

ELIZA HAYWOOD

1693 – 1756

One of the most prolific writers of the eighteenth century is also one of the most elusive. Little is known of Eliza Haywood's private life, yet she produced more than 80 titles and wrote some of the most popular works of the first half of the century. Her fame began in 1719 when she published *Love in Excess; or, the Fatal Inquiry*, an amorous tale of adventure that became one of the best selling books of the early eighteenth century.



Born in London as Eliza Fowler, probably but not certainly in 1693 Haywood left London and married by 1714, when she began a theater apprenticeship in Dublin under the name Eliza Haywood. We know that she had two children (precisely when is unknown), and that her marriage had ended by 1717 when she returned to England and toured with various theater companies. One of the few biographical references to her suggests that she began writing to support herself and her children.

Love in Excess began a writing career that progressed at an astonishing pace: Haywood averaged five titles a year in the 1720s and produced two collected editions by 1725. From 1721 until 1724 she had a romantic relationship with the poet Richard Savage, and from 1724 probably until her death she lived with William Hatchett, a minor playwright and actor. Little else is known of her domestic life. Her first biographer, David Erskine Baker, claimed in 1764 that she deliberately obscured her history: “from a supposition of some improper liberties being taken with her character after death, by the intermixture of truth and falsehood with her history, she laid a solemn injunction on a person who was well acquainted with all the particulars of it, not to communicate to any one the least circumstance relating to her.”

Although the details of Haywood's personal life remain vague, her public persona was well known. Her dozens of amorous fictions published in the 1720s and 1730s found a wide audience; she was dubbed the “Great arbitress of passion” by one contemporary poet, and “Mrs. Novel” by Henry Fielding (in his 1730 play *The Author's Farce*). *Fantomina* is representative of this early fiction. First published in her 1725 collection *Secret Histories, Novels, and Poems*, it explores male inconstancy, female agency, and sexual adventure, as well as the social repercussions of such adventure.

In the 1730s the pace of Haywood's fiction writing slowed as she returned to the theater. From 1729 to 1737 she wrote or co-wrote several plays and acted in at least six. Collaborating with William Hatchett, she produced the successful *Opera of Operas* in 1733, a musical adaptation of Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies*. During this period she also anonymously published *The Adventures of Eovaii, Princess of Ivajeo* (1736), a satire of English politics and—in particular—of Sir Robert Walpole, Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742. In subsequent years she translated works from French, wrote a 1741 parody of *Pamela*, became a publisher herself, continued to act in the theater, and in 1749 wrote a controversial political pamphlet that led to her arrest (though not her prosecution).

In the last fifteen years of her life, Haywood's writing became more domestic, moral, and didactic. Novels such as *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753) endeavor not only to entertain readers but also to instruct them in such matters as courtship and marriage. She also published the first periodical written for women, *The Female*

Spectator, which appeared in 24 installments from April 1744 to May 1746 and touched on philosophical, political, and scientific, as well as literary, matters. In 1756 she began a new periodical entitled *The Young Lady*, but she announced in an early issue that she was too ill to continue with the journal. She died shortly thereafter, on 25 February 1756.

It was typical of the time that, however widely a woman writer might be read, she would also be criticized for having made writing her profession. In *The Dunciad* (1728) for example, Alexander Pope satirized those he considered to be hack writers, and castigated Haywood in particular. But other contemporaries acknowledged her talent, and present-day critics are increasingly recognizing her important contribution to the development of the novel. Haywood was one of the earliest novelists to explore inner states and feelings. Her reputation may well continue to grow: scholars continue to attribute newly-found titles to this prolific pioneer of the novel.



Fantomina: or, Love in a Maze

*In love the victors from the vanquished fly.
They fly that wound, and they pursue that die.*

WALLER.¹

A young lady of distinguished birth, beauty, wit, and spirit happened to be in a box² one night at the playhouse, where, though there were a great number of celebrated toasts,³ she perceived several gentlemen extremely pleased themselves with entertaining a woman who sat in a corner of the pit and, by her air and manner of receiving them, might easily be known to be one of those who come there for no other purpose than to create acquaintance with as many as seem desirous of it. She could not help testifying her contempt of men who, regardless either of the play or circle,⁴ threw away their time in such a manner to some ladies that sat by her. But they, either less surprised by being more accustomed to such sights than she—who had been bred for the most part in the country—or not of a disposition to consider anything very deeply, took but little notice of it. She still thought of it, however, and the longer she reflected on it, the greater was her wonder that men,

some of whom she knew were accounted to have wit, should have tastes so very depraved. This excited a curiosity in her to know in what manner these creatures were addressed. She was young, a stranger to the world and, consequently, to the dangers of it, and, having nobody in town at that time to whom she was obliged to be accountable for her actions, did in everything as her inclinations or humours⁵ rendered most agreeable to her. Therefore she thought it not in the least a fault to put in practice a little whim which came immediately into her head, to dress herself as near as she could in the fashion of those women who make sale of their favours and set herself in the way of being accosted as such a one, having at that time no other aim than the gratification of an innocent curiosity. She no sooner designed this frolic than she put it in execution and, muffling her hoods over her face, went the next night into the gallery-box⁶ and, practicing as much as she had observed at that distance the behaviour of that woman, was not long before she found her disguise had answered the ends she wore it for. A crowd of purchasers of all degrees and capacities were in a moment gathered about her, each endeavouring to out-bid the other in offering her a price for her embraces. She listened to them all and was not a little diverted in her mind at the disappointment she should give to so many, each of which thought himself secure of gaining her. She was told by them all that she was the most lovely woman in the world, and

¹ “*In love ... die*” Edmund Waller, “To A.H., of the Different Successes of Their Loves” (1645), ll. 27–28.

² *box* Private compartment at a theater.

³ *celebrated toasts* Beautiful women (toasted with drinks by men).

⁴ *circle* I.e. dress circle; the lower gallery, with the most expensive seats.

⁵ *humours* Temperament.

⁶ *gallery-box* Box in the higher and less expensive gallery.

some cried, "Gad, she is mighty like my fine Lady Such-a-one"—naming her own name. She was naturally vain and received no small pleasure in hearing herself praised, though in the person of another and a supposed prostitute, but she dispatched as soon as she could all that had hitherto attacked her when she saw the accomplished Beauplaisir was making his way through the crowd as fast as he was able, to reach the bench she sat on. She had often seen him in the drawing room; had talked with him (but then her quality and reputed virtue kept him from using her with that freedom she now expected he would do); and had discovered something in him which had made her often think she should not be displeased if he would abate some part of his reserve. Now was the time to have her wishes answered. He looked in her face and fancied, as many others had done, that she very much resembled that lady whom she really was, but the vast disparity there appeared between their characters prevented him from entertaining even the most distant thought that they could be the same. He addressed her at first with the usual salutations of her pretended profession, as, "Are you engaged, Madam? Will you permit me to wait on you home after the play? By Heaven, you are a fine girl! How long have you used this house?" and such like questions. But, perceiving she had a turn of wit and a genteel manner in her raillery¹ beyond what is frequently to be found among those wretches who are for the most part gentlewomen but by necessity, few of them having had an education suitable to what they affect to appear, he changed the form of his conversation and showed her it was not because he understood no better that he had made use of expressions so little polite. In fine,² they were infinitely charmed with each other. He was transported³ to find so much beauty and wit in a woman who he doubted not but on very easy terms he might enjoy, and she found a vast deal of pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrained manner. They passed their time all the play with an equal satisfaction, but when it was over, she found herself involved in a difficulty which before never entered into her head, but which she knew not well how to get over. The

passion he professed for her was not of that humble nature which can be content with distant adorations. He resolved not to part from her without the gratifications of those desires she had inspired and, presuming on the liberties which her supposed function allowed of, told her she must either go with him to some convenient house of his procuring or permit him to wait on her to her own lodgings. Never had she been in such a dilemma. Three or four times did she open her mouth to confess her real quality,⁴ but the influence of her ill stars prevented it by putting an excuse into her head which did the business as well, and at the same time did not take from her the power of seeing and entertaining him a second time with the same freedom she had done this. She told him she was under obligations to a man who maintained her and whom she durst not disappoint, having promised to meet him that night at a house hard by.⁵ This story, so like what those ladies sometimes tell, was not at all suspected by Beauplaisir. And, assuring her he would be far from doing her a prejudice, he desired that in return for the pain he should suffer in being deprived of her company that night, that she would order her affairs so as not to render him unhappy the next. She gave a solemn promise to be in the same box on the morrow evening, and they took leave of each other—he to the tavern to drown the remembrance of his disappointment, she in a hackney-chair⁶ hurried home to indulge contemplation on the frolic she had taken, designing nothing less on her first reflections than to keep the promise she had made him, and hugging herself with joy that she had the good luck to come off undiscovered.

But these cogitations⁷ were but of a short continuance; they vanished with the hurry of her spirits and were succeeded by others vastly different and ruinous. All the charms of Beauplaisir came fresh into her mind; she languished, she almost died for another opportunity of conversing with him, and not all the admonitions of her discretion were effectual to oblige her to deny laying hold of that which offered itself the next night. She depended on the strength of her virtue to bear her safe

¹ *raillery* Banter.

² *In fine* In short.

³ *transported* Enraptured.

⁴ *quality* High social status.

⁵ *hard by* Near by.

⁶ *hackney-chair* One-seated vehicle for hire, carried on poles.

⁷ *cogitations* Thoughts.

through trials more dangerous than she apprehended this to be, and never having been addressed by him as Lady, was resolved to receive his devoirs as a town-mistress,¹ imagining a world of satisfaction to herself in engaging him in the character of such a one, and in observing the surprise he would be in to find himself refused by a woman who he supposed granted her favours without exception. Strange and unaccountable were the whimsies she was possessed of, wild and incoherent her desires, unfixed and undetermined her resolutions, but in that of seeing Beauplaisir in the manner she had lately done. As for her proceedings with him, or how a second time to escape him without discovering who she was, she could neither assure herself, nor whether or not in the last extremity she would do so. Bent, however, on meeting him, whatever should be the consequence, she went out some hours before the time of going to the playhouse and took lodgings in a house not very far from it, intending that, if he should insist on passing some part of the night with her, to carry him there, thinking she might with more security to her honour entertain him at a place where she was mistress than at any of his own choosing.

The appointed hour being arrived, she had the satisfaction to find his love in his assiduity.² He was there before her, and nothing could be more tender than the manner in which he accosted her. But from the first moment she came in to that of the play being done, he continued to assure her no consideration should prevail with him to part from her again, as she had done the night before, and she rejoiced to think she had taken that precaution of providing herself with a lodging to which she thought she might invite him without running any risk, either of her virtue or reputation. Having told him she would admit of his accompanying her home, he seemed perfectly satisfied and, leading her to the place, which was not above twenty houses distant, would have ordered a collation³ to be brought after them. But she would not permit it, telling him she was not one of those who suffered themselves to be treated at their own lodgings, and as soon she was come in, sent

a servant belonging to the house to provide a very handsome supper and wine, and everything was served to table in a manner which showed the director neither wanted⁴ money, nor was ignorant how it should be laid out.

This proceeding, though it did not take from him the opinion that she was what she appeared to be, yet it gave him thoughts of her which he had not before. He believed her a mistress, but believed her to be one of a superior rank, and began to imagine the possession of her would be much more expensive than at first he had expected. But, not being of a humour to grudge anything for his pleasures, he gave himself no farther trouble than what were occasioned by fears of not having money enough to reach her price about him.

Supper being over, which was intermixed with a vast deal of amorous conversation, he began to explain himself more than he had done, and both by his words and behaviour let her know he would not be denied that happiness. the freedoms she allowed had made him hope. It was in vain she would have retracted the encouragement she had given; in vain she endeavoured to delay till the next meeting the fulfilling of his wishes. She had now gone too far to retreat. He was bold; he was resolute; she, fearful, confused, altogether unprepared to resist in such encounters, and rendered more so by the extreme liking she had to him. Shocked, however, at the apprehension of really losing her honour, she struggled all she could, and was just going to reveal the whole secret of her name and quality when the thoughts of the liberty he had taken with her, and those he still continued to prosecute, prevented her with representing the danger of being exposed and the whole affair made a theme for public ridicule. Thus much, indeed, she told him: that she was a virgin and had assumed this manner of behaviour only to engage him. But that he little regarded, or if he had, would have been far from obliging him to desist. Nay, in the present burning eagerness of desire, 'tis probable that had he been acquainted both with who and what she really was, the knowledge of her birth would not have influenced him with respect sufficient to have curbed the wild exuberance of his luxurious⁵ wishes, or made him in that longing—that

¹ *receive ... town-mistress* To receive his addresses as a prostitute would.

² *in his assiduity* In devoted attendance.

³ *collation* Light meal.

⁴ *wanted* Lacked.

⁵ *luxurious* Concerned with extravagant pleasures.

impatient moment—change the form of his addresses. In fine, she was undone, and he gained a victory so highly rapturous that, had he known over whom, scarce could he have triumphed more. Her tears, however, and the distraction she appeared in after the ruinous ecstasy was past, as it heightened his wonder, so it abated his satisfaction. He could not imagine for what reason a woman who, if she intended not to be a mistress, had counterfeited the part of one and taken so much pains to engage him, should lament a consequence which she could not but expect—and, till the last test, seemed inclinable to grant—and was both surprised and troubled at the mystery. He omitted nothing that he thought might make her easy and, still retaining an opinion that the hope of interest¹ had been the chief motive which had led her to act in the manner she had done (and believing that she might know so little of him as to suppose, now she had nothing left to give he might not make that recompence she expected for her favours), to put her out of that pain, he pulled out of his pocket a purse of gold, entreating her to accept of that as an earnest of what he intended to do for her, assuring her with ten thousand protestations that he would spare nothing which his whole estate could purchase to procure her content and happiness. This treatment made her quite forget the part she had assumed and, throwing it from her with an air of disdain, “Is this a reward,” said she, “for condescensions² such as I have yielded to? Can all the wealth you are possessed of make a reparation for my loss of honour? Oh no, I am undone beyond the power of heaven itself to help me!” She uttered many more such exclamations, which the amazed Beauplaisir heard without being able to reply to, till, by degrees sinking from that rage of temper, her eyes resumed their softening glances and, guessing at the consternation he was in, “No, my dear Beauplaisir,” added she, “your love alone can compensate for the shame you have involved me in. Be you sincere and constant, and I hereafter shall, perhaps, be satisfied with my fate and forgive myself the folly that betrayed me to you.”

Beauplaisir thought he could not have a better opportunity than these words gave him of enquiring

¹ *interest* Profit.

² *condescensions* Lascivious.

who she was and wherefore she had feigned herself to be of a profession which he was now convinced she was not. And after he had made her a thousand vows of an affection as inviolable and ardent³ as she could wish to find in him, entreated she would inform him by what means his happiness had been brought about, and also to whom he was indebted for the bliss he had enjoyed. Some remains of yet unextinguished modesty and sense of shame made her blush exceedingly at this demand. But, recollecting herself in a little time, she told him so much of the truth as to what related to the frolic she had taken of satisfying her curiosity in what manner mistresses of the sort she appeared to be were treated by those who addressed them, but forbore discovering her true name and quality for the reasons she had done before—resolving, if he boasted of this affair he should not have it in his power to touch her character. She therefore said she was the daughter of a country gentleman who was come to town to buy clothes and that she was called Fantomina. He had no reason to distrust the truth of this story and was therefore satisfied with it, but did not doubt by the beginning of her conduct but that in the end she would be in reality the thing she so artfully had counterfeited, and had good nature enough to pity the misfortunes he imagined would be her lot. But to tell her so or offer his advice in that point was not his business, at least as yet.

They parted not till towards morning, and she obliged him to a willing vow of visiting her the next day at three in the afternoon. It was too late for her to go home that night; therefore, she contented herself with lying there. In the morning she sent for the woman of the house to come up to her and, easily perceiving by her manner that she was a woman who might be influenced by gifts, made her a present of a couple of broad pieces⁴ and desired her that if the gentleman who had been there the night before should ask any questions concerning her, that he should be told she was lately come out of the country, had lodged there about a fortnight,⁵ and that her name was Fantomina. “I shall,” also added she, “lie but seldom here, nor, indeed, ever

³ *ardent* Passionate.

⁴ *broad pieces* Coins worth twenty shillings each, a substantial sum for a prostitute but not for a gentlewoman.

⁵ *fortnight* Two weeks.

come but in those times when I expect to meet him. I would therefore have you order it so that he may think I am but just gone out if he should happen by any accident to call when I am not here, for I would not for the world have him imagine I do not constantly lodge here." The landlady assured her she would do everything as she desired and gave her to understand she wanted not the gift of secrecy.

Everything being ordered at this home for the security of her reputation, she repaired to the other, where she easily excused to an unsuspecting aunt, with whom she boarded, her having been abroad all night, saying she went with a gentleman and his lady in a barge to a little country seat¹ of theirs up the river, all of them designing to return the same evening, but that one of the bargemen happening to be taken ill on the sudden, and no other waterman to be got that night, they were obliged to tarry till morning. Thus did this lady's wit and vivacity assist her in all but where it was most needful. She had discernment to foresee and avoid all those ills which might attend the loss of her reputation, but was wholly blind to those of the ruin of her virtue, and, having managed her affairs so as to secure the one, grew perfectly easy with the remembrance she had forfeited the other. The more she reflected on the merits of Beauplaisir, the more she excused herself for what she had done. And the prospect of that continued bliss she expected to share with him took from her all remorse for having engaged in an affair which promised her so much satisfaction, and in which she found not the least danger of misfortune. "If he is really," said she, to herself, "the faithful, the constant lover he has sworn to be, how charming will be our amour? And if he should be false, grow satiated like other men, I shall but, at the worst, have the private vexation of knowing I have lost him—the intrigue being a secret, my disgrace will be so too. I shall hear no whispers as I pass, 'She is forsaken.' The odious word *forsaken* will never wound my ears, nor will my wrongs excite either the mirth or pity of the talking world. It will not be even in the power of my undoer himself to triumph over me. And while he laughs at and perhaps despises the fond, the yielding Fantomina, he will revere and esteem the virtuous, the reserved Lady." In this manner did she applaud her own

conduct and exult with the imagination that she had more prudence than all her sex beside. And it must be confessed indeed that she preserved an oeconomy² in the management of this intrigue beyond what almost any woman but herself ever did: in the first place, by making no person in the world a confidante in it, and in the next, in concealing from Beauplaisir himself the knowledge who she was. For though she met him three or four days in a week at that lodging she had taken for that purpose, yet as much as he employed her time and thoughts, she was never missed from any assembly she had been accustomed to frequent. The business of her love has engrossed her till six in the evening, and before seven she has been dressed in a different habit³ and in another place. Slippers and a nightgown⁴ loosely flowing has been the garb in which he has left the languishing Fantomina; laced and adorned with all the blaze of jewels has he, in less than an hour after, beheld at the royal chapel, the palace gardens, drawing room, opera, or play, the haughty, awe-inspiring lady. A thousand times has he stood amazed at the prodigious likeness between his little mistress and this court beauty, but was still as far from imagining they were the same as he was the first hour he had accosted her in the playhouse, though it is not impossible but that her resemblance to this celebrated lady might keep his inclination alive something longer than otherwise they would have been, and that it was to the thoughts of this as he supposed unenjoyed charmer she owed in great measure the vigour of his latter caresses.

But he varied not so much from his sex as to be able to prolong desire to any great length after possession. The rifled charms of Fantomina soon lost their poignancy⁵ and grew tasteless and insipid. And when, the season of the year inviting the company to the Bath,⁶ she offered to accompany him, he made an excuse to go without her. She easily perceived his coldness and the reason why he pretended her going would be inconvenient, and endured as much from the discovery as any

² *oeconomy* Frugal and judicious conduct; discretion.

³ *habit* Outfit.

⁴ *nightgown* Evening dress.

⁵ *poignancy* I.e. intensity.

⁶ *Bath* Resort town where people of fashion summered, known for its medicinal waters and its social opportunities.

¹ *seat* Residence.

of her sex could do. She dissembled it, however, before him, and took her leave of him with the show of no other concern than his absence occasioned. But this she did to take from him all suspicion of her following him, as she intended and had already laid a scheme for. From her first finding out that he designed to leave her behind, she plainly saw it was for no other reason than that being tired of her conversation, he was willing to be at liberty to pursue new conquests and, wisely considering that complaints,¹ tears, swoonings, and all the extravagancies which women make use of in such cases have little prevailance over a heart inclined to rove, and only serve to render those who practice them more contemptible by robbing them of that beauty which alone can bring back the fugitive lover, she resolved to take another course. And, remembering the height of transport² she enjoyed when the agreeable Beauplaisir kneeled at her feet, imploring her first favours, she longed to prove³ the same again. Not but a woman of her beauty and accomplishments might have beheld a thousand in that condition Beauplaisir had been, but with her sex's modesty she had not also thrown off another virtue equally valuable, though generally unfortunate: constancy. She loved Beauplaisir. It was only he whose solicitations could give her pleasure and, had she seen the whole species despairing, dying for her sake, it might, perhaps, have been a satisfaction to her pride, but none to her more tender inclination. Her design was once more to engage him. To hear him sigh, to see him languish, to feel the strenuous pressures of his eager arms, to be compelled, to be sweetly forced to what she wished with equal ardour was what she wanted and what she had formed a stratagem⁴ to obtain, in which she promised herself success.

She no sooner heard he had left the town than, making a pretence to her aunt that she was going to visit a relation in the country, she went towards Bath, attended but by two servants who she found reasons to quarrel with on the road and discharged. Clothing herself in a habit she had brought with her, she forsook the coach and went into a wagon, in which equipage she

arrived at Bath. The dress she was in was a round-eared cap, a short red petticoat, and a little jacket of grey stuff.⁵ All the rest of her accoutrements were answerable to these, and, joined with a broad country dialect, a rude⁶ unpolished air (which she, having been bred in these parts, knew very well how to imitate), with her hair and eyebrows blacked, made it impossible for her to be known or taken for any other than what she seemed. Thus disguised did she offer herself to service in the house where Beauplaisir lodged, having made it her business to find out immediately where he was. Notwithstanding this metamorphosis she was still extremely pretty, and the mistress of the house, happening at that time to want a maid, was very glad of the opportunity of taking her. She was presently received into the family and had a post in it such as she would have chosen had she been left at her liberty: that of making the gentlemen's beds, getting them their breakfasts, and waiting on them in their chambers. Fortune in this exploit was extremely on her side. There were no others of the male sex in the house than an old gentleman who had lost the use of his limbs with the rheumatism and had come thither for the benefit of the waters,⁷ and her beloved Beauplaisir, so that she was in no apprehensions of any amorous violence but where she wished to find it. Nor were her designs disappointed. He was fired with the first sight of her, and though he did not presently take any farther notice of her than giving her two or three hearty kisses, yet she, who now understood that language but too well, easily saw they were the prelude to more substantial joys. Coming the next morning to bring his chocolate as he had ordered, he caught her by the pretty leg—which the shortness of her petticoat did not in the least oppose—then, pulling her gently to him, asked her how long she had been at service, how many sweethearts she had, if she had ever been in love, and many other such questions befitting one of the degree she appeared to be, all which she answered with such seeming innocence as more inflamed the amorous heart of him who talked to her. He compelled her to sit

¹ *complaints* Sorrowful utterances.

² *height of transport* Ecstasy.

³ *prove* Experience.

⁴ *stratagem* Scheme.

⁵ *The dress ... grey stuff* Dress associated with the country; *stuff* Fashionable wool fabric.

⁶ *rude* Simple.

⁷ *benefit of the waters* Hot springs of Bath, purported to have healing powers.

in his lap and, gazing on her blushing beauties, which, if possible, received addition from her plain and rural dress, he soon lost the power of containing himself. His wild desires burst out in all his words and actions. He called her “little angel,” “cherubim”; swore he must enjoy her though death were to be the consequence; devoured her lips, her breasts with greedy kisses; held to his burning bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant body; nor suffered her to get loose till he had ravaged all and glutted each rapacious sense with the sweet beauties of the pretty Celia—for that was the name she bore in this second expedition. Generous as liberality itself to all who gave him joy this way, he gave her a handsome sum of gold, which she durst not now refuse for fear of creating some mistrust and losing the heart she so lately had regained. Therefore, taking it with an humble curtsy and a well counterfeited show of surprise and joy, she cried, “O law, Sir! What must I do for all this?” He laughed at her simplicity and, kissing her again, though less fervently than he had done before, bade her not be out of the way when he came home at night. She promised she would not, and very obediently kept her word.

His stay at Bath exceeded not a month, but in that time his supposed country lass had persecuted him so much with her fondness that, in spite of the eagerness with which he first enjoyed her, he was at last grown more weary of her than he had been of Fantomina; which, she perceiving, would not be troublesome but, quitting her service, remained privately in the town till she heard he was on his return, and in that time provided herself of another disguise to carry on a third plot, which her inventing brain had furnished her with, once more to renew his twice-decayed ardours. The dress she had ordered to be made was such as widows wear in their first mourning, which, together with the most afflicted and penitential countenance that ever was seen, was no small alteration to her who used to seem all gaiety. To add to this, her hair, which she was accustomed to wear very loose, both when Fantomina and Celia, was now tied back so strait,¹ and her pinnars² coming so very forward, that there was none of it to be

¹ *strait* Tightly drawn.

² *pinnars* Cap, or the hanging flaps thereof, worn by women of high social standing.

seen. In fine, her habit and her air³ were so much changed that she was not more difficult to be known in the rude country girl than she was now in the sorrowful widow.

She knew that Beauplaisir came alone in his chariot⁴ to Bath, and in the time of her being servant in the house where he lodged, heard nothing of any body that was to accompany him to London, and hoped he would return in the same manner he had gone. She therefore hired horses and a man to attend her to an inn about ten miles on this side Bath, where, having discharged them, she waited till the chariot should come by, which when it did, and she saw that he was alone in it, she called to him that drove it to stop a moment and, going to the door, saluted the master with these words:

“The distressed and wretched, Sir,” said she, “never fail to excite compassion in a generous mind, and I hope I am not deceived in my opinion that yours is such. You have the appearance of a gentleman and cannot, when you hear my story, refuse that assistance which is in your power to give to an unhappy woman who, without it, may be rendered the most miserable of all created beings.”

It would not be very easy to represent the surprise so odd an address created in the mind of him to whom it was made. She had not the appearance of one who wanted charity, and what other favour she required he could not conceive. But, telling her she might command anything in his power, he gave her encouragement to declare herself in this manner: “You may judge,” resumed she, “by the melancholy garb I am in, that I have lately lost all that ought to be valuable to womankind, but it is impossible for you to guess the greatness of my misfortune unless you had known my husband, who was master of every perfection to endear him to a wife’s affections. But, notwithstanding, I look on myself as the most unhappy of my sex in out-living him. I must so far obey the dictates of my discretion as to take care of the little fortune he left behind him, which, being in the hands of a brother of his in London, will be all carried off to Holland, where he is going to settle. If I reach not the town before he leaves it, I am undone for ever—to

³ *her habit and her air* Her characteristic dress and appearance.

⁴ *chariot* Lightweight four-wheeled carriage with seats in the back only.

which end I left Bristol, the place where we lived, hoping to get a place in the stage at Bath, but they were all taken up before I came. And, being, by a hurt I got in a fall, rendered incapable of travelling any long journey on horseback, I have no way to go to London and must be inevitably ruined in the loss of all I have on earth without you have good nature enough to admit me to take part of your chariot.”

Here the feigned widow ended her sorrowful tale, which had been several times interrupted by a parenthesis of sighs and groans, and Beauplaisir, with a complaisant and tender air, assured her of his readiness to serve her in things of much greater consequence than what she desired of him, and told her it would be an impossibility of denying a place in his chariot to a lady who he could not behold without yielding one in his heart. She answered the compliments he made her but with tears, which seemed to stream in such abundance from her eyes that she could not keep her handkerchief from her face one moment. Being come into the chariot, Beauplaisir said a thousand handsome things to persuade her from giving way to so violent a grief, which, he told her, would not only be destructive to her beauty, but likewise her health. But all his endeavours for consolation appeared ineffectual, and he began to think he should have but a dull journey in the company of one who seemed so obstinately devoted to the memory of her dead husband that there was no getting a word from her on any other theme. But, bethinking himself of the celebrated story of the Ephesian matron,¹ it came into his head to make trial whether she who seemed equally susceptible of sorrow might not also be so too of love. And, having began a discourse on almost every other topic, and finding her still incapable of answering, he resolved to put it to the proof if this would have no more effect to rouse her sleeping spirits. With a gay air, therefore, though accompanied with the greatest modesty and respect, he turned the conversation, as though without design, on that joy-giving passion, and soon discovered that was indeed the subject she was best pleased to be entertained with. For, on his giving her a

hint to begin upon, never any tongue run more voluble² than hers on the prodigious power it had to influence the souls of those possessed of it to actions even the most distant from their intentions, principles, or humours. From that she passed to a description of the happiness of mutual affection, the unspeakable ecstasy of those who meet with equal ardency, and represented it in colours so lively, and disclosed by the gestures (with which her words were accompanied) and the accent of her voice so true a feeling of what she said that Beauplaisir, without being as stupid as he was really the contrary, could not avoid perceiving there were seeds of fire not yet extinguished in this fair widow's soul, which wanted but the kindling breath of tender sighs to light into a blaze. He now thought himself as fortunate as some moments before he had the reverse, and doubted not but that before they parted he should find a way to dry the tears of this lovely mourner to the satisfaction of them both. He did not, however, offer, as he had done to Fantomina and Celia, to urge his passion directly to her, but by a thousand little softening artifices, which he well knew how to use, gave her leave to guess he was enamoured. When they came to the inn where they were to lie, he declared himself somewhat more freely and, perceiving she did not resent it past forgiveness, grew more encroaching still. He now took the liberty of kissing away her tears and catching the sighs as they issued from her lips; telling her if grief was infectious, he was resolved to have his share; protesting he would gladly exchange passions with her and be content to bear her load of sorrow, if she would as willingly ease the burden of his love. She said little in answer to the strenuous pressures with which at last he ventured to enfold her, but not thinking it decent for the character she had assumed to yield so suddenly, and unable to deny both his and her own inclinations, she counterfeited a fainting and fell motionless upon his breast. He had no great notion that she was in a real fit, and the room they supped in happening to have a bed in it, he took her in his arms and laid her on it, believing that whatever her distemper was, that was the most proper place to convey her to. He laid himself down by her and endeavoured to bring her to herself, and she was too grateful to her kind physician at her returning sense to

¹ *celebrated story ... matron* The story originates in Petronius (d. CE 65; see *Satyricon*, “Eumolpus,” 111–12) and was adapted in 1659 by Sir Walter Charlton. In it, a woman famous for her chastity has sex with a soldier whom she encounters while mourning by the tomb of her recently deceased husband.

² *voluble* Fluently.

remove from the posture he had put her in, without his leave.

It may perhaps seem strange that Beauplaisir should in such near intimacies continue still deceived. I know there are men who will swear it is an impossibility, and that no disguise could hinder them from knowing a woman they had once enjoyed. In answer to these scruples, I can only say that besides the alteration which the change of dress made in her, she was so admirably skilled in the art of feigning that she had the power of putting on almost what face she pleased, and knew so exactly how to form her behaviour to the character she represented that all the comedians at both playhouses¹ are infinitely short of her performances. She could vary her very glances, tune her voice to accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke when she appeared herself. These aids from nature, joined to the wiles of art and the distance between the places where the imagined Fantomina and Celia were, might very well prevent his having any thought that they were the same, or that the fair widow was either of them. It never so much as entered his head, and, though he did fancy he observed in the face of the latter, features which were not altogether unknown to him, yet he could not recollect when or where he had known them. And, being told by her that from her birth she had never removed from Bristol, a place where he never was, he rejected the belief of having seen her and supposed his mind had been deluded by an idea of some other whom she might have a resemblance of.

They passed the time of their journey in as much happiness as the most luxurious gratification of wild desires could make them, and when they came to the end of it, parted not without a mutual promise of seeing each other often. He told her to what place she should direct a letter to him, and she assured him she would send to let him know where to come to her as soon as she was fixed in lodgings.

She kept her promise and, charmed with the continuance of his eager fondness,² went not home but into private lodgings, whence she wrote to him to visit her the first opportunity and enquire for the widow Bloom-

¹ comedians at both playhouses Actors in the comedies staged by the licensed theaters at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, London.

² eager fondness Infatuation.

er. She had no sooner dispatched this billet than she repaired to the house where she had lodged as Fantomina, charging the people if Beauplaisir should come there, not to let him know she had been out of town. From thence she wrote to him, in a different hand, a long letter of complaint that he had been so cruel in not sending one letter to her all the time he had been absent, entreated to see him, and concluded with subscribing herself his unalterably affectionate Fantomina. She received in one day answers to both these. The first contained these lines:

To the charming Mrs. Bloomer

It would be impossible, my angel, for me to express the thousandth part of that infinity of transport the sight of your dear letter gave me. Never was woman formed to charm like you. Never did any look like you, write like you, bless like you; nor did ever man adore as I do. Since yesterday we parted, I have seemed a body without a soul, and had you not by this inspiring billet³ gave me new life, I know not what by tomorrow I should have been. I will be with you this evening about five. O'tis an age till then! But the cursed formalities of duty oblige me to dine with my Lord, who never rises from table till that hour. Therefore, adieu till then, sweet lovely mistress of the soul and all the faculties of

Your most faithful,

BEAUPLAISIR.

The other was in this manner:

To the lovely FANTOMINA

If you were half so sensible as you ought of your own power of charming, you would be assured that to be unfaithful or unkind to you would be among the things that are in their very natures impossibilities. It was my misfortune, not my fault, that you were not persecuted every post with a declaration of my unchanging passion. But I had unluckily forgot the name of the woman at whose house you are, and knew not how to form a direction that it might come safe to your hands. And indeed, the reflection how you might misconstrue my silence brought me to town some weeks sooner than I intended. If you knew how I have languished to renew those blessings I am permitted to enjoy

³ billet Note.

in your society, you would rather pity than condemn
Your ever faithful,

BEAUPLAISIR.

P.S. I fear I cannot see you till tomorrow; some business has unluckily fallen out that will engross my hours till then. Once more, my dear, adieu.

“Traitor!” cried she as soon as she had read them. “’Tis thus our silly, fond, believing sex are served when they put faith in man. So had I been deceived and cheated, had I like the rest believed, and sat down mourning in absence, and vainly waiting recovered tendernesses. How do some women,” continued she, “make their life a hell, burning in fruitless expectations and dreaming out their days in hopes and fears, then wake at last to all the horror of despair? But I have outwitted even the most subtle of the deceiving kind, and while he thinks to fool me, he is himself the only beguiled person.”

She made herself, most certainly, extremely happy in the reflection on the success of her stratagems and, while the knowledge of his inconstancy and levity of nature kept her from having that real tenderness for him she would else have had, she found the means of gratifying the inclination she had for his agreeable person in as full a manner as she could wish. She had all the sweets of love, but as yet had tasted none of the gall,¹ and was in a state of contentment which might be envied by the more delicate.

When the expected hour arrived, she found that her lover had lost no part of the fervency² with which he had parted from her. But when the next day she received him as Fantomina, she perceived a prodigious difference, which led her again into reflections on the unaccountableness of men’s fancies, who still prefer the last conquest only because it is the last. Here was an evident proof of it, for there could not be a difference in merit because they were the same person, but the widow Bloomer was a more new acquaintance than Fantomina, and therefore esteemed more valuable. This, indeed, must be said of Beauplaisir, that he had a greater share of good nature than most of his sex, who, for the most part, when they are weary of an intrigue, break it

entirely off without any regard to the despair of the abandoned nymph.³ Though he retained no more than a bare pity and complaisance for Fantomina, yet, believing she loved him to an excess, he would not entirely forsake her, though the continuance of his visits was now become rather a penance than a pleasure.

The widow Bloomer triumphed some time longer over the heart of this inconstant, but at length her sway was at an end, and she sunk in this character to the same degree of tastelessness⁴ as she had done before in that of Fantomina and Celia. She presently perceived it, but bore it as she had always done, it being but what she expected. She had prepared herself for it and had another project in embryo which she soon ripened into action. She did not, indeed, complete it altogether so suddenly as she had done the others, by reason there must be persons employed in it, and the aversion she had to any confidantes in her affairs, and the caution with which she had hitherto acted, and which she was still determined to continue, made it very difficult for her to find a way without breaking through that resolution to compass what she wished. She got over the difficulty at last, however, by proceeding in a manner if possible more extraordinary than all her former behaviour. Muffling herself up in her hood one day, she went into the park about the hour when there are a great many necessitous⁵ gentlemen who think themselves above doing what they call “little things for a maintenance” walking in the Mall⁶ to take a chameleon treat and fill their stomachs with air instead of meat.⁷ Two of those, who by their physiognomy⁸ she thought most proper for her purpose, she beckoned to come to her and, taking them into a walk more remote from company, began to communicate the business she had with them in these words: “I am sensible, Gentlemen,” said she, “that, through the blindness of fortune and partiality of the world, merit frequently goes unrewarded, and

³ *nymph* Young woman.

⁴ *tastelessness* Dullness.

⁵ *necessitous* In need of money; indigent.

⁶ *the Mall* Fashionable pedestrian concourse in St. James’s Park, London.

⁷ *to take ... meat* The chameleon was believed to live on air.

⁸ *physiognomy* Facial appearance.

¹ *gall* Bitterness.

² *fervency* Passion.

that those of the best pretensions¹ meet with the least encouragement. I ask your pardon," continued she, perceiving they seemed surprised, "if I am mistaken in the notion that you two may, perhaps, be of the number of those who have reason to complain of the injustice of fate. But if you are such as I take you for, I have a proposal to make you which may be of some little advantage to you." Neither of them made any immediate answer, but appeared buried in consideration for some moments. At length, "We should, doubtless, Madam," said one of them, "willingly come into any measures to oblige you, provided they are such as may bring us into no danger, either as to our persons or reputations." "That which I require of you," resumed she, "has nothing in it criminal. All that I desire is secrecy in what you are entrusted, and to disguise yourselves in such a manner as you cannot be known if hereafter seen by the person on whom you are to impose. In fine, the business is only an innocent frolic, but if blazed abroad,² might be taken for too great a freedom in me. Therefore, if you resolve to assist me, here are five pieces to drink my health and assure you that I have not discoursed you on an affair I design not to proceed in. And when it is accomplished fifty more lie ready for your acceptance." These words and, above all, the money, which was a sum which 'tis probable they had not seen of a long time, made them immediately assent to all she desired and press for the beginning of their employment. But things were not yet ripe for execution, and she told them that the next day they should be let into the secret, charging them to meet her in the same place at an hour she appointed. 'Tis hard to say which of these parties went away best pleased—they, that fortune had sent them so unexpected a windfall, or she, that she had found persons who appeared so well qualified to serve her.

Indefatigable in the pursuit of whatsoever her humour was bent upon, she had no sooner left her new-engaged emissaries than she went in search of a house for the completing her project. She pitched on one very large and magnificently furnished, which she hired by the week, giving them the money beforehand to prevent any inquiries. The next day she repaired to the park,

¹ *pretensions* Claims (here, to merit).

² *blazed abroad* Made widely known.

where she met the punctual 'squires of low degree, and, ordering them to follow her to the house she had taken, told them they must condescend to appear like servants, and gave each of them a very rich livery.³ Then, writing a letter to Beauplaisir in a character vastly different from either of those she had made use of as Fantomina or the fair widow Bloomer, ordered one of them to deliver it into his own hands, to bring back an answer, and to be careful that he sifted out nothing of the truth. "I do not fear," said she, "that you should discover to him who I am, because that is a secret of which you yourselves are ignorant, but I would have you be so careful in your replies that he may not think the concealment springs from any other reasons than your great integrity to your trust. Seem, therefore, to know my whole affairs, and let your refusing to make him partaker in the secret appear to be only the effect of your zeal for my interest and reputation." Promises of entire fidelity on the one side and reward on the other being passed, the messenger made what haste he could to the house of Beauplaisir and, being there told where he might find him, performed exactly the injunction that had been given him. But never astonishment exceeding that which Beauplaisir felt at the reading this billet, in which he found these lines:

To the all-conquering Beauplaisir

I imagine not that 'tis a new thing to you to be told you are the greatest charm in nature to our sex. I shall, therefore, not to fill up my letter with any impertinent praises on your wit or person, only tell you that I am infinite in love with both and, if you have a heart not too deeply engaged, should think myself the happiest of my sex in being capable of inspiring it with some tenderness. There is but one thing in my power to refuse you, which is the knowledge of my name, which, believing the sight of my face will render no secret, you must not take it ill that I conceal from you. The bearer of this is a person I can trust. Send by him your answer, but endeavour not to dive into the meaning of this mystery, which will be impossible for you to unravel and at the same time very much disoblige me. But, that you may be in no apprehensions of being imposed on by a woman unworthy of your regard, I will venture to assure you the first and greatest men in the kingdom would think them-

³ *livery* Uniform.

selves blessed to have that influence over me you have, though unknown to yourself, acquired. But I need not go about to raise your curiosity by giving you any idea of what my person is. If you think fit to be satisfied, resolve to visit me tomorrow about three in the afternoon, and, though my face is hid, you shall not want sufficient demonstration that she who takes these unusual measures to commence a friendship with you is neither old nor deformed. Till then I am,

Yours,

INCOGNITA.

He had scarce come to the conclusion before he asked the person who brought it from what place he came, the name of the lady he served, if she were a wife or widow, and several other questions directly opposite to the directions of the letter. But silence would have availed him as much as did all those testimonies of curiosity. No *Italian bravo*¹ employed in a business of the like nature performed his office with more artifice,² and the impatient enquirer was convinced that nothing but doing as he was desired could give him any light into the character of the woman who declared so violent a passion for him. And, little fearing any consequence which could ensue from such an encounter, he resolved to rest satisfied till he was informed of everything from herself, not imagining this Incognita varied so much from the generality of her sex as to be able to refuse the knowledge of anything to the man she loved with that transcendency of passion she professed, and which his many successes with the ladies gave him encouragement enough to believe. He therefore took pen and paper, and answered her letter in terms tender enough for a man who had never seen the person to whom he wrote. The words were as follows:

To the obliging and witty Incognita

Though to tell me I am happy enough to be liked by a woman such as by your manner of writing I imagine you to be is an honour which I can never sufficiently acknowledge, yet I know not how I am able to content myself with admiring the wonders of your wit alone. I am certain a soul like yours must shine in your eyes with a vivacity

¹ *Italian bravo* Hired soldier, here a spy.

² *artifice* Cunning.

which must bless all they look on. I shall, however, endeavour to restrain myself in those bounds you are pleased to set me, till by the knowledge of my inviolable fidelity I may be thought worthy of gazing on that heaven I am now but to enjoy in contemplation. You need not doubt my glad compliance with your obliging summons. There is a charm in your lines which gives too sweet an idea of their lovely author to be resisted. I am all impatient for the blissful moment which is to throw me at your feet and give me an opportunity of convincing you that I am,

Your everlasting slave,

BEAUPLAISIR.

Nothing could be more pleased than she to whom it was directed at the receipt of this letter. But when she was told how inquisitive he had been concerning her character and circumstances, she could not forbear laughing heartily to think of the tricks she had played him and applauding her own strength of genius and force of resolution, which by such unthought-of ways could triumph over her lover's inconstancy and render that very temper which to other women is the greatest curse a means to make herself more blessed. "Had he been faithful to me," said she to herself, "either as Fantomina, or Celia, or the widow Bloomer, the most violent passion, if it does not change its object, in time will wither. Possession naturally abates the vigour of desire, and I should have had at best but a cold, insipid, husband-like lover in my arms. But by these arts of passing on him as a new mistress whenever the ardour (which alone makes love a blessing) begins to diminish for the former one, I have him always raving, wild, impatient, longing, dying. O that all neglected wives and fond abandoned nymphs would take this method! Men would be caught in their own snare and have no cause to scorn our easy, weeping, wailing sex!" Thus did she pride herself, as if secure she never should have any reason to repent the present gaiety of her humour. The hour drawing near in which he was to come, she dressed herself in as magnificent a manner as if she were to be that night at a ball at court, endeavouring to repair the want of those beauties which the vizard³ should conceal by setting forth the others with the greatest care and exactness. Her fine shape and air and neck appeared to

³ *vizard* Mask worn at a masquerade ball.

great advantage, and by that which was to be seen of her one might believe the rest to be perfectly agreeable. Beauplaisir was prodigiously charmed, as well with her appearance as with the manner she entertained him. But, though he was wild with impatience for the sight of a face which belonged to so exquisite a body, yet he would not immediately press for it, believing before he left her he should easily obtain that satisfaction. A noble collation being over, he began to sue for¹ the performance of her promise of granting everything he could ask, excepting the sight of her face and knowledge of her name. It would have been a ridiculous piece of affectation in her to have seemed coy in complying with what she herself had been the first in desiring. She yielded without even a show of reluctance. And if there be any true felicity in an amour such as theirs, both here enjoyed it to the full. But not in the height of all their mutual raptures could he prevail on her to satisfy his curiosity with the sight of her face. She told him that she hoped he knew so much of her as might serve to convince him she was not unworthy of his tenderest regard, and if he could not content himself with that which she was willing to reveal, and which was the conditions of their meeting, dear as he was to her she would rather part with him forever than consent to gratify an inquisitiveness which, in her opinion, had no business with his love. It was in vain that he endeavoured to make her sensible of her mistake and that this restraint was the greatest enemy imaginable to the happiness of them both. She was not to be persuaded, and he was obliged to desist his solicitations, though determined in his mind to compass what he so ardently desired before he left the house. He then turned the discourse wholly on the violence of the passion he had for her, and expressed the greatest discontent in the world at the apprehensions of being separated; swore he could dwell forever in her arms, and with such an undeniable earnestness pressed to be permitted to tarry with her the whole night that had she been less charmed with his renewed eagerness of desire, she scarce would have had the power of refusing him. But in granting this request she was not without a thought that he had another reason for making it besides the extremity of his

passion, and had it immediately in her head how to disappoint him.

The hours of repose being arrived, he begged she would retire to her chamber, to which she consented but obliged him to go to bed first, which he did not much oppose because he supposed she would not lie in her mask and doubted not but the morning's dawn would bring the wished discovery. The two imagined servants ushered him to his new lodging, where he lay some moments in all the perplexity imaginable at the oddness of this adventure. But she suffered not these cogitations to be of any long continuance. She came, but came in the dark, which, being no more than he expected by the former part of her proceedings, he said nothing of. But as much satisfaction as he found in her embraces, nothing ever longed for the approach of day with more impatience than he did. At last it came, but how great was his disappointment when, by the noises he heard in the street—the hurry of the coaches and the cries of penny-merchants²—he was convinced it was night nowhere but with him? He was still in the same darkness as before, for she had taken care to blind the windows in such a manner that not the least chink was left to let in day. He complained of her behaviour in terms that she would not have been able to resist yielding to if she had not been certain it would have been the ruin of her passion. She therefore answered him only as she had done before and, getting out of the bed from him, flew out of the room with too much swiftness for him to have overtaken her if he had attempted it. The moment she left him, the two attendants entered the chamber and, plucking down the implements which had screened him from the knowledge of that which he so much desired to find out, restored his eyes once more to day. They attended to assist him in dressing, brought him tea, and by their obsequiousness let him see there was but one thing which the mistress of them would not gladly oblige him in. He was so much out of humour, however, at the disappointment of his curiosity that he resolved never to make a second visit. Finding her in an outer room, he made no scruple of expressing the sense he had of the little trust she reposed in him, and at last plainly told her he could not submit to receive obligations from a lady who thought him incapable of

¹ *to sue for* Beg for, ask for.

² *penny-merchants* Street merchants selling cheap goods.

keeping a secret which she made no difficulty of letting her servants into. He resented; he once more entreated; he said all that man could do to prevail on her to unfold the mystery. But all his adjurations¹ were fruitless, and he went out of the house determined never to re-enter it till she should pay the price of his company with the discovery of her face and circumstances. She suffered him to go with this resolution and doubted not but he would recede from it when he reflected on the happy moments they had passed together. But if he did not, she comforted herself with the design of forming some other stratagem with which to impose on him a fourth time.

She kept the house and her gentlemen-equipage for about a fortnight, in which time she continued to write to him as Fantomina and the widow Bloomer, and received the visits he sometimes made to each. But his behaviour to both was grown so cold that she began to grow as weary of receiving his now insipid caresses as he was of offering them. She was beginning to think in what manner she should drop these two characters when the sudden arrival of her mother, who had been some time in a foreign country, obliged her to put an immediate stop to the course of her whimsical adventures. That lady, who was severely virtuous, did not approve of many things she had been told of the conduct of her daughter. And though it was not in the power of any person in the world to inform her of the truth of what she had been guilty of, yet she heard enough to make her keep her afterwards in a restraint little agreeable to her humour and the liberties to which she had been accustomed.

But this confinement was not the greatest part of the trouble of this now afflicted lady. She found the consequences of her amorous follies would be, without almost a miracle, impossible to be concealed: she was with child. And though she would easily have found means to have screened even this from the knowledge of the world had she been at liberty to have acted with the same unquestionable authority over herself as she did before the coming of her mother, yet now all her invention was at a loss for a stratagem to impose on a woman of her penetration.² By eating little, lacing

prodigious strait, and the advantage of a great hoop-petticoat, however, her bigness was not taken notice of, and perhaps she would not have been suspected till the time of her going into the country, where her mother designed to send her and from whence she intended to make her escape to some place where she might be delivered with secrecy, if the time of it had not happened much sooner than she expected. A ball being at court, the good old lady was willing she should partake of the diversion of it as a farewell to the town. It was there she was seized with those pangs which none in her condition are exempt from. She could not conceal the sudden rack³ which all at once invaded her, or, had her tongue been mute, her wildly rolling eyes, the distortion of her features, and the convulsions which shook her whole frame in spite of her would have revealed she laboured under some terrible shock of nature. Everybody was surprised; everybody was concerned; but few guessed at the occasion. Her mother grieved beyond expression, doubted not but she was struck with the hand of death, and ordered her to be carried home in a chair while herself followed in another. A physician was immediately sent for, but he, presently perceiving what was her distemper, called the old lady aside and told her it was not a doctor of his sex but one of her own her daughter stood in need of. Never was astonishment and horror greater than that which seized the soul of this afflicted parent at these words. She could not for a time believe the truth of what she heard, but he insisting on it and conjuring her to send for a midwife, she was at length convinced of it. All the pity and tenderness she had been for some moment before possessed of now vanished and were succeeded by an adequate shame and indignation. She flew to the bed where her daughter was lying and, telling her what she had been informed of and which she was now far from doubting, commanded her to reveal the name of the person whose insinuations had drawn her to this dishonour. It was a great while before she could be brought to confess anything, and much longer before she could be prevailed on to name the man whom she so fatally had loved. But the rack of nature growing more fierce, and the enraged old lady protesting no help should be afforded her while she persisted in her obstinacy, she, with great difficulty and

¹ *adjurations* Entreaties.

² *penetration* Discernment; mental acuteness.

³ *rack* Pain.

hesitation in her speech, at last pronounced the name of Beauplaisir. She had no sooner satisfied her weeping mother than that sorrowful lady sent messengers at the same time for a midwife and for that gentleman who had occasioned the other's being wanted. He happened by accident to be at home and immediately obeyed the summons, though prodigiously surprised what business a lady so much a stranger to him could have to impart. But how much greater was his amazement when, taking him into her closet, she there acquainted him with her daughter's misfortune, of the discovery she had made, and how far he was concerned in it? All the idea one can form of wild astonishment was mean to what he felt. He assured her that the young lady her daughter was a person whom he had never more than at a distance admired, that he had indeed spoke to her in public company, but that he never had a thought which tended to her dishonour. His denials, if possible, added to the indignation she was before inflamed with. She had no longer patience and, carrying him into the chamber where she was just delivered of a fine girl, cried out, "I will not be imposed on. The truth by one of you shall be revealed." Beauplaisir, being brought to the bedside, was beginning to address himself to the lady in it to beg she would clear the mistake her mother was involved in, when she, covering herself with the clothes and ready to die a second time with the inward agitations of her soul, shrieked out, "Oh, I am undone! I cannot live and bear this shame!" But the old lady, believing that now or never was the time to dive into the bottom of this mystery, forcing her to rear her head, told her she should not hope to escape the scrutiny of a parent she had dishonoured in such a manner and, pointing to Beauplaisir, "Is this the gentleman," said she, "to whom you owe your ruin? Or have you deceived me by a fictitious tale?"

"Oh no!" resumed the trembling creature, "He is indeed the innocent cause of my undoing. Promise me your pardon," continued she, "and I will relate the means." Here she ceased, expecting what she would reply, which, on hearing Beauplaisir cry out, "What

mean you, Madam? I your undoing, who never harboured the least design on you in my life?" she did in these words: "Though the injury you have done your family," said she, "is of a nature which cannot justly hope forgiveness, yet be assured, I shall much sooner excuse you when satisfied of the truth than while I am kept in a suspense if possible as vexatious as the crime¹ itself is to me." Encouraged by this, she related the whole truth. And 'tis difficult to determine if Beauplaisir or the lady were most surprised at what they heard—he, that he should have been blinded so often by her artifices, or she, that so young a creature should have the skill to make use of them. Both sat for some time in a profound reverie, till at length she broke it first in these words: "Pardon, Sir," said she, "the trouble I have given you. I must confess it was with a design to oblige you to repair the supposed injury you had done this unfortunate girl by marrying her, but now I know not what to say. The blame is wholly hers, and I have nothing to request further of you than that you will not divulge the distracted folly she has been guilty of." He answered her in terms perfectly polite, but made no offer of that which perhaps she expected, though could not, now informed of her daughter's proceedings, demand. He assured her, however, that if she would commit the newborn lady to his care, he would discharge it faithfully. But neither of them would consent to that, and he took his leave, full of cogitations more confused than ever he had known in his whole life. He continued to visit there to enquire after her health every day, but the old lady perceiving there was nothing likely to ensue from these civilities but perhaps a renewing of the crime, she entreated him to refrain, and as soon as her daughter was in a condition, sent her to a monastery in France, the abbess of which had been her particular friend. And thus ended an intrigue which, considering the time it lasted, was as full of variety as any, perhaps, that many ages has produced.

—1725

¹ *crime* Morally odious act.

IN CONTEXT

The Eighteenth Century Sexual Imagination

Eliza Haywood wrote extensively on romantic and sexual themes not only in her fiction and drama but also in a variety of nonfictional prose contexts. Among the most interesting of these works is *A Present for a Servant-Maid*, which was published anonymously in 1743. It went through several editions and was widely imitated. The work presents advice for young female servants and devotes a considerable amount of attention to the difficulties they are likely to face at the hands of the gentlemen in the households in which they work.

from *A Present for a Servant-Maid* (1743)

Dear Girls,

I think there cannot be a greater service done to the commonwealth (of which you are a numerous body) than to lay down some general rules for your behaviour, which, if observed, will make your condition as happy to yourselves as it is necessary to others. Nothing can be more melancholy than to hear continual complaints for faults which a very little reflection would render it almost as easy for you to avoid as to commit; most of the mistakes laid to your charge proceeding at first only from a certain indolence and inactivity of the mind, but, if not rectified in time, become habitual and difficult to be thrown off.

As the first step therefore towards being happy in service, you should never enter into a place¹ but with a view of *staying in it*; to which end I think it highly necessary that (as no mistress worth serving will take you without a character²) you should also make some enquiry into the place before you suffer yourself to be hired. There are some houses which appear well by *day*, that it would be little safe for a modest maid to sleep in at *night*: I do not mean those coffeehouses, bagnios, &c. which some parts of the town, particularly Covent Garden,³ abounds with; for in those the very aspect of the persons who keep them are sufficient to show what manner of trade they follow. But houses which have no public show of business, are richly furnished, and where the mistress has an air of the strictest modesty, and perhaps affects a double purity of behaviour, yet under such roofs, and under the sanction of such women as I have described, are too frequently acted such scenes of debauchery as would startle even the owners of some common brothels. Great regard is therefore to be had to the character of the persons who recommend you, and the manner in which you heard of the place; for those sort of people have commonly their emissaries at inns, watching the coming in of the wagons, and, if they find any pretty girls who come to town to go to service, presently hire them in the name of some person of condition, and by this means the innocent young creature, while she thanks God for her good fortune in being so immediately provided for, is ensnared into the service of the Devil. Here temptations of all kinds are offered her; she is not treated as a servant but a guest; her country habit is immediately stripped off, and a gay modish one put on in the stead; and then the designed victim, willing or unwilling, is exposed to sale to the first lewd supporter of her mistress's grandeur that comes to the house. If she refuses the shameful business for which she was hired, and prefers the

¹ *place* I.e., a position (of employment).

² *character* I.e., a letter of character reference.

³ *Covent Garden* Where many brothels were located.

preservation of her virtue to all the promises can be made her, which way can she escape? She is immediately confined, close watched, threatened, and at last forced to compliance. Then, by a continued prostitution withered in her bloom, she becomes despised, no longer affords any advantage to the wretch who betrayed her, and is turned out to infamy and beggary, perhaps too with the most loathsome of all diseases, which ends her miserable days in an hospital or workhouse, in case she can be admitted, though some have not had even that favour, but found their deathbed on a dunghill.

...

... This town at present abounds with such variety of allurements that a young heart cannot be too much upon its guard. It is those expensive ones, I mean, which drain your purse as well as waste your time: such as plays, the Wells,¹ and gardens, and other public shows and entertainments; places which it becomes nobody to be seen often at, and more especially young women in your station. All things that are invented merely for the gratification of luxury, and are of no other service than temporary delight, ought to be shunned by those who have their bread to get. Nor is it any excuse for you that a friend gives you tickets and it costs you nothing; it costs you at least what is more precious than money—your time; not only what you pass in seeing the entertainments, but what the idea and memory of them will take up. They are a kind of delicious poison to the mind, which pleasingly intoxicates and destroys all relish for any thing beside. If you could content yourselves with one sight and no more of any, or even all, these shows, or could you answer that they would engross your thoughts no longer than while you were spectators, the curiosity might be excusable. But it rarely happens that you have this command over yourselves; the music, the dances, the gay clothes and scenes make too strong an impression on the senses not to leave such traces behind as are entirely inconsistent either with good housewifery or the duties of your place. Avoid, therefore, such dangerous amusements ...

Temptations from your Master: Being so much under his command, and obliged to attend him at any hour and at any place he is pleased to call you will lay you under difficulties to avoid his importunities, which it must be confessed are not easy to surmount; yet a steady resolution will enable you; and as a vigorous resistance is less to be expected in your station, your persevering may, perhaps, in time oblige him to desist and acknowledge you have more reason than himself: it is a duty, however, owing to yourself to endeavour it.

Behaviour to him, if a single Man: If he happens to be a single man, and is consequently under less restraint, be as careful as you can, opportunities will not be wanting to prosecute his aim; and, as you cannot avoid hearing what he says, must humbly, and in the most modest terms you can, remonstrate to him the sin and shame he would involve you in; and omit nothing to make him sensible how cruel it is to go about to betray a person whom it is his duty to protect. Add that nothing shall ever prevail on you to forfeit your virtue; and take care that all your looks and gestures correspond with what you say: let no wanton smile or light coquette air give him room to suspect you are not so much displeased with the inclination he has for you as you would seem; for if he once imagines you deny but for the sake of form, it will the more inflame him, and render him more pressing than ever. Let your answers, therefore, be delivered with the greatest sedateness. Show that you are truly sorry, and more ashamed than vain that he finds anything in you to like ...

If a married Man: Greater caution is still to be observed if he is a married man. As soon as he gives you the least intimation of his design, either by word or action, you ought to keep as much as possible out of his way in order to prevent his declaring himself more plainly; and if, in spite of all your care,

¹ *the Wells* Several locations of popular springs, such as Epsom Wells and Lambeth Wells, also offered other entertainments, such as gambling or concerts, in addition to their spas.

he find an opportunity of telling you his mind, you must remonstrate the wrong he would do his wife, and how much he demeans both himself and her by making such an offer to his own servant. If this is ineffectual and he continues to persecute you still, watching you wherever you go, both abroad and at home, and is so troublesome in his importunities that you cannot do your business quietly and regularly, your only way then is to give warning; but be very careful not to let your mistress know the motive of it. That is a point too tender to be touched upon even in the most distant manner, much less plainly told. Such a discovery would not only give her an infinite uneasiness (for in such cases the innocent suffer for the crimes of the guilty), but turn the inclination your master had for you into the extremest hatred. He may endeavour to clear himself by throwing the odium on you, for those who are unjust in one thing will be so in others; and you cannot expect that he who does not scruple to wrong his wife, and indeed his own soul, will make any to take away your reputation, when he imagines his own will be secured by it. He may pretend you threw yourself in his way when he was in liquor, or that, having taken notice of some indecencies in your carriage, and suspecting you were a loose creature, he had only talked a little idly to you as a trial how you would behave; and that it was because he did not persist as you expected, and offer you money, that you had made the discovery—partly out of malice, and partly to give yourself an air of virtue. But though he should not be altogether so unjust and cruel, nor allege any thing of this kind against you, it would be a thing which you never ought to forgive yourself for, if by any imprudent hint you gave occasion for a breach of that amity and confidence which is the greatest blessing of the married state, and when once dissolved, continual jarring and mutual discontent are the unfailing consequence.

At the end of *Fantomina* Haywood refers to the heroine being sent “to a monastery in France.” For eighteenth-century readers, such a reference would almost certainly have carried with it connotations of debauchery; sexual activities in French nunneries were a frequent topic in the erotic fiction of the period. One of the best-known examples is *Vénus Dans Le Cloître, Ou La Religieuse En Chemise*, a French pornographic novel originally printed in 1863 and translated into English as *Venus In The Cloister* in 1724. The following excerpt is related by Angelica, a 20-year-old nun; she is discussing the activities of Eugenia, another woman in the same nunnery.

from *Venus in the Cloister; or, The Nun in Her Smock* (1724)

Angel. I’ll tell thee: I thought I saw one of the workmen enter her cell, and, tripping softly along the dormitory, I made up to her door, which having a large chink between the boards, I saw what I tell you. The first thing I beheld was Eugenia all naked with Frederick sitting by her, holding in his hand—which extremely surprised me, imagining to myself that she could never enjoy the excess of pleasure I afterwards found she did.

Said I to myself, “Lord! what pain must poor Eugenia undergo? How is it possible he should not tear her to pieces?” These were my thoughts, but I suppose he treated her very gently on account of her youth, for she was but bare fifteen. While I was thus busied in my thoughts, I heard Frederick say, “Eugenia, my dear, turn upon your back;” which after she had done, he got up and put his—into her—for my part I was quite frightened when I heard her cry out as if she were in excessive pain. This gave me, as thou may’st well imagine, a great deal of uneasiness, for I did not dare to come in for fear of surprising of them, which might have had perhaps but very ill consequences. However, a moment after I saw her move her legs and embrace her lover with both her arms after such an extraordinary manner as sufficiently expressed the utmost satisfaction.

Frederick was no less pleased with this encounter. "Ha!" said he, "what pleasure does thou give me!" In short, after endeavouring to exceed each other in the amorous combat, they softly sighed, and then for some small space reposed as in an ecstasy. And to show thee what love Eugenia had for her lover, I must tell thee that, notwithstanding this pleasing trance, she could not help now and then giving him many a kiss, nay, I think she kissed him all over, and spoke to him the kindest things in the world, which sufficiently convinced me what excess of joy she then received. This raised a desire in me to taste the same love potion, and indeed I even grew distracted with strong unknown longings and desires. I could not help thinking of it all night, and slept not a moment till the morning, and, by a lucky accident, fortune, who favoured my desires, gave me some consolation.