—was reluctant even to lay eyes on her.

But before she could sort out whether she was more afraid of meeting a monster or of the monster not caring to meet her, she heard a great noise in the hall, a tramping of boots, dogs barking, and men’s voices calling out, a confusion of voices. Dona Maria stepped aside and back; all the company seemed to ebb away like a tide, as through the door he came, a throng of courtiers following at his heels, along with some half a dozen excited spaniels. Beside his royal brother, tall, handsome, princely James seemed less than he had been: less tall, less impressive—an affable hound next to a lion.

The lion himself was amazingly tall, with a straight figure and a great fall of dark curling hair. But exactly what he looked like seemed less material than the force of his personality. Catherine felt it instantly, doubled as his gaze fell upon her.

The king’s expression of amusement at whatever James had been saying as they entered shifted to a look so private Catherine forgot the attendants crowding the chamber. He crossed to her bedside and made a leg, as she bowed as best she could from her pillows. Straightening, he looked down into her eyes. “Well, my dearest wife, here you are at last.”

Catherine gaped up at him. How had she ever thought him unhandsome? He smiled, amused. *For the love of all the saints, Catarina, she thought. Collect your wits!*

She cleared her throat. “And here you are, husband, at very long last.”

“Ah, yes.” The corners of his mouth twitched. “Do forgive my quite unforgivable delay. My time is never my own, you know, affairs of state—and so on.”

His spoken Spanish was much better than his written. “Oh, yes, of course. I understand,” she assured him.

“They tell me you are unwell? It could not be too serious, to leave you in such beauty.”

“I . . . Oh, I . . . I thank you, it is nothing, nothing in the least . . .” His look of tender concern had sent an absurd thrill right through her. She took a slow breath to steady herself.

“In any case, I have a small offering of atonement for my lamentable delay, if you will be gracious enough to accept it.” He turned away to take something from one of his gentlemen. When he turned back, he was holding out to her, in his big gloved hand, a small brown-and-white spotted puppy.

Catherine couldn’t help herself—she inhaled sharply and exhaled an enchanted “Ah!” She reached out both her hands, and gathered the little creature up.

“Oh, how sweet,” she said, cradling the soft, wiggling bundle to her cheek. “What is its name?”

“I have left it for you to name her. It was a bit of luck, my favorite bitch whelping just at the right time.”

Catherine looked from the dog’s melting dark eyes up into Charles’s. The room was still full of people, watching them as though they were upon a stage, but none of them mattered save one. “Shall I call her Esperanza?”

Charles smiled and sat close by her on the edge of the bed. He put both his hands around hers, and they sat with the little dog between them.

“Hope?” he said. “A lovely name. But why not Feliciana? I am sure we are to be very happy, you and I.”

And at that moment, Catherine believed it too.



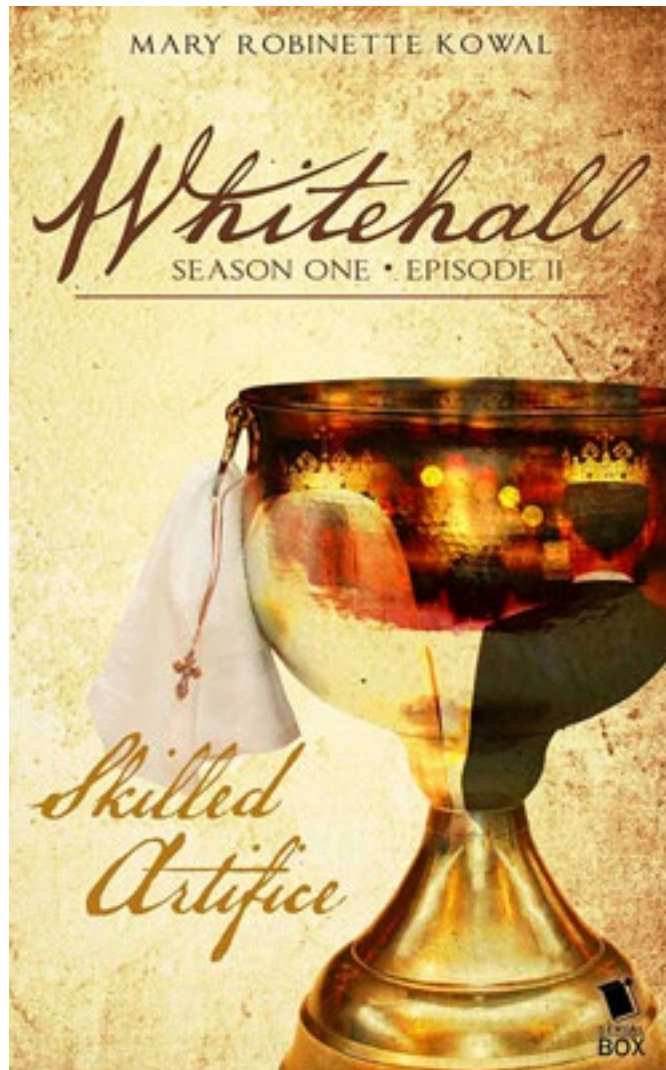
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