



ELFRID :

OR, THE
FAIR INCONSTANT.

A

TRAGEDY :

As it is ACTED at the
THEATRE ROYAL, by Her
Majesty's Servants.

To which is Added the

WALKING STATUE :

OR, THE

Devil in the Wine-Cellar.

A

FARCE.

Written by Mr. HILL.

*Faciunt graviora, coacta
Imperio sexus, minimūnque Libidine peccant. Juv. Sat. 6.*

LONDON, Printed for BERNARD LINTOTT, at the *Cross-Keys* be-
twixt the *Two Temple-Gates*; and EGBERT SANGER, at the *Post-*
House at the *Middle Temple-Gate*, in *Fleetstreet*.

Sup T' 20.1 m G. 2.5

TO THE

*Most Noble the Marquis of KENT,
Lord Chamberlain of Her Majesty's
Household, &c.*

MY LORD,

THat distinguishing Nobleman, who first did me the Honour of an Introduction to Your Lordship's Knowledge, and was pleas'd to recommend a Tragedy of mine, knew well, that the Politeness of your Taste, as well as the Dignity of your Office, mark'd you out as a Person doubly qualify'd for the Patronage of such Labours, as not meeting their old Encouragement from the humour of the *Many*, must be oblig'd to seek it from the Judgment of the *Few*.

The DEDICATION.

I remember, 'twas Your Lordship's Opinion, that Tragedy, in general, wou'd for some time be less successful on the Stage, than in the Closet. The Town has been as favourable to me, as I cou'd presume to wish, when a Person of Your Lordship's Penetration had pass'd that Judgment on the Subject; and if the Play may now receive the private Honour of pleasing you in the perusal, I shall look upon its Success as compleated in the highest manner, and may thence take encouragement to endeavour at *Comedy*, the *easiest* way of pleasing, in my weak Opinion.

I present this Poem to Your Hands, not only, as an Offering of Respect, but as a Debt of Duty. It is the first Dramatick Essay I have made publick, and cou'd therefore seek no other Patron, without a manifest Injustice to Your Lordship, under whose Judicious Direction the Drama flourishes, and to whose Power and noble Care we owe the present
Mo-

The DEDICATION.

Morality of our Stage, and growing Excellence of all Theatrical Entertainments.

May Your Lordship long live happy, and enjoy the Fruits of Your glorious Endeavours, in the loud Applause, which shall be ever given you by the Favouers of Morality, when they shall find the Stage reform'd, and know, that the MARQUIS OF KENT is He to whom They owe that Reformation.

MY LORD,

I talk not now, as an Addresser to Your Person, but an Admirer of Your Mind; The Hero who conquers Enemies abroad, is not more a *Patriot*, than he who subdues Profaneness and Immorality at home; The first protects us from an outward Danger, The last preserves us from an inward Ruin.

I have no other Encouragement to hope your Smiles upon this Play, than the Dependance I have on Your Affection

to

The DEDICATION.

to every Thing whose Design is *Moral*.
To plead in the Defence of what is to
have the Honour of appearing before so
just a Judge, wou'd argue me of Folly
and Presumption; I submit entirely to the
Sentence you shall please to pass, and on-
ly ask the Liberty to take upon me a Title
I am proud of, which is,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's

most obedient, and

most humble Servant,

Aaron Hill.

THE

THE
P R E F A C E.

I Should not have troubled the Reader with a Preface, to a Work of this Nature, but in Defence of my little Judgment, which I wou'd not attempt to justify in many Points; but it stands now accus'd of having led me to prefer the Actors of the Old House, when (say my Accusers) the Unizersal Voice of the Town has voted for the New One.

That Novelty is taking, be the Puppet-Shew a Witness; but, that it has led the Town to decide the Difference between the two Houses, in Favour of the New, is what I can by no means consent to. The Judicious Nobleman, who, by vertue of the Office he so deservedly holds, presides over Both the Houses, has given a very publick Proof, that no Partiality of Inclination shall have Power to make him prefer either: And, since they are left entirely to their Merit, I appeal to all the Knowing, and unprejudic'd Part of Mankind, whether Her Majesty's Company of Tragædians, in Drury-Lane, have not at least an equal Claim to Encouragement, with Her Majesty's Company of Comedians, in the Hay-market.

If Modesty, Sincerity, and Industrious Application, are Motives sufficient to engage an Author in the Interest of a Company, I have Reason on my side, in the Choice

The P R E F A C E.

Choice I made of Those in Drury-Lane. Perhaps their Rivals too may be possess'd of all these Qualifications; one I have try'd, and their Title to the Virtues above-mention'd I am sure of. The others, being wholly unexperient'd in, I am unqualify'd to guess at.

One Thing more I must add, and that is, When the Actors in Drury-Lane had labour'd long under such unsurmountable Difficulties, that my Lord Chamberlain himself, who had most Reason to prolong his Resentment; compassionated their Sufferings, and generously restor'd them to the Liberty he had Power to restrain, even then the Town dealt most hardly with 'em; and while their Misfortune, and Oppression, depriv'd 'em of the very Habits they were us'd to act in, made that their Crime, which was indeed their Misery.

However, the Clouds which eclips'd their Industry, are now blown over, and they begin to find the Encouragement due to their Merit; I shall therefore add no more on their Account, but proceed to say a Word or two upon my own.

I take this publick Opportunity to return my Thanks to that generous Part of the Town, who remember'd, 'twas a Third Night, and made so favourable an Appearance in my Interest; and I can't omit doing Justice to the ingenious Author of the Tender Husband, who endeavour'd as much as possible to persuade the Manager of the New House to put off that Play, and the Interest which was made for it, to another Night. Mr. Steel is a Gentleman, for whom I profess so entire an Esteem, that I cou'd not have been uneasy, if any Thing, which was design'd to do
him

The P R E F A C E.

him Honour, had been never so much to my own Disadvantage.

The Tragædy succeeded as well, as I cou'd have expected, especially when I consider 'tis an Entertainment out of Taste. I have not met with Friends enough to particularize the Errors, I have committed; therefore can only say, in general, that I endeavour'd to preserve the Unities to a greater Nicety, than, perhaps, an English Audience may think necessary. The Action is one, and entire; the Scene confin'd to the House, and Garden; and the time no more than the Play requires in its Representation.

If Regularity is a Fault, 'tis at least a very pardonable one: and tho' the Example of all the ancient Writers, and the Authority of their Commentators, may form a Plea sufficient to Justifie my Imitation; yet, I must confess, not Aristotle himself cou'd more prevail upon my little share of Reason, than the Opinion of a modern Prodigy, a Native of the Country, famous for great Writers, I need not tell the World that I mean Torquato Tasso, a Man of so acknowledg'd a Capacity, that 'twould be a Presumption in me to attempt his Character. I shall only add, that, as a Proof of the Veneration I profess to his Memory, I have attempted a Translation of his Godfrey of Bulloign, and shall very suddenly publish a Specimen and Propasal for Printing it by Subscription.

PROLOGUE.

Spoke by Mr. Keen.

*T*IS rumour'd, with what Justice you best know,
All Tragædies of late unwelcome grow,
And that you cannot pity Scenes of Woe;
Yet did this groundless Notion strive in vain
To fright our Author from his Tragick Strain,
For Tragædies are your peculiar Care,
And Tutelary Mercy guides the Fair;
Thus on your Pity hazarding his Fame,
If you permit his Wreck, you share his Shame,
Guard him ye Fair Ones, and his Wishes Crown,
For if you smile, ill Nature dares not frown.

To Night our Author tells an English Story,
And brings your Ancestors to Life before ye;
Heroes, whose innate Worth descends to you,
E'en to the History there's some Reverence due;
The Wise still profit with their Pleasure, Love,
The Stage shou'd both divert us, and improve;
Example shou'd insensibly prevail,
And the Couch'd Moral enter with the Tale;
Wou'd you but smile upon Designs like these,
We shou'd by nobler Methods strive to please,
With sinew'd Sense our future Scenes shou'd shine,
And the low Strain give place to the Divine;
Your wish'd Applause wou'd so refine the Age,
That Britain shou'd outvie the fam'd Athenian Stage.

E P I.

EPILOGUE.

Spoke by Miss Santlow, running out upon the Stage, as if she had been forcibly withheld. The First EPILOGUE she ever spoke.

NA T, I'm got loose ——— Now follow, if you dare;
I have Friends here, will think me worth their Care.
Wou'd ye believe it, Sirs? ——— The Cross-grain'd Poet,
Ay, frown, I care not ——— The whole House shall know it;
The Graceless, Grave, Unlov'd, Unloving ——— Rogue,
Thought me too young to speak his Epilogue.
That a Man's Reason! — That I'm Young, I know,
But, pray, am I the worse for being so?
'Tis for my self, I'll plead, and while I stay,
I'll recommend my Parts, and not his Play;
In Comedy they tell me I am Proof,
You say I've Air, I say, I've Tongue enough.
Fain wou'd I once in Tragedy be try'd,
Sure I cou'd make a Fair Inconstant Bride,
And am as soft a Nymph as ever dy'd;
See there now! ——— Were not those Words finely spoke?
Now for some God, or Goddess to invoke.
Tell me ye mighty Pow'rs, that reign on high,
If Heav'n e'er thinks on Poets ——— tell me why — }
This Bard durst slight a Maid so Bright as I, }
I'm quite transported! See, — I've found the way!
Oh! how He'll wish, I'd acted in his Play!
That Thought will sting ——— Don't you his Fate decree,
Leave the sweet Act of my Revenge to me;
My Female Courage can such Wonders do,
As shall defeat him ——— tho' upheld by you.

Personæ Dramatis.

<i>King,</i>	<i>Mr. Powel.</i>
<i>Athelwold,</i>	<i>Mr. Booth.</i>
<i>Ordgar,</i>	<i>Mr. Keen.</i>
<i>Egbert,</i>	<i>Mr. Cory.</i>
<i>Servant,</i>	<i>Mr. Burkhead.</i>

W O M E N.

<i>Elfrid,</i>	<i>Mrs. Bradshaw.</i>
<i>Ordelia,</i>	<i>Mrs. Knight.</i>

S C E N E *Athelwold's House,*

Time two Hours, and an Half.

ELFRID:

OR, THE

Fair Inconstant.

ACT I.

SCENE. *A Bower, Athelwold and Elfrid.*

Athel. **H**OW goes the Day, my Love; or the Night rather?

Elf. As much of Night as this gay Season knows
Has sicklied o'er the Visage of the Sky,

Which blush'd but now, to see the am'rous Sun
Play with the Dimples of his smiling Mistress.

Athel. 'Tis after Nine then.

Elf. Half an Hour at least.

Athel. You see, fair *Elfrid*, how you charm my Thoughts,
I cannot count the Hours, while you are by;
My Blessings, like *Time's* Moments, pass untold,
For the rich Joys, you give, slip by, unmark'd,
While still fresh Joys succeed 'em; my past Bliss
In a contracted Circle strikes Remembrance;
While future Oceans of immense Delight
Roll deeply thro' the Prospects of my Soul!
Oh! cou'd the Sin-led World be blest like me!
Like me, be chastly happy! Vice wou'd dye,
And the deluded Taste of giddy Man
Find Innocence, and Happiness no Strangers!

B

Elf.

2 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Elf. And will you ever be thus kind, my Lord ?
 Ever thus charming ? Ever thus sincere ?
 Will not Reflection freeze this Marriage Nectar ?
 Will not your Draughts of Love be bitter'd, think you,
 When longer mix'd with Pleasure's Wormwood, Wife ?

Athel. Wife, is as much of Heav'n, as Earth can know !
 When Man was, in his Makers Likeness, made,
 And wond'ring Angels gaz'd on the bright Form,
 Judging that Work as near a full Perfection,
 As all, but that Perfection's self, cou'd be ;
 To prove his glorious Pow'r unlimited,
 And blest the late-made Man, Man's mighty Maker
 Stamp'd a new Form, still nearer to his own ;
 That Form was Woman, and that Woman, Wife.
 Woman, like soft *May* Dew, on Morning Flow'rs,
 Distills her balmy Influence ; Peace, and Rest
 Are Woman's Gifts to Man ; when Toils, and Cares
 Have worn our weary Souls, Woman, Dear Woman,
 Is Nature's Downy Pillow of Repose.

Elf. What must Man be, if Woman be thus charming ?

Athel. Man is the Staff for your weak Sex to lean on.
 The Prop, your Beauty's tender Stalk is bound to,
 The Wall, to yield your branching Vine a shelter,
 Man is the circled Oak ; Woman the Ivy.

Elf. And will you, still, thus let my Ivy bind you ? [*Em-
bracing him.*

Athel. Love, built on Truth, may shake, but cannot fall ;
 For you I left a bounteous Monarch's Court ;
 For you sook the Sun-shine of his Favour ;
 For you I live in Shades, where no Beams shine,
 But those, your smiling Beauty darts upon me.

Elf. The Sun will sooner cease to guide the Day,
 Than I to love my doubting *Athelwold* :
 I call you doubting, 'cause I prove you so ;
 For, if you thought my Love no less than yours,
 You wou'd not thus confine me from the Court ;
 The Court, which, like the Sky, must needs be bright,
 Since it has single Stars, which I have seen
 Outshine the very Light, by which I saw them.

Athel.

ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

3

Athel. Alas! my Dear, those Stars are gaudy Nothings,
The meanest Cottager, that tills thy Lands,
In one short moment knows more solid Blifs,
Than Ages give those Courtiers.

Elf. Yet they live,
As if the World knew None, more blefs'd than they.

Athel. Let that, As If, keep place in thy Remembrance,
For three As If's may serve to speak a Courtier ;
They talk, As If they wou'd be Friends to Vertue,
They act, As If they had no Aim, but Vice,
They glitter, Gloeworm-like, As if they flam'd,
Yet have no Fire about 'em.

Elf. But my Lord,
Riches, and Honour make a large Amends
For these Deficiencies.

Athel. Love, think not so.
False Honour, like a Comet, blazes wide,
But boasts a short-liv'd Reign, its Blaze destroys it ;
While real Merit, like the glorious Sun,
Shines out, with mod'rate Rays, and shines for ever.
The poor Man's rich, who wishes not for more,
And Happiness is built upon Content.

Enter Ordgar.

Welcome my Friend! my more than Brother, welcome!

Ordg. My Lord, I hunted with the King to day,
In the wide Forest, near your *Tavestock* ;
And, while I rode more close than he suspected,
O'er heard him tell Lord *Egbert*, he design'd
To ride aside, take up his Lodging here,
So to surprize his lov'd Earl *Athelwold* ;
The Lords who follow'd him, were all dismiss'd,
But *Egbert* only, he attends him hither.
I took a private Road, and spar'd no spurring,
To give you Notice ; he'll be here anon.
I left them near the Forrest Verge, and judge,
I have not much outrode them.

4 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Elf. Coming hither?

Is the King coming hither, say you Sir?

Ordg. E're half an Hour can pass, he must be here.

Athel. He takes us unprepared!

Ordg. He chose to do so.

Athel. But tell me, *Ordgar*, does Lord *Egbert's* Int'rest
Encrease or wane, at Court?

Ordg. It rises daily,
And honest Men are griev'd, to see your Absence
Give Opportunity to one so base,
To grasp the Fortune of his Prince's Favour.

Athel. He is your Rival in *Ordelia's* Love!

Ord. Oh! I can't fear a Rival, like Lord *Egbert*,
When wise *Ordelia* is to judge betwixt us;
Not that I boast my Merit, but my Love;
And that must be superior; for Loves Flame
Burns dim in Villains, as the Lights burn blue,
When midnight Spirits, in their Walks, approach 'em.
But I delay my Blifs; Love wastes no Time,
And you, who once, felt Hopes, and Fears, like mine,
Will pardon my Impatience.

Elf. Love befriend you. [Exit *Ordg.*
What muse you on, my Lord?

Athel. Oh! *Elfrid!* *Elfrid!*

Elf. What wou'd my Love?

Athel. I wou'd be happy *Elfrid*;

Elf. I thought, you said, you was so!

Athel. Yes, I was so,
But oh! I was so says not, that I am.
O! *Elfrid*, oh, my Bosom Comforter;
Thou dearest, richest Cordial to my Soul!
Thou hast a Sea of Pity, pour it on me,
Shed thy soft Dew of Mercy on my Love,
And oh! forgive the Wretch, who kneels before thee; [Kneeling.

Elf. Defend me, Heav'n! his Aspect speaks Distraction!
His Colour comes, and goes, and his Joints tremble!
'Tis Madness sure!

Athel.

ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.* 5

Athel. Oh! worse than Madness, *Elfrid!*
For Hope, and Fear wage War, within my Soul,
And tear my Quiet thence.

Elf. Pray, rise, my Lord;
And let me share your Grief!

Athel. Wou'dst thou do that; [*Rising.*
I shou'd feel none; all Grief that threatens me,
Must wound me either through, or from thy self;
Oh, *Elfrid!* steel thy Soul with Expectation
Of what wou'd most distract it, for I know thee,
Thou hast no Fault but one, and that's Ambition;
And my curs'd Fate will strike that ill-tun'd String,
Whose Jarr must raise a Discord, worse than Death!!

Elf. If Grief must come by me, rejoice for ever,
I wou'd heap Blessings on you, but all Ills
Be far away, my Lord; This is not Love!
Must I, who never made you sigh in vain,
Unpitied, thus shed Tears, for your Unkindness!

Athel. Oh, *Elfrid!* I believe thee chaste as Snow,
Soft, as the Morning Breezes of the Spring!
Kind, as the billing Turtles; yet I fear thee;
What will not curs'd Ambition work in Woman!
Ambition first taught Angels to rebel;
Ambition made *Eve* fall; And sure, my *Elfrid!*
If ever Woman cou'd resist 'twas she,
Who knew no Pow'r to wish, but was her own!
But I will breathe a Secret thro' thy Soul,
That shall alarm this Enemy to Rest.
Guard thee, my *Elfrid!* call to thy Assistance:
Love, Honour, Pity, All the Charms of Woman;
For thou wilt need them all, to prop Forgiveness!

Elf. When Love, and Honour leave me, leave me Life,
Or leave me Thou, more dear than Life can be,
Leave me, my Guardian Angel, and my Fame!

Athel. Oh! Words to palliate Woe! and soften Death!
Sit down, thou, what wou'dst thou be call'd? Thou Wife!!
For Wife, howe'er misunderstood by some,
Is sure the softest Name; that Love can give thee!
Let us sit here; And now, my *Elfrid,* say,
What wou'dst thou quit to keep thy *Athelwold?* *Elf.*

6 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Elf. Why, to keep thee, I cou'd forego my Joy,
Wander from Pleasure, Peace, and Happiness,
But oh! that cannot be, for Peace and Joy,
And everlasting Pleasure dwell in thee.

For thee, were I possess'd of Diadems,
I cou'd exchange my Crowns for Rural Crooks,
And follow grazing Flocks, to follow *thee*.
Rather than fill a Throne, and *reign* without thee.

Athel. Sound, ye harmonious Strings of Nature's Musick,
And strike a Tune of Joy, to rowse my Soul!
And thou, pale Monster Fear! stalk thou away,
And leave my Bosom free for none, but *Elfrid* ;
Oh! thou endearing Specimen of Heav'n!

Thou, ——— I wou'd call thee somewhat higher still!
But, when my Thoughts search Heav'n for Appellations,
They echo back the Sov'reign Name of *WOMAN*;
Thou *WOMAN*, therefore! Oh! thou loveliest *WOMAN*!

Elf. Shall I not know this Secret, gentle Love?

Athel. Shall I know any thing, unknown to thee!
Thou hast my Soul; thou keep'st my Key of Thought;
How can my Secrets, then, be hid from thee!
Yes! I will tell thee, tho' my Death succeeds it;
Thou know'st, if thou can'st e'er employ thy Thoughts
So ill, as to remember ought of me;

That, just before the Duke, your Father, dy'd,
I came, a Stranger to your House, and you,

Elf. To practise your engaging Courtly Charms,
Which first won me, and next, my Father's Will,
That, having made a short Return to Court,
You shou'd come back, to Marriage Rites, and me.

Athel. I did so, *Elfrid* ; and, to bless my self,
Have curs'd my Sov'reign with the Loss of thee;
For, know, the Charmer, who is now my Wife,
Had I been faithful, shou'd have been my Queen,
And shar'd the Bed of *Edgar*, *England's* King!

Elf. What say'st thou, *Athelwold*, I, *Edgar's* Queen!

Athel. Thou wer't still Queen of all his Subject's Hearts;
Fame blew her Trumpet hoarse, to sound thy Beauty;
England, in thee possess'd a Western Magnet,

That

That did attract more Hearts, and Eyes this way,
 Than e'er the *Northern* Loadstone Needles t'other!
 Thy loud-tongu'd Praise, at last reach'd *Edgar's* Ear;
Edgar! who never heard of Beauty, but he wish'd it!
 A Prince, the justest, noblest of the Earth,
 In all things, Love excepted! there he falls!
 Fickle, and fierce, as raging Whirlwinds blow,
 His Love is Lust, base Lust! and thence, his Fire,
 Like Heaps of Straw, soon kindles, soon burns out.

Elf. And is this then the King's just Character;

Athel. I need not tell thee how he trusted me,
 I was the darling Object of his Favour;
 One Day he call'd me to him, and spoke thus,
 Fame sounds at large — how aged *Devonshire*
 Is blest with matchless Beauty, in a Daughter,
 Whose Name is *Elfrid* — I dare trust your Honour;
 Go, see, and judge of her, Men speak so fair,
 If she deserves the Character she bears,
 I'll make her, what her Merits claim, my Queen.

Elf. [*Aside.*] Fate! what a mighty Fortune have I miss'd!

To Athel.] So then you came not to our House by Choice,
 But, sent, to judge of me?

Athel. And how I judg'd,

My Sighs, my Looks, my Pray'rs, and Vows inform'd thee!

Elf. And pray what Answer did you bear the King?

Athel. Oh! think on all the Arts, that Love can use,
 To gain the Object Lov'd! those Arts were mine!
 I told him you were fair indeed, and good,
 But, far, oh, very far from what Fame spoke you;
 'Twas easie then to win on his Belief
 For my Advantage, I perswaded him,
 You were not fit for Majesty; but said,
 I had receiv'd some silent Marks of Favour,
 Which gave me room to hope, I might obtain you:
 The kind, consenting Prince, who knew you rich,
 Made no Denial; I return'd with Joy,
 The rest, your self, who crown'd that Joy, can tell.
 But, oh! what is to come, I dare not think.
 The King! the am'rous King, my *Elfrid*, comes!

Elf.

8 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Elf. Still are your Fears Disturbers of your Rest!

Athel. I had some Fears, but they are vanish'd now;
Yet oh! my *Elfrid*, let not *Edgar* see thee!
Temptation is the Father of all Sin;

Elf. Nay, now, my *Athelwold*, you are unkind!
There is no Merit, where there is no Trial;
And, till Experience stamps the mark of Strength,
Cowards may pass for Hero's, Fear for Courage.

Athel. Woman was made to yield, as well as conquer,
And shou'd not hazard Peace, by meeting Danger!

Elf. To let thee see, how much I really love thee,
I will, against my very Will obey thee.
Obedience is a galling Weight on Woman,
And leaves no room for Doubt, that Love goes with it.

Athel. *Ordelia*, thy kind Sister shall appear,
Ordelia—moderately fair—but good,
Beyond a moderate measure—she shall save me,
She shall consent to personate my *Elfrid*,
While thou shalt in her Chamber veil thy Sun-shine,
Till, with to morrows Dawn, the King departs.

Elf. But you forget that *Egbert's* with the King.

Athel. He loves your Sister, haste, advise her, Dear,
To work the am'rous Villain into Secrecy.

Enter a Servant.

Serv. My Lord! the King, attended by Earl *Egbert*,
And some few Guards, this moment are alighting,
At the Court Gate!

Athel. Oh fly—my *Elfrid*, fly! [*Exit hastily.*

Elf. [*Alone.*] — Why, what a Hill of Glory had I clim'd,
Had not this *Athelwold* deceiv'd me thus!
A Queen! Oh, Heav'ns! There's something in the Name,
That strikes a kind of unknown Pleasure here,
And says, — A Crown was, what my Stars design'd me!
Well! and it may be yet my Lot! Perhaps
This *Athelwold* may die! I do not wish it,
He makes a good, dull, faithful, vulgar Husband,

Were he a King, I wou'd not wish him more!

But, oh! he wants a Throne for me to shine on!

There's somewhat, very heav'nly in a Throne!

And those are God-like Souls, who burn for Pow'r;

Pow'r is the darling Attribute of Heav'n!

But, ha! they come. Oh, Pow'r, oh, glorious Majesty! [*Exit.*

Re-enter Athelwold; the King, Egbert, and Guards.

King. Nay, nay, my Lord! we know your Modesty,

But we allow it not; when one, so brave,

So just, so wise, so great as *Athelwold*

Retires to Solitudes, the Court must miss him;

And since you will not visit us, we come

To give you one Nights Trouble for a Punishment.

Athel. Honours, thus great, and undeserv'd, from Kings,

Shou'd silence Subjects Tongues; and my poor House

Will, from this time, be look'd on, worth Mens Notice,

When they shall know, the Majesty of *Edgar*,

Was pleas'd to grace its Walls!

King. Indeed, my Lord!

The Country's happy, whose alluring Groves

Can keep, not shade, a Worth, so-bright as yours!

But there's, I think, another Charm, that binds you,

I ought to give you Joy of a new Life.

You married since we saw you!

Athel. Sir, I did;

My Wife will hear the Honour, we receive,

With too much Gratitude and Duty, Sir,

To be long absent from your Princely Feet.

King. Believe us, *Athelwold*, we hold you dear;

Nor can forget your Merit, in your Absence.

I must ask Leave to be retir'd a while,

Till I dispatch some Letters.

Athel. This way, Sir,

Will lead your Majesty to the best Part

Of the poor Pile, you honour with your Presence.

[*Exeunt.*

We boast no stately Ornaments of Art,

King. A King's best Lodging is his Subjects Heart.

A C T II.

S C E N E. *Ordelia's Chamber; Ordgar
and Ordelia.*

Ord. **T**HE great Concern my Sister but this moment
Engag'd me in, requires me to prepare
For the important Part I act to Night;
I must take Care to caution *Egbert* too,
Lest he betray us ———

Ordg. Oh! that Word, betray!
How strange it is That God-like Creature *MAN*,
Form'd to possess, and shine with Heav'nly Vertues,
Shou'd stoop to base Distrusts and Fears of Treachery!
Fear is the shiv'ring Ague of our Souls!
A Passion Man created for himself,
For sure! that Frost of Nature cou'd not dwell
In the warm Realms of Glory!

Ord. But can *You*,
Can any Man, live void of Apprehension?

Ordg. Of Apprehension, no, but void of Jealousie;
I scorn to judge so Ill of any Man,
As to believe he dares be greatly Wicked,
Till he has wrong'd me into Proofs he is so.
For, let me tell you, Lady! Villains Souls
Shou'd be possess'd of more than mortal Courage;
Those, who fight Men, fight equal Enemies,
But those, who fight with Conscience, meet such odds,
They lose by Victory; Thought, Rest, and Solitude,
The balmy Relaxations of Our Care
Drag their Repose to Torments; and the Wretches
Are not alone forbid to hope for Heav'n,
But bear a Hell about 'em!

Ord. Well! my Lord,
I wish, no base Deceiver wrongs your Goodness,
Were you betray'd, how wou'd you meet the Traitor?

Ordg.

Ordg. As Hawks meet Ravens, or as Lyons Wolves,
He, who assumes the Name of Friend to hurt me,
Is more a Devil, than Devils themselves——For Devils
Are Foes who dare profess it.

Ord. But in Love?

Is not there somewhat to be fear'd in Love?

Ordg. Ah, no, Love lives on hearty Hope, *Ordelia,*

Ord. But what if Hope proves vain?

Ordg. Why then Hope dies,

And shou'd be buried in Loves falling Ruins;

If hope is vain, far vainer is the Love,

That lives beyond the hope, which gave it Birth.

Not but, where Worth and Beauty meet in Woman,

As both meet brightly in *Ordelia's* Charms,

'Tis worth a Disappointed Lovers Pains,

To strive by Pray'rs, and Vows, and tender Looks,

To keep Hope living to the latest Gasp.

But when no Pray'rs, no Vows, no Looks revive it,

He bears a Woman's Soul, who pines to lose it.

Ord. I thought a Passion, violent like Love,
Was not our Slave, but Master.

Ord. Oh! You err,

Loves Infant Wings are weak, and 'tis our Aid

Must lift the petty Tyrant, e're he flies,

Prudence may clip those Wings, and then he leads,

Just whither we direct him ——

Ord. Sir, your Rival ——

Wou'd give another Definition of it.

Ordg. Nay, use not that stale Female Art, *Ordelia,*

To threaten me with Follies Bugbear, Rival.

Women are much to blame, who cloak their Wishes,

Perverting Modesty from Natures Meaning;

Her End in that bright Vertue was to join

To guiltless Freedom, artless Innocence;

But modern Ladies scarce find other Use

For the new moulded Nymph, than to cloak Nature,

And by affecting more than Heav'n enjoyn'd them,

Make a stiff Monster of the Queen of Vertues.

You are too wise, not to know this, *Ordelia* ;
 You know, I love you more than *Egbert* can,
 And I know you esteem me more than him,
 Why therefore nam'd you Rival ?

Ord. I must own,
 I see more Worth in you, than he can boast.
 But, pray, when gave I you encouragement,
 To hope, much less direct my Love ?

Ordg. My Hope was born from my Opinion of your Wisdom,
 Who knowing *Egbert* wants my Honesty,
 Must know he cannot equalize my Love.

Ord. He promises like you, like you pretends
 To dare do most to gain me.

Ordg. How ! Pretends !
 Lovers should scorn Pretence, and dare indeed ;
 I shou'd be glad, if he durst say to me,
 He dar'd deserve *Ordelia*, I would trace him
 Thro' Woods and Streams, thro' Groves of pointed Steel,
 Tear up the Roots of Mountains to come at him ;
 And wou'd he then ——

Ord. Hold Sir, you promise fairly,
 What Labours wou'd you prove to win my Heart ?

Ord. With bursting Veins I'd climb 'gainst Hills of Fire,
 Were you the Prize twou'd gain me—for your sake,
 I'd plunge my shivering Limbs in Seas of Snow,
 And swim thro' all the freezing Lakes of Winter ;
 Were you a Pris'ner, to restore your Freedom,
 I wou'd rush on, and throw my naked Breast
 Upon the Spears of Armies——To reach you
 I wou'd tear Lyons Throats, and combat Dragons ;
 I wou'd descend to Hell, cou'd Hell retain you ;
 But Hell wou'd be no Hell, when you were there !
 I wou'd do more than Fancy can impose,
 Or Woman wish, to gain you——but by Heav'ns,
 The very moment you depos'd your Honour,
 I wou'd despise, forsake, and scorn to own you.

Ord. I shou'd detest a Love, less brave than this ;
 For he, who flatters Vice, can know no Vertue ;
 I think 'tis near the hour my Sister nam'd.

Enter

Enter Athelwold.

Ordg. What ails my Friend? You seem freighted with Care,
And bear your Bill of Lading on your Brow.

Athel. Alas, my *Ordgar*, had you lov'd, like me,
And for that Love, like me, been prov'd a Traitor,
You'd not have ask'd me, why my Heart is heavy.
Wilt thou not pity me? but ah! thou can'st not!
He must know Guilt, like mine, who wou'd conceive
What Torments Apprehension tears my Soul with.
But, Bright *Ordelia*, Thou art form'd a Woman,
Woman was cast in Natures softest Mould,
And Pity is thy Sexes Darling Passion.

Ord. Your Crime was small, my Lord; for Mighty Love
Is Natures Tyrant Passion, Vertue trembles
When Loves keen Arrows are discharg'd against her;
You had the King's Consent to marry *Elfrid*,
And since my Sister grieves not, why grieve you?

Athel. Know you my Guilt so soon then? — Oh *Ordelia*!
Deceit is the false Road to Happiness,
And all the Joys we travel to through Vice,
Like Fairy Banquets vanish, when we touch them.
Had he but known his Gift!

Ordg. By Heav'n's till now
I thought, of all Old *England's* Gallant Sons,
The bravest, noblest, was this *Athelwold*,
But by my Mother's Honour, 'tis as false
As thy poor Doubts — — Thou art a very Coward — —

Athel. The Voice of War wou'd not have told me so.
There hast thou seen me step for step with thee,
Wade deep thro' Seas of Blood to Rocks of Danger;
The Man, who then had dar'd tell *Athelwold*,
He was a Coward, had not seen him bear it
Tamely, as Guilt and Friendship bid him now.

Ordg. Art thou a Traitor then? hast thou been led
To act some monstrous Crime, some shock to Nature,
That Conscience and Remorse thus torture thee,
Thus change thy Sanguine Courage into Fear,
Below a Womans Paleness. — —

Ord.

Ord. Fie my Lord ———

Friendship has lost her way, when roughness meets her.

Ordg. I cannot bear to see a brave Man doubt ;
If Ruin threatens, let him meet it Greatly,
Not whine for Pains he feels not. Servile Doubt
Argues an Impotence of Mind, that says
We fear, because we dare not meet Misfortunes.

Athel. Alas ! Thou dost not know the force of Passion,
How bitter 'tis to hazard what we love,
What lost a moment, must be lost for ever !
I call the Tongue of Heav'n to witness for me,
I ne'er befriended Vice, nor injur'd Vertue ;
Nor ever in the Course of my past Life,
Can charge Remembrance with one act, but this,
Which claims Repentance from me — oh ! 'tis hard,
One Sin, which such Temptations too drew on,
Shou'd damn my future quiet ———

Ord. Good my Lord,
Judge not so rashly, Diffidence offends
The Throne of Mercy, and while Man distrusts
The gracious help of Heav'n, 'tis oft with-held
To punish sinful Doubt.

Athel. Alas, my Friends !
I see my Follies, as lost Mariners
See Rocks, when 'tis too late to shun their Danger.
Just now I left the King, who writes alone ;
And as I pass'd the Hall, the Doors all round me
Creek'd loud, and then like Thunder, on a sudden
Flew strangely open, thro' each vacant Entrance
A hollow Wind came whistling ; and a Voice,
Shrill as the midnight Shrieks of Ghosts in Desarts,
Cry'd *Athelwold*, then groan'd ; then shrill again,
Cry'd *Athelwold*, three times with dreadful sound
The Voice cry'd *Athelwold* ; then faintly fell,
And dy'd in distant Echo's ; strait the Doors
With noise more frightful than before clapp'd to,
And left my stiffen'd Hair, like Pikes erect,
And my chill'd Soul bound up in Frosts of Wonder !

Ordg.

Ordg. Dreams! Dreams! meer Dreams, by Heav'n!

Ord. Wild Births of Fancy!

Athel. Ordgar! The King designs to fend you hence,
With Letters of Concern, as far as *Plimouth*,
Where certain Vessels lie, expecting Orders;
I know not certainly, but gues the Business
To be some sudden Resolution taken
Against the Rebel *Welch!*

Ordg. Another Time,
I shou'd be griev'd to leave *Ordelia* thus;
But now rejoice, because, by leaving her,
I leave a Mad-man's Fears in *Athelwold!*

Athel. In losing thee, I lose a Guard of Honour!
Thy Presence here, might curb the swing of Fate!
Friends, always dear, are welcome most in woe!

[*Exeunt Athelwold and Ordgar.*

Enter Egbert to Ordelia.

Egb. Ordelia! brightest Star, in Beauty's Sphere!
Your *Egbert* cannot live, but where you shine;
Courts, wanting you, are Desarts!

Ord. O, my Lord!
The Tongues of Courtiers are like Jugglers Hands:
Your Briskness of Address is only us'd,
To make your Art admir'd by Lookers on,
The better, while we wonder at your Skill,
To pass false Play upon us.

Egb. Ladies Beauty,
Is Charm enough to ruin Worlds of Lovers;
But where 'tis strengthen'd with a Wit, like yours,
All, but the Blind, and Deaf, must be undone!

Ord. You know, my Lord, to talk of Love to me,
Is to discharge those Arrows in the Air,
Which, aim'd at proper Marks, might win you Honour!
I am so great a Foe to Love, my Lord,
That was *Diana* really what we read her,
I shou'd devote my Person to her Service!

Egb. Your Beauty, and bright Form indeed, profess
A Nymph, more lovely, than e'er grac'd that Goddess!

But

16 ELFRID : Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

But there's a Swain, I doubt, whose pow'rful Lays
 Wou'd charm you from that *Sylvan* Resolution !
 The happy *Ordgar* wou'd not quit you so !

Ord. I never gave my Heart to *Ordgar*'s keeping,
 But am as free, as Innocence can make me.

Egb. Make me the Keeper of that Innocence,
 'Twill lose no more by my possessing it;
 Than Jewels lose their Value, when lock'd up,
 And giv'n to Servants Care !

Ord. That Word lock'd up
 Forms an unlucky Emblem of my Fears ;
 The single State, my Lord, like those great Kings,
 Who, with despotick Rule, exert their Pow'r,
 Knows no Dependance, and, thence, knows no Fear ;
 But, unconfin'd by Laws, in boundless Sway,
 Feasts upon Pleasures, Glories, Charms, and Joys
 The common Wealth of Marriage cannot tast,
 But with restrain'd Permission !

Egb. Yet those Kings,
 Who rashly on their own free Wills depend,
 And scorn the useful Aid of Counsellors,
 Are often known to break their Spring of Pow'r,
 By skrewing it too high : A Partner therefore,
 Not to control, but guide the Blifs of Life,
 Cou'd be no weight on Happiness.

Ord. But then,
 Kings still have Pow'r to chuse their Counsellors,
 Tho' they submit to take them. I have chosen.

Egb. And your fix'd Choice is *Ordgar* ?

Ord. Nay, why so ?
 I do not tell you 'tis a Man I chose.

Egb. You cannot need a female Counsellor,
 For your whole Sexes Wisdom meets in you !
 I know 'tis *Ordgar*, for your Blushes say so ;
 And what can *Ordgar* do, to gain your Love,
 Which *Egbert* wou'd not double ?

Ord. Wou'd you then
 Oblige me in the Grant of one Request ?

Egb. Bid me bear Torments, and I'll bear 'em smiling:
Bid me lose Life to find your Love, and Life
Is doubly found by losing.

Ord. My Request
Wears no such rigid Keeness, as these do;
But you must swear to keep the Secret well!

Egb. Forfake me all the Joys of Heav'n, and Earth,
When I forsake the Faith I pledge to keep it!

Ord. Enough! my Sister's Husband is grown jealous,
That, if the King shou'd see her, Love wou'd follow,
And, therefore, fearing Danger, has injoin'd her
Not to appear, till the King leaves the House;
While I must take her Name, and Duty on me:
This Project, none but you can render vain;
And 'tis that Secret, you have sworn to keep.

Egb. Tho' I've more Cause for Fear, than *Athelwold*,
Yet Love, and Honour sway my mind so far,
That I will favour the Deceit, to please
The beautiful Deceiver; ——— See! the King!

Enter the King, Athelwold, and Ordgar.

Athel. The King, my Dear, who ever honours me,
Beyond my Hope, or Merit, wou'd prevent you
From paying Majesty the Duty, due,
And forc'd me to direct to your Apartment.

Ord. If kneeling thus, before a Prince, like you, [*Kneeling.*
Cou'd pay the thousandth Part of that true Duty,
I owe your Majesty, I'd kneel for ever;
But outward Signs of Duty oft deceive,
True Gratitude is seated in the Soul,
And there mine flames, with a just sense of all,
That Love, and Loyalty can bid me pay you!

King. We must not see so fair a Subject kneel,
Beauty, and Worth, like yours, shou'd be kneel'd to!
We cou'd not ride so near your Residence,
And not take time to make a friendly Visit!

Ord. I wish, the Entertainment, you'll receive,
Cou'd equal the high Honour, you bestow;

18 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

But rural Cottages are unprepar'd
To welcome mighty Princes, such as You!

King. Tho' sweet Retirements shade you, Fame took Care
To be the happy Bearer of your Praises;
And in that sense, at least, the lovely *Elfrid*
Has been no stranger to the Court, and me!

Ord. It was a Blessing, that in any sense,
So poor a Thing, as I, cou'd reach your Notice!

Ord. [*Aside.*] *Elfrid* her self cou'd not look more like *Elfrid*,
Nor more enchant the Eyes of all, who see her!

Athel. [*Aside.*] So well she acts her Part, that Hope revives!

King. I think, the Air's reputed good, you breath in!

Athel. Your Majesty's whole Kingdom knows no better.

King. I'm sorry for it; were it less so, sure
'Twould less confine you here! Peace too befriends you!
You cou'd not be thus spar'd in rougher Times,
For War wou'd borrow you from Love, to serve us!
Wou'd you part with him, Lady?

Ord. Oh! Sir, yes;
When Glory calls, brave Men spring loose from Love;
And I possess a kind of *Roman* Soul,
Which tells me, Publick Safety is a Plea,
Shou'd silence Private Int'rest!

King. While you live,
Britain can never want her *Boadicea*!
I hope, tho' Business interrupts us now,
You will not give us Reason to complain,
That you seek Absence from us, while we trouble you.

Ord. Duty, Great Sir, and Inclination both,
Forbid me that Omission!

King. Pardon us,
Affairs of State are Tyrants o'er King's Pleasures.

Ord. Alas! Poor Prince! he seems to feel his Fate! [*Exeunt all but*
Kings are at best but Royal Slaves of State! (Ord.
Who o'er wide Worlds exert a fancied sway,
While their own Passion's Power themselves obey. [*Exit.*

A C T

A C T III.

S C E N E. *A Garden, Elfrid, and Ordelia.*

Elf. WHY, at an Hour, so late, so odd as this,
Shou'd my *Ordelia* chuse a Garden Conference ?

Ord. Because the Garden yields such private Walks,
That we may talk unseen, or unsuspected ;
Your Husband's Honour, Safety, Happiness,
Depend on your Concealment from the King.

Elf. Alas ! Experience has instructed him
How to conceal me from the King you name :
Ought I to hold his Happiness so dear,
Who turn'd the Tide of mine, when its full Flow
Bore Crowns and Scepters towards me ? — No, — *Ordelia!*
This *Athelwold* has wrong'd me, basely wrong'd me.

Ord. The Faults of Love are Nature's kindest Errors ;
Had he not lov'd, he had not injur'd you,
If stepping in betwixt a Crown, and you
May be reputed Injury — Oh ! *Elfrid,*
We view the outward Glories of a Crown ;
But, dazled with the Lustre, cannot see
The Thorns which line it, and whose painful Prickings
Embitter all the pompous Sweets of Empire.
Happier the Wretch who at his daily Toils
Sweats for his homely Dinner, — than a King
In all the dang'rous Pomp of Royalty !
He knows no Fears of State, to damp his Joys ;
No Treason shakes the humble Bed he lyes on ;
Nor dreads he Poison in his peaceful Bowls ;
He sleeps contented in the guileless Arms
Of his unjealous Consort ; ——— frightful Dreams
Break not his Slumbers with the shocking sight
Of bloody Daggers, and Ideal Murders.
True, he's a Stranger to the Pow'r of Kings,
But then again, he is as much a Stranger
To Kingly Cares, and Miseries —

20 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Elf. Fie, *Ordelia,*

Who taught thee to blaspheme the Heav'n of Pow'r ?
With Arguments, the distant Vulgar use,
Whose growling Souls too prostrate to attain,
Vilely traduce the Blifs of Majesty ?

A King has something more than Earthly in him.:

There's but a Step betwixt a God and him !

Oh ! there's a kind of Pleasure in Supremacy,
No more to be express'd, than to be equall'd !

And they, who praise not, nay, who wish not Empire,
Are such mean, lowly, half-created Souls,
As are too blind to see, or weak to guide

The flaming Wheels of the bright Car of Pow'r.

Ord. Had *Craesus* thought so, when the destin'd Faggots
Began with rising Flames to singe his Royalty,
He had not in the Anguish of his Soul
Remember'd *Solon's* Counsel. ———

Elf. Those stale Fables

Will fright a Noble Soul from Search of Empire,
No more than one brave General's Fall in Battel
Shou'd check the Beat of Valour in his Mind,
Who takes his glorious Station. Fate finds all ;
Kings are but Men, and Miseries may reach them ;
But they, like strong-built Forts, maintain their Safety
Long after undefended Countries yield.

Ord. Ah ! no ! the Heights they stand on, double Danger,
Tempests, and Thunderbolts, and Earthquakes shocks,
O'erwhelm huge Mountains with their dreadful force,
While the low Valleys, and the humble Plains
Possess untroubled Safety.

Elf. Still you reason,
And still my Soul flies back from Reason's Call,
To the more tempting Musick of Ambition.

Ord. Oh ! 'tis a *Syren's* Voice Ambition sings with ;
Why will you listen, when 'tis Ruin calls you ?
Lean not your Mind an Inch from Vertue, *Elfrid* :
Vice has the Art of the false Crocodile ;
If you but slumber in the Boat of Honour,

'Twill twist its jointed Tail of Venom round you,
And draw you downward thro' a Gulph of Mischief.

Elf. What! do you take take the Liberty to doubt,
I can abandon Honour?

Ord. No, not so,

But they, who Counsel best, may hear Advice,
For Caution is no burden to the Wisest.

Elf. You wou'd do well to look to your own Actions;
I judge your Caution too officious, Sister,
I find, in spite of Reasons clearest Opticks,
Some People can be blind to their own Faults;
But when another's Failings are their Object,
The dimmest Eye of Folly sees to Censure.

Ord. If I've offended you, your Pardon, Sister,
'Twas not the Crime of Jealousie, but Zeal;
Love led me to the Guilt, and Love I hope
Will guide you readily to its Forgiveness:
Perhaps my Absence might not be unwelcome,
I have heard say, that when the Mind's disturb'd,
The fittest Cure is Balmy Solitude. [Exit *Ordèlia.*

Elf. [*Alone.*] Alas! she prob'd the Wound too deep to cure it,
For Sin is too deform'd to see her self;
Were this King gone! or wou'd he never go!
I know not which of those to wish with Joy,
My Vertue points me one, one my Desire;
Oh, Conscience! grow more strong, or yield thee quite,
Shall I, or shall I not, consent to Sin?
Answer me Heav'n! But hold, what will Heav'n answer?
Answer me Hell; for Heav'n will damn Desire,
And be a Hell within me — Ha! he comes,
By all the hopes of Nature *Edgar* comes,
'The mighty Monarch comes; my Guardian Angel,
Knocks at my Breast, and says, he comes for thee;
Lose this Occasion, and lose hope for ever;
I'll walk the other way, and plead with Nature,
Or rather Nature shall contend with Duty. [Exit *Elfrid.*

Enter the King and Egbert.

King. Oh! never urge it, *Egbert*, she has Charms,

Wou'd

Wou'd make a Bearded Hermit quit his Cell,
And own no God, but Beauty.

Egb. She has Charms,
But there are Faces fairer far than hers.

King. Oh! she has that vast Beauty of the Mind,
The loveliest Face in Nature cannot equal ;
Faces are gilded Baits to catch Fools Hearts with,
The superficial Varnishes to hide
The Flaws that lurk beneath them——Wit like hers,
And that engaging Air of artless Innocence,
Shall strike the Heart, ten thousand Faces reach not.

Egb. [*Aside.*] By Heav'n he loves her! I'll discover all,
The stronger Poison must expel the weaker.

King. And then such modest Blushes grace her Speech,
Such winning Gestures wait on what she utters,
He must not be a Man, who, seeing her,
Envys not *Athelwold* her sweet Possession.

Egb. True! she has worth! — but, oh! she has a Sister,
As far beyond her——every way beyond her,
As Mountain Snow beyond the Fogs of Morning.

King. A Sister, say'st thou, fairer than her self?

Egb. O, every way more Charming, Sir, than she ;
She has a Sister, who, like Forest Pines,
Stands with an aspect of erected Majesty ;
But then so Condescending, and so kind,
As if her humble Soul was form'd to prove,
Pride dwells not in appearance——Then her Face
Has all the Brightness of an Angels Look,
Without the Terror of it.——Her soft Voice,
Like sudden Musick, heard at dead of Night,
Wakes wonder, that our Pleasure may dissolve it ;
The Rainbow has no White and Red, to match her,
Lilies grow paler, and the Roses blush,
To see themselves worn by her for ; their shame,
Not her own Ornament ; —— Her rising Breasts,
Like Snow-Top'd Mountains, mark her *Eden's* Confines,
Betwixt them lies a Plain, so lovely fair,
It seems the milky way to Beauties Heav'n!

King.

King. Can Stars, like this, shine in my Hemisphere,
And I not see their Glory, — sure thou dream'st,
Fairer than *Elfrid*, say'st thou?

Egb. Not than *Elfrid*,
For how can *Elfrid* be more fair than *Elfrid*?

King. Art thou grown mad? — Thou saidst this beautiful Creature
Was *Elfrid's* Sister, and more fair than *Elfrid*. (ture

Egb. Fairer she is by far than *Elfrid* is,
If she be *Elfrid's* self, whom we call *Elfrid*.

King. Hell! Dost thou mock me with a Womans Riddle?

Egb. Women themselves are Riddles; few they are,
Who can unfold them rightly.

King. Hast thou meaning?
Or dost thou dally with thy Sov'reigns Passions?

Egb. [*Aside.*] I am advanc'd too far for a Retreat,
Athelwold shares too much of the King's Favour,
And Love and Policy conspire his Ruin.

[*To the King.*] In short your Majesty has not seen *Elfrid*;
For *Athelwold*, remembering the Deceit
By which he gain'd her, fear'd your just Resentment;
And won the kind *Ordelia*, *Elfrid's* Sister,
To personate the Wife he fear'd to lose.

King. What! has the Man I trusted, wrong'd me so?
O Love! thy Power is uncontroul'd indeed,
If it can make an honest Man a Villain!

Egb. I dare not plead to save his Life, who thus
Has prov'd disloyal to a Prince so Gracious.

King. Thou art too zealous in thy Sov'reign's Cause;
I wou'd not touch so brave a Subject's Life,
For all the Female Charms the World cou'd give me;
I will not strain Revenge beyond its Cause;
Love taught the Subject to betray his King,
And Love shall teach the King to wrong his Subject.
If this be Sin, 'tis sure the smallest Sin
Unbounded Power can know; and Gracious Heav'n
Alleviates Punishments for Crimes of Love,
When urg'd by Provocations great as mine.

Egb.

24 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Egb. Ha! see! lest you shou'd doubt I said too much
In praise of *Elfrid's* Charms, kind Heav'n has sent her
To prove her Worth, and my Sincerity.

King. If that be she, who yonder pensive comes,
She seems some fair Inhabitant of Heav'n,
Shot with a falling Star from yon bright Regions,
To light the World below! ———

Egb. Observe her, Sir,
She takes our Walk, and musing, sees us not.

Enter Elfrid in a melancholy Posture.

Elf. I'll curb my longing Glances, lest they judge
'Tis Choice, not Chance, that guides me: Oh! my Soul!
He bears a wond'rous Magick in his Person!

King. If to disturb so fair a Creatures Thoughts
May be forgiven a Prince, who wond'ring sees you,
You will not change that lovely Countenance,
To frown on Interruption.

Elf. Heav'ns defend me!
I little thought I shou'd meet Strangers here,
I came to seek a solitary Walk.

King. Who can blame you for loving Solitude,
When Earth's too poor to furnish a Companion,
That may deserve the Blessing of your Converse.

Elf. The Words you speak to me, serve but to prove
You're us'd to talk with Ladies far above me;
I am a Guest, like you, to the kind Owner
Of these fair Gardens.

King. Ah! too well I know you,
Too well, because I do not know you mine:
I am your King; but oh! how vainly so,
When you enslave the Power you shou'd obey!

Elf. [*Kneeling.*] Oh, Royal Sir! since I perceive you know me,
Tho' by what fatal means is yet a Secret;
Accept my prostrate Debt of Duty thus:
But oh! if ever Pity touch'd your Breast,
If the Intreaties of a wretched Woman
Have Pow'r to pierce the Ear of Majesty,
Forget that I, unhappy I, am *Elfrid*,

And for the sake of my dear *Athelwold*,
 Who only cou'd have forc'd me to deceive you ;
 For his sake pity me, and him for mine,
 And do not, — do not let him know you saw me.
 Next, oh ! forgive me, if I fly your sight,
 Since Duty fights with Duty, and compels me. [*Rises and goes out.*]

King. By Heav'n, 'till now I never saw Perfection ;
 All the gay Bubbles of the worthless Court
 Were but the Shadows to this Queen of Beauty.
 Oh, *Athelwold* ! I feel thy Treason now !
 What shall I do to gain her ? For tho' Ghosts
 Shou'd shake their shrowded Forms to bid me stand ;
 Tho' Thunder roar'd to check me, and the Earth
 Gap'd with a Grave-like Yawn 'twixt her and me,
 I cou'd not, wou'd not stop, 'till I possess'd her.

Egb. I cannot wonder at, nor blame your Vow ;
 But open Violation will not suit
 That Godlike Justice you are greatly fam'd for.
 Caution and Prudence must assist the Race
 A Man wou'd fairly win ; — a little Patience
 Will help Contrivance, and Contrivance gain her.

King. Patience ! thou Lump of Ice ! a Curse on Patience !
 Preach Patience to the Ocean when it roars ;
 When Cities burn, climb to the Tops of Tow'rs,
 And thence preach Patience to the Wind-born Flames ;
 Bid Hostile Armies, rushing on to Blood,
 Stand still, and listen to the Whine of Patience :
 But to name Patience to a Love like mine,
 Is to give tasteless Drops to Men in Fevers.
 I am on Fire within me, and the Streams
 Of gushing Rivers might rush thro' me now,
 And fail to quench my burning.

Egb. Pray be calm,
 E'er many hours are past, I'll find some means
 To bring your Majesty to *Elfrid's* Chamber ;
 There, while the warm Impressions of Resentment
 Whisper her Soul how much her Husband wrong'd her,

E

Touch

26 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Touch that String artfully, 'twill jarr within her,
And echo Notes fit for Revenge and Pleasure.

King. Thou talk'st of hours, when Moments are too tedious ;
A Leaden Age rolls on in every minute.

Egb. Ha ! I have form'd a Notion in my Soul,
That will compleat your Joy soon as you wish it.

King. Give the great Embryo Birth, and share my Kingdom.

Egb. Earl *Athelwold*, among his numerous Vertues,
Cannot find one that's proof 'gainst Flattery ;

For Flattery's an unseen Enemy,

And ruins gallant Souls, as Poisons kill,
Which Villains mix with Consecrated Wine,

So to be swallow'd as an holy Cordial :

Arm'd then with Flatt'ry, seek this *Athelwold*,

Praise him, and talk him into a Conceit,

That he of all your Subjects is the Man

In whom alone you safely can confide ;

Then, when his Mind, work'd to a secret Pride

Is fit for your Impression, mildly tell him,

It does not suit a kind Guests Gratitude

To send his gen'rous Host on Services

So full of Trouble ; ——— But your Honour urges,

And having weigh'd Lord *Ordgar's* Inexperience,

You find him no ways equal to the Charge

Of treating with a Foe so wise as *Ludwall* :

So take the Liberty to fix on him,

And press him to Departure.

King. He'll suspect me,

He's a discerning Man, the Turn's too sudden,

And the Request too odd to pass unguess'd.

Egb. My Life shall answer it, it passes on him ;

But still the Wheel that moves it must be Flatt'ry.

Think on the glorious Opportunity

His sudden absence leaves you ; and mean while

The Task be mine to entertain *Ordelia*,

With whom Lord *Ordgar's* Jealousy of me

Can never fail to keep him. ——— Thus your Majesty

Making right use of all these Circumstances,

May find fair *Elfrid* no severe *Diana* ;
 And so enjoy the utmost Blifs you wish
 Without the Publick Infamy. ———

King. Oh, *Egbert* !

Thou art a glorious Villain, *Judas's* self
 Was a faint Type of thee, thou Prince of Mischief.
 Come, let us in : I'll seek Earl *Athelwold*,
 Nor lose a moment's time to prove thy Skill.
 Witness ye Heav'ns I ne'er offended Vertue,
 But where the strongest Passion Nature feels
 Inclin'd, nay forc'd my backward Soul to sin.
 Tyrants may boast their Pow'r ; ——— but oh ! they prove
 Kings who enslave the World, are Slaves to Love. ———

A C T IV.

A Gallery ; Athelwold and Ordgar.

Ordg. **W**HY I have known thee bear thy Wounds, and smile
 While the barb'd Arrow torn from thy brave Flesh
 Drew mangled Sinews with it, — as if Death
 Dreadful to others, had been sport to thee ;
 Yet now thou fall'st so much below thy self,
 The very wind of Fear blows down thy Courage.

Athel. Have I not more than common Cause to doubt
 The King has some Design against my Honour,
 To send me thus abruptly from my House
 With a Pretence so false ; the vertuous Prince
 Unus'd to Acts of Baseness, spoke with Pain,
 And felt his falt'ring Tongue betray his Purpose.

Ordg. Confusion on that downy Devil, Love !
 Who thus can make a Boy of a known Hero.
 Death ! I shall lose all Patience ; has the King
 So much as seen, or heard, or thought of *Elfrid* ?
 Oh Hell ! that when the Vertue of a Wife
 Keeps a Man's real Honour out of danger,

28 ELFRID : Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

The Plague of Jealousy must be call'd in,
To make him an imaginary Cuckold!

Athel. Oh, *Ordgar!* bear the failings of thy Friend;
Coud'st thou but feel the weight that galls my Soul,
Pity wou'd teach thy Reason to forgive me!
I wou'd not doubt the Vertue of my Wife,
But something here assures me 'twill be try'd
With more than common strength; — and let me tell you,
Temptation is a pow'rful Plea with Women.
I knew the Guilt of Treachery to obtain her.
Vertue is Vice, when 'tis thro' Vice we reach it;
Like unslak'd Lime, Sin lies unfelt, and easy,
While Mirth and Gladness keep it dry within us;
But when Remorse has seiz'd our guilty Souls,
And Sorrow's Tears have rain'd their Streams upon it,
The moist Incentive strikes the limy Heap,
And rouses all its Fires to scorch our Bosoms.

Ordg. If Guilt has stain'd your Soul, the Dew of Mercy
Falls thick enough to wash those Stains away,
And re-establish all the Snow of Vertue.
Heav'n asks no more Atonement for great Sins
Than our Repentance; your Repentance then
Has long since rac'd out one so small as yours:
If Grief is vain, what vainer than to grieve;
If 'tis not vain, why let me know the Cure,
And I'll apply it with the Balm of Friendship;
While there was Hope, I laugh'd at thy Affliction;
But I now pity thee, to see thee sunk
In an eternal Lethargy of Folly.

Athel. I have no Friend but thee, on whom to lean,
If thou forsak'st me, I must sink indeed;
Thou wilt be happy in the sight of *Elfrid*,
When I am gone to make more room for Ruin;
Watch her with Eagles Eyes, for she's ambitious,
And they who slide upon Ambition's Ice
Sink into Vices, which they see and hate,
But move too swift to shun them.

Ordg.

Ordg. For my Friend

I will do more than ev'n that Friend can ask me ;
 Prevention of a Crime keeps Honour safe,
 But proves not Innocence ; *Elfrid* shall think
 No Eye observes her ; if she then forbears,
 Rest satisfy'd, she will forbear for ever ;
 The better to prepare for Observation,
 I will depart the House, as if disgusted
 At the new Choice the King has made of you ;
 But leave my Horses in your Keeper's Care,
 And coming back alone, enter again
 Thro' the back Gate, which you shall open privately,
 So, going to my Chamber, which you know
 Is opposite to *Elfrid's* ——— I unseen
 Can mark all Night what passes worth observing,
 And be your Ladies Guardian. ———

Athel. Friend indeed !

This is a proof of Love, which I wou'd pay
 With Show'rs of Blessings, cou'd I claim from Heav'n,
 What I can only pray for ; ——— but the King,
 The King, my *Ordgar*, will resent thy Absence.

Ordg. Oh ! let not that disturb you, *Ordgar's* Soul
 Was never Pandar to his Person's Pride ;
 Courts may invite great Minds, but awe them not.
 Farewell, and know I undertake this Task,
 But to confute your Fears, not prove them just. [*Exit Ordgar.*

Athel. The Night advances with a heavy pace,
 And hangs upon the Verge of Apprehension,
 With such a deadly weight, and climbing slowness,
 As in portentous Terror, speaks her Womb
 Impregnated with Births of dreadful Mischief !
 I must be gone with Steps more swift than hers,
 But I will take a Kiss or two from *Elfrid*,
 To live on in the Famine of my Absence ;
 And see she's here ! ——— So after cloudy Storms
 Outbreaks the glorious Sun to comfort Mariners.

Enter Elfrid.

Elf. They tell me most unwelcome News, my Lord,
 That you must leave me.

Athel.

Athel. Ay, this moment leave thee;

Leave thee perhaps for ever, ever *Elfrid.*

That's a long Date for ever, is't not *Elfrid?*

Elf. The King's unkind to rob me of a moment,
Pray when returns my Love?

Athel. Ah! when indeed?

If Love has left your Breast, ah! when returns it?

Elf. I ask'd how long your Journey is to be?

Athel. Alas! I cannot tell thee. This sad Night
Leads me to lye at my first Stage of Woe;
And Woes long Road has many, many Stages.

Elf. For Heav'n's sake, my Dear Lord, answer not thus,
My Tears will drown me.

Athel. Oh! my Souls best half,

Lose not one pearly Drop of that rich Dew,
Which, shed on Sorrow, wou'd make Sorrow Joy,
And Pleasure spring from Misery; — Oh *Elfrid!*
I must be some whole Days in mournful Absence,
And all the Hours in Lovers Days are Ages.

Elf. Till you return, I shall be deaf to Joy,
As Adders are to Musick, pining Grief
Will tell away the sleepless Nights in Turnings;
I shall lie wishing for the Morning Light,
Yet curse its sad Arrival when it comes,
Because it cannot shew me *Athelwold.*

Athel. Wilt thou not see the King when I am gone?

Elf. Alas! I wou'd not longer wish for sight,
Than sight cou'd dwell on thee; when thou art gone
My Eyes, grown useless, shall be clos'd in Night;
As Swallows fly not when the Summer leaves them.

Athel. And till my Arms again thus clasp thee to me,
If I embrace a Friend I long have lost,
Or throw me on the Neck of one more Dear
Than all, but thee, my Dearest Earthly Blessing,
Yet will thy Absence make my Joy a Shadow,
And I shall taste an Unsubstantial Blifs,
Like one who clasps a Ghost and hugs but Air.

Elf. You'll find some other She, in your long Absence,
Whose greater Merit will make mine forgot.

Athel. Alas ! how can I see to find another
When I have lost my self? or being lost,
What cou'd the gaining others profit me?
Thou wilt not see the King?

Elf. So blefs me Heav'n,
As I shall keep, or break that Promise made !

Athel. This Kiss shall seal the kind engaging Oath,
And this, and this, Oh ! I cou'd linger Ages,
But Duty, barb'rous Duty, calls from Love.
Farewel, my Dear, I go, and yet I cannot,
I must return for one Kiss more, and now
Farewel, I go indeed, — Remember, *Elfrid.* [*Exit Athelwold.*]

Elf. Remember, *Elfrid*, was the Word he left me;
Yes, Yes, I will remember, *Athelwold*,
I will remember, that the finding thee
Lost me an Empire; and in that Remembrance
A thousand Tongues bid me remember too,
How Heav'n, by calling thee away so strangely,
Has smil'd on Opportunity and me!
Oh, Opportunity, thou bane of Vertue !
What Woman can resist thee ! I'll retire,
And wait a moment till my Husband's gone,
Then, when the King comes thro' the Gallery,
Borrow the Drefs of Chance once more to friend me,
And finish the great Task begun so happily. [*Exit Elfrid.*]

Enter the King and Egbert.

King. But to depart so strangely, and so soon,
Nor take a decent leave, is such a proof
Of proud Disgust, as I imagin'd *Ordgar*
Cou'd not have shewn me.

Egb. It surpriz'd me too,
But by this happy Chance your Love-blest Fate
Has freed you from a watchful Man's Inspection.

King. By all the Hopes of Love that's greatly thought !
But have you publish'd fully thro' the House,
The Illness 'twill be proper to pretend,
And the Command, that none shou'd stir this way ?

Egb.

32 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Egb. I gave the Orders with such feign'd Concern,
That the whole Family are struck with Terror ;
The Wretches scarce durst breath for fear you hear them ;
They walk below as if they trod on Glass,
And fear'd to wound their Feet by breaking thro' it ;
They whisper to their Horses in the Stable,
If a Dog howls they stab him.

King. All things then
Seem to invite me to the Throne of Pleasure ;
And, to come thither, lead to *Elfrid's* Chamber.

Egb. You cannot err, just now the lovely Fair,
Willing to be alone, dismiss'd her Maids,
With charge to wait her Call, e'er they return'd.

King. That's still another smiling Glance of Fortune ;
Fail not to wait me at the time appointed.

Egb. I shall be punctual, as the Sun to Time.

King. Assist ye soft Desires that fan Loves Flame,
Vertue lye silent in fair *Elfrid's* Soul,
And let her snowy Breast be all inspir'd,
With the kind yielding Motives of Compliance.

Smile, God of Love ! if such a God there be,
Smile from thy Heav'n on my vast Hopes and me ;
Soft as her Bosom let her Passions prove,
And melt her Frosts of Fear to Floods of Love !

So shall Revenge, and Love thus jointly giv'n,
Make this vile Earth a momentary Heav'n. [*Exit the King.*

Egb. [*Alone.*] Well did the King observe how Midwife For-
Helps the great Birth of Love with which he labours, (tune,
And I shou'd be more blind to my good Fate
Than Owls to Noon, did not I see it shine
With Rays of happy Prospect ; now *Ordelia*
Sits in her Chamber, like the Mate-left Turtle,
I'll tune my Falcon's Voice of Roughness to her,
And force her to one Passion by another ;
But see, as if my Guardian Angel brought her,
She comes, oh ! may the Omen prove propitious.

Enter Ordelia.

I'm well prevented, Lady, I was coming

To bring you an unwelcome Piece of News,
Ordgar has left his Mistress, and his King.

Ord. I answer not, my Lord, for *Ordgar's* Actions ;
 But you might well have spar'd the Pains you take,
 I heard, and have been sorry for't already.

Egb. Can you be sorry for his Faults you love not ?
 Ah ! fair Deceiver ! you convince me now !

Ord. Since the full Symptoms of a barb'rous Triumph
 Swell on thy Eye-balls with a sparkling Joy,
 To find, Lord *Ordgar* has incens'd the King,
 Tho' he had Cause sufficient for Resentment,
 Which, I believe, was owing to thy Counsel ;
 Know, that I love him more than I hate thee,
 And sure ! that speaks superlative Excess ;
 For thou hast such mean Artifice within thee,
 As makes thee odious to the World, and me.

Egb. Lovers who hope can bear far more than this.

Ord. Can thy detested Love hope ought from me ?
 Thou art Love's Scare-Crow ; Pleasure flies before thee,
 As Doves before the Swoop of tow'ring Falcons.

Egb. I can hear this, and more, disdainful Maid ;
 But know, I'll place it to your *Ordgar's* score,
 He shall make large amends ; ——— nay, do not frown,
 For I can force him to it. ———

Ord. Thou force *Ordgar* !
 The Mountain-Goat wou'd sooner force the Lion,
 How wou'dst thou force him ? With thy Sword thou dar'st not.

Egb. I will not use my Sword, I need not, Madam,
 His late Affront to Majesty suffices,
 I can improve a Theme less copious far
 To the Destruction of a favour'd Rival.

Ord. Thou wilt not, dar'st not act a Deed so base,
 He'll stab thee for't, and punish here on Earth
 Thy Villain-body ; then thy broiling Soul
 Shall howl Atonement in a Hell of Torments.

Egb. Nay, if your *Ordgar's* Ruin will not move you,
 I have another Card of Fate to play ;
 I will betray the Secret to the King,

34 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

He can find means to punish your Deceit,
And *Atbelwold's* base Robbery of *Elfrid*.

Ord. Why, thou might'st keep a School of Villainy
For Devils to learn to sin in: Tell me, Fiend,
Dost thou not feel a thing call'd Conscience in thee?
Will not whole Houses Ruin move thy Pity?

Egb. Yes, I have Pity, and a Conscience too;
But my Despair of you has froze them both,
Nothing but the warm Blessing of your Love
Can thaw their Influence in me.

Ord. Nothing else!
Can nothing but my Love make thee less Villain,
Than Nature form'd thee for? ——— Tell me, dear Devil,
Say, wand'ring Prince of Hell, disguis'd in Courtier,
Can no less Sacrifice than Love content thee?

Egb. No less than all your Love, or all your Person,
Person and Love with me have the same meaning;
Or if you can divide them to my liking,
I'll be content with either.

Ord. Perish all ———
Perish *Ordelia* in her self, and Friends,
Rather than stoop to perish in her Honour!
Avoid me, Hell-hound, as thou wou'dst thy Fate,
Thy sight, like Basilisks, destroys by looking;
Thy Touch infects like Poison, and thy Voice,
Like the foreboding Skriech-Owls, sounds to Mischiefs;
Thy ev'ry Sense is venomous as Asps,
And brings Damnation with thee: Fly me, Monster. — [*Exit. Ord.*]

Egb. [*Alone.*] Not all this Rage shall shake the Hope within me,
'Tis but the Blaze before extinguish'd Hatred,
The loudest Blast, that speaks a Calm approaching:
I'll after her, she has the Hook within her,
And plunging will but weaken her Resistance. [*Exit after her.*]

Enter Ordgar alone.

Ordg. I enter'd with such silence, and such haste,
That Notice neither met, nor overtook me;

I heard a Voice but now, methoughts *Ordelia's*,
 She must not see me here, I'll to my Post ;
 For, having undertaken the fond Task,
 Friendship commands my Reason to be blind
 To the soft Folly of the thing design'd.

[*Exit Ordgar.*]

A C T V.

The SCENE continues. Enter Ordgar. The Stage wholly darken'd, with Thunder and Lightning.

Ordg. SO vast a Change in the bright Face of Heav'n
 Ne'er made Earth wonder ; for the silver Moon
 Wreaths her pale Horns with folds of mourning Sable,
 As if some Tragedy were to be play'd
 In Heav'n's high Theatre ; whose shifting Scenes
 Have fill'd the World with such a solid Darkness,
 The Sun will fail to pierce it ; and the Wings
 Of flutt'ring Ravens beat against the Windows,
 While Birds of Omen with foreboding Screams
 Make Horror's self more horrid ; Ev'ry Board
 Seems to send up a Groan, when trod upon ;
 Strange colour'd Lights are hurried to and fro
 Without a hand to guide them, whose pale Flames
 Serve not for Light, but Terror. — What this means,
 My Soul, too weak to tell, forbears to guess at!

Enter Athelwold feeling his Way.

Athel. The House is silent, as if Death reign'd in it !
 Such silence doubles Horror !

Ordg. Who's there ?

Athel. *Ordgar !*

Ordg. Who calls me with a Voice so like my Friend's ?

Athel. 'Tis I, thy *Athelwold*.

Ordg. What brings you back?

Athel. May I speak here with safety?

Ordg. None can hear,

No Mortal treads this Floor besides us two.

Athel. Oh, *Odgar!* Fate designs some wondrous Mischief.
 Soon as I left my Wife, I strait took Horse,
 And spurr'd full speed directly thro' that Road
 Which leads to the wide Heath, that lies between
 The Wood of *Beeches*, and my Park's West-entrance.
 No sooner had I gain'd the open Common,
 But such a Darkness shut the Eye of Heav'n,
 As made sight useless, and a storm of Rain
 Beat in my Face with an impetuous fury,
 Driv'n by a rising Wind, that whistled round me;
 And ever, and anon, a dreadful Peal
 Of rattling Thunder burst the Walls of Heav'n,
 And drove the flashing Lightning thro' the Gloom
 With crooked Keeness, and portentous Horror.
 I spurr'd in vain; for still the more I strove,
 The Horse more startled at the Storm's Increase,
 Turn'd sidelong to the Weather, 'till at last
 All on a sudden, up he bounded backward,
 And lighting roughly on the slipp'ry Ground,
 Fell, and with angry hoofs kick'd at the Air.

Ordg. A strange Misfortune! sure this Fall has bruise'd you.

Athel. Alas! Ten thousand thousand Falls, my *Ordgar*,
 Wou'd fail with all their force to bruise my Body
 So much as this one Fall has bruise'd my Soul:
 For — oh! my Nature shrinks at the Rememb'rance!
 And Courage shakes within me! — As I rose,
 And stood surpriz'd, I felt a sudden Force,
 Which, like the stiff cold hand of a dead Friend,
 Touch'd me behind, and pull'd me gently backward;
 I turn'd, and oh! amazing Sight! — beheld
 The shrouded Ghost of my dear aged Father;
 In the sad posture of a Man who mourns!
 The Phantom stood, and wrung its hands before me,

The Head, in speechless gestures, thus ——— and thus,
 Seem'd willing, but unable to advise me;
 And while my knocking Knees bent to the Earth,
 That in the posture of an awful Duty,
 I might desire to know the mighty Cause,
 Which broke the peaceful Marble he was laid in,
 To send him back to Earth in this strange Form,
 Ev'n while the half-born Words dy'd on my Tongue,
 He seem'd to weep, groan'd thrice and vanish'd from me.

Ordg. Prodigious! and amazing! vanish'd thus?

Athel. Vanish'd, and left a Heart of Ice within me;
 I ventur'd to remount my Horse, and rode
 Swift, as the Gloom permitted, back again;
 I enter'd at the Gate, which you left open,
 And pass'd unnoted. ——— Now, my *Ordgar*, say,
 What strange Discoveries hast thou made? ——— Oh! tell me,
 For sure this War of Nature must mean something.

Ordg. A dreadful something sure! What e'er it be;
 But rest thou happy; Peace and Thou may meet;
 Good Heav'n preserve the King from these bad Omens!

Athel. I heard the Servants as I pass'd a Door,
 Where some were met, whisper in Words of Fear,
 As if the King were gone to Bed disorder'd.

Ordg. 'Tis highly probable, for since I came,
 No Tread of Man or Woman has been heard,
 Not a Mouse stirring this way; ——— Solemn Silence
 Has kept the guiltless Door of *Elfrid's* Chamber.

Athel. Then I am blest'd, then Heav'n is kind indeed;
 Let Omens upon Omens threaten now,
 Since *Elfrid's* Love and Vertue bid me fear not;
 Hark! is not that a Tread?

Ordg. The step speaks Man. ———

Athel. I wou'd not have him hear me, ——— I'll go round,
 And entring *Elfrid's* Chamber the back way,
 Surprize her with my Presence, and its Cause. ———

*As Athelwold goes off on one side the Stage, enter Egbert
 on the other.*

Egb. Hem! Hem! Sir, are you here?

Ordg.

38 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Ordg. Ha! 'tis a Voice
That seems to give a sign to one expected,
I'll answer him, — Hem, — Hem. —

Egb. My Lord the King?

Ordg. [*Aside.*] Ha! is it there you are? — Oh! Heil! — the

Egb. I met *Ordelia* when I left your Majesty, (faine.
And after long Entreaties had been vain
To win her Heart from *Ordgar*, told her plainly
Your Majesty took his late Act so ill,
That Banishment wou'd follow your Displeasure.
'This mov'd her Bosom with a War of Passions,
And if, while your Resentment now is warm,
Your Majesty wou'd banish for a while
That boy'strous Youth, whose Pride sullies his Worth,
I shou'd be happy in *Ordelia's* Love;
Absence wou'd teach her to forget my Rival;
And such a Punishment on *Ordgar* done
Wou'd teach some discontented great ones Duty.
If by my means you have, as sure you have,
Possess'd the Lovely *Elfrid*, be this Grant
The sole Reward it gains me.

Ordg. [*Aside.*] Oh, thou Villain! [*Drawing.*

Egb. Why is the Majesty of *England* silent?
What Joys, what Transports has fair *Elfrid* giv'n you?
Oh fill my Breast with some unheard of —

Ordg. [*stabbing him.*] Torture, —
There Hellhound! there, thou hast what suits thy Merit,
Down to the Devils, down, Hell is thy Home,
And thus I send thee thither. —

Egb. Curses find thee,
Tho' Death and Darknes hide thee from my Eyes. [*Dies.*

Ordg. Furies tear thee as thou hast torn my Quiet,
Down Devil, down, and tell the Prince of Darknes
Ordgar has sent a Fiend more black than he,
To fill the burning Throne of Hells Dominions:
Oh! what a shock has my poor Soul sustain'd!
Now *Athelwold!* Unhappy *Athelwold!*

Poor, Ruin'd, Lost, Undone Friend *Athelwold!*
 I can forgive thee now for all thy Fears;
 I was a Novice in the School of Nature,
 And had not learnt till now to spell a Villain;
 Night wears not all this hideous Dress for nothing.
 Oh! *Athelwold!* poor, wretched *Athelwold!*

Enter Ordelia with a Candle.

Ordelia! Dear *Ordelia!* thou art honest,
 Venture not one step farther, Hell reigns here,
 And Plagues will blast thy Footsteps.

Ord. *Ordgar* here!

Oh Prodigy! Methoughts I heard a noise,
 And snatch'd a Light to run ———

Ordg. Take the Light hence ———

For what has Light to do with Deeds of Darknes?
 Yet stay, 'twill guide me to my Friends Revenge,
 Oh! lead me to the King, this Monster King,
 And I'll rob Heav'n of Vengeance, Blood and Vengeance.

Ord. Alas! what strange Disorder shakes you thus?

Ordg. Look here, and let Death answer; Death! what's Death!
 What is one Death for such a List of Treasons?

Oh! that thou cou'dst but furnish me a Life
 For every damning Sin thy black Soul swell'd with,
 Thus wou'd I stab thee, thus, thus, kill thee Ages;

But I'll go seek the injur'd *Athelwold*,
 Revenge is sweetest to the wrong'd Mans Taste,

And his shou'd surfeit on it ——— [*Exit Ordgar snatching the
 Light from Ordelia.*

Ord. Bounteous Heav'n,
 Rain Mercy here, for sure whole Showrs must fall,
 Before this Stain of Murder disappears. — [*Runs out after
 Ordgar.*

Re-enter Athelwold in the Dark.

Athel. I knock'd, but *Elfrid* cou'd, or wou'd not hear me,
 A Leaden Weight of Fear hangs o my Soul;

Hark!

Hark! There's the Voice again; thrice has that Sound
 Rung thro' my Ears like some shrill Skream of Woe!
 And in my Father's Accents thrice pronounc'd
 The dark foreboding Words expect and bear.
 Sure he, who can bear Prodigies like these,
 These Racks of Terror, and these Stings of Conscience,
 These threatning Omens, these portentous Shockings,
 These dreadful Prologues to the Scenes of Fate,
 Will never shrink from Mischiefs keenest Edge,
 Nor the hudge Strides of formidable Horror.
 Why, what a Wreck of Heav'n and Earth is here,
 To usher in the Fall of one poor Mortal!
 Death is too common to need all this State,
 And the cold Graves kind Bosom lies as open
 To stateless Entrance, as to solemn Ruin.
 Hope is no more, and with Hope, Fear is dead;
 But hark! a Tread, perhaps 'tis *Elfrid* comes,
 I'll walk and meet her. ———

Enter the King, as from Elfrid's Chamber.

King. Oh! I hear thee, *Egbert*,
 Give me thy guiding Hand, this sudden Darkness
 Made my way difficult from *Elfrid's* Arms,
 Who wou'd not suffer me to bring a Light,
 Least I might so discover my stol'n Happiness.

Athel. Oh! that some Thunder-bolt wou'd strike thee dumb,
 And bless my Ears with Deafness.

King. What art thou,
 Who speak'st so like the Man, who wrong'd his Prince?

Athel. The wretched'st Husband, and most injur'd Subject
 Will teach your guilty Tongue to call me *Athelwold*.

King. How dard'st thou disobey my late Commands?

Athel. How dar'd you wrong a Man who loves Revenge?

King. Am I your King?

And have I giv'n you Honours after Honours,
 Titles on Titles, ———

Athel.

Atbel. Titles! Yes, — of Cuckold —
Hell! and Confusion! Were you King of Nature
Above the Pow'r of Fate, and wrong'd my Bed,
I wou'd lave Oceans dry, but I would reach you;
The Flames of Lightning shou'd not scorch me back,
Nor Thunder drive me from my just Revenge.

King. Thou dar'st not lift thy Arm to wound thy Prince.

Atbel. Dare I not, King? — Yes, by the Pow'rs of Heaven
I dare as much against thee, thus offending,
As I dar'd for thee; when this single Arm
Drove Hostile Squadrons of *Welch* Rebels back,
While thy fall'n Horse expos'd thy treach'rous Breast
To a whole Grove of Lances bent against thee;
Oh! Had I then, instead of saving, kill'd thee,
Instead of thee, I had preserv'd my Honour!

King. How is thy Honour lost?

Atbel. Damn the base Question,
Does not my Wife's Disloyalty lose Honour?

King. No; not thy Wife's, thy own Disloyalty
First lost thy Honour; if thou e'er hadst any;
Elfrid is mine, not thine, and pleas'd to hear it:
Nothing but that cou'd ease the Pain thou gav'st me.
But, Traitor, know, and let it grate thy Soul,
Thy Wife, repeating, that she let thy Hand
Pluck the first Flow'r from her rich Field of Beauty,
Has kindly own'd me Lord of that fair Garden,
And giv'n me free Possession of the whole,
With leave to Revel uncontrol'd, and often,
And guard my Paradise from Fiends like thee.

Atbel. I thank thee, thou hast rais'd me now indeed;
Draw, for my Sword shall see to thy false Heart,
Tho' my Eyes cannot find thee; — Lights here, Lights. [*Draws.*]

King. Slave! Know thy King.

Atbel. Damnation! all thy Majesty
Has lost the Sacred Pow'r that us'd to guard thee;
For Guilt debases Kings to common Sinners,
And common Punishments for injur'd Honour.

42 ELFRID: Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Shall strike thee thro' thy Shield of Royalty ;
Lights, Lights, here Lights! —

Enter Elfrid, surpriz'd, with a Light.

Elf. Tell me, here !

What direful Mischief has befall'n the King,
That this Noise reach'd my Chamber? — *Athelwold!* [*Starting.*

Athel. I thank thee Heav'n ; — and thus revenge my Wrongs ;
Die, fair foul Damner, die ; ——— and Shame die with thee.
[*Stabs Elfrid.*

Elf. Oh! let Revenge, so full, restore thy Peace!
And expiate the Guilt of thy lost *Elfrid.* [*She dies.*

King. Mourn Widow'd World! for Beauty dies with her,
Oh! she is gone! the Star of Love is fall'n,
And Pleasure withers in her flow'ry Blossom!
Thou, Traitor! shalt not live to boast her Murder!
Go —— Villain, follow her, —— her Ghost demands thee.
[*Stabs Athelwold.*

Athel. 'Twas an inglorious Blow! but 'twas a welcome one!
[*Supporting himself on his Sword.*

'Tis a kind Hand, that takes the only way
Thus to atone for what your unkind Heart
Has greatly wrong'd me in! —— Oh! Royal Sir!
Forgive the Transport, Rage and injur'd Love
Plung'd my Allegiance in, when my bold Tongue
Blasphem'd the holy Head of Majesty!
My Wrongs I pardon ; do you pardon yours,
And I shall look on Death as a kind Friend
Who draws a Curtain round my Bed of Sorrows!

King. Nay, thou hast touch'd me now with deep Repentance!
And thy forgiving me a wrong so great,
Forbids me the forgiving it my self.

Oh! live, my *Athelwold!* that future Good
May recompence the mighty Ills I've done thee!
I have no Subject left, when thou art gone,

Who

Who loves me more than Fortune! Thou art known!
 Proofs after Proofs have spoke thee brave and honest!
Athel. I had been honest, had not Love seduc'd me!

Enter Ordgar, his Sword drawn, with Ordelia.

Ordg. Hell! what has bloody Fate been doing here!
 Death has outstripp'd my haste! Oh! barb'rous King!
 Does not thy Conscience ———

Athel. Ordgar! ——— by our Love,
 I charge thee say no more! Let Duty bind thee!
 The pitying King has griev'd thy Friend's Misfortune!

Ord. Oh! Death! come, take me from these Scenes of Woe!
 The Lady faints; support her all! and bear her
 Where Art and Care may raise her sinking Soul!

Ordg. Oh! touch her gently, as you wou'd your Eye-balls!
 What shall I do? Pity and Love divide me!

Oh! Friend! oh! *Athelwold!* when thou art dead,
 Who can tast Joys in Life, or Life in Joy?
 Thou dear Companion of my Youth and Manhood!
 Thou Bosom-balm of Peace! Thou Soul of Friendship!
 Say, to what Hand, what Chance owe we thy Loss?

Athel. Ask me not what I have no Breath to answer.
 Come closer, *Ordgar!* let me lean upon thee!
 For I feel Death, cold Death! in Icy Sweats
 Creep o'er my stiff'ning Joints, and drag me downward!!

King. Let me join with you in this latest Proof
 Of pious Friendship! ——— Oh! lov'd *Athelwold!*

[They support him.]

Wilt thou not once more say that thou forgiv'st me?
 Speak, if the Tyrant Death yet leaves thee Pow'r,
 Speak That once more, and blefs me!

Athel. Oh! I do!
 May you live happy ever! ——— Fatal Love!
 Oh! *Ordgar,* let my sad Example teach thee
 Not to make Love thy Plea for Guilt! for Love.

44. ELFRID : Or, *The Fair Inconstant.*

Has made my Fall thus guilty, and thus wretched !

I feel my Breath grow shorter, and my Sinews,
Like unbent Bows, have lost the Force of Nature.

Let me lie low — low as my Love has cast me !

[*Sinking.*

So! now my humble Posture suits my Fate !

Now, *Ordgar*, join thy manly Breast to mine,

And kiss me closely with the Lips of Love,

That I may breath my dying Friendship through thee !

Thou wilt sometimes remember *Athelwold*,

Wilt thou not, *Ordgar* ?

Ordg. How can I forget thee

In whom alone I live ? ——— Oh ! Friend ! permit me

Thus to embrace thee in thy low Condition !

My Friend ! my dying Friend ! ——— oh ! may thy Fate

In the uncertainty of that dark World

Upon whose Brink thou standest, be more blest'd

Than thy unhappy Love has made it here !

Pardon the Woman's Tears I shed upon thee !

For, oh ! who wou'd not weep for such a Friend ?

King. What sight of Woe cou'd ever equal this !

Athel. Farewel ! and — if *Ordelia* shall be thine,

Bid her ——— remember *Elfrid* ——— *Elfrid* ——— oh !

[*Dies.*

Ordg. [*Rising.*] Angels receive thy dear departing Spirit !

There lies the vertuous World's Epitome !

All that was great and good is gone with thee ! !

King. A Loss, like this, claims more than loud Complaint,

And I, who have most Cause, shall feel most Grief,

I, the chief Mourner at his Funeral,

Will see that glorious Obsequies express

The Subjects Merit, and the Sov'reign's Sorrow ;

Each future Year, to expiate my past Crime,

I will endow some Seat of pure Religion,

Where fervent Pray'rs from Choirs of holy Men

Shall join with mine for Mercy on my Sin.

And what his living Merits wou'd have claim'd,

Shall upon you and your *Ordelia's* Head

Be

Be doubly showr'd by me —— Be you the Heirs
To *Athelmold's* high Titles, as his Vertues.
And oh! may this Example serve to prove,
He treads on dang'rous Ground, who walks on Love.

F I N I S.



