

*Dido's Lament*  
OR  
*The Willing Librettist*

*A Novel by*  
*Peter Stickland*

**77**books

*Dido's Lament or The Willing Librettist*

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The drawing on the front cover is by Louise Blair. It was inspired by a drawing of Dido and Aeneas by Guido Reni, circa 1620.

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*For Ron and Mary Stickland*

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## PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Nahum Tate	<i>Writer and librettist</i>
Henry Purcell	<i>Composer</i>
Eliza Ashton	<i>Nahum's mistress</i>
Josias Priest	<i>Choreographer; Head of School</i>
Cecelia Priest	<i>Wife of Josais; also Head of School</i>
Frances Pieters	<i>Young lady attending school</i>
Anna Pieters	<i>Young lady attending school</i>
Amy Pieters	<i>The mother of the young ladies</i>
Ellen Fairweather	<i>Nahum's housekeeper</i>
Harry Fairweather	<i>Ellen's son</i>
Horace Heveningham	<i>Nahum's friend</i>
Mary Heveningham	<i>Horace's wife</i>
Thomas Boteler (Button)	<i>Nahum's friend</i>
Thomas Flatman	<i>Nahum's friend</i>
The Duchess de Mazarin	<i>The King's consort and stylist</i>
John Blow	<i>Master of the King's music</i>
Thomas Killigrew	<i>Director of the Theatre Royal</i>
Belinda Perryman	<i>Mary's friend</i>
Faithful Tate	<i>Nahum's brother</i>
Caroline	<i>Flatman's wife</i>
Elizabeth	<i>Caroline's Aunt</i>

## PROLOGUE

*“Friendship’s the privilege of private men, for  
wretchéd greatness knows no blessing so substantial.”*

Nahum Tate

“A city of refuge and the mansion house of liberty.” Nahum Tate walked the streets with John Milton’s words ringing in his head. London was a revelation to Nahum; it appeared in all respects to have the love of heaven directed at it.

Nahum had grown up in Dublin, a turbulent place where trust was not a thing to count on, but why one person should be set against another he could never fathom. In London there were too many differences for conflicts to cause lasting division and if the sociability was rough-hewn there was a good deal of humour beneath its surface.

Nahum’s house, just west of St. Clements Church, was on the north side of The Strand, a street that was often so crowded it was impossible for a carriage to pass along it. He took in the noisy mayhem from his bedroom window and imagined it as a play he was viewing from a theatre box. For Nahum, the great cacophony that greeted him each morning promised only excitement.

Londoners had a reputation for humour, they were renowned for their considerable ingenuity and they had a passion for discourse. Music, architecture, literature and science all flourished here and

for a poet, like Nahum Tate, there was no finer place to write and nurture his ambition. He had dreams of becoming Poet Laureate and though he clearly understood that the accolade was probably beyond his grasp, the very thought of it drove him along and encouraged his eagerness to work. At twenty seven, the name Nahum Tate was already beginning to be associated with some modest literary acclaim, although the achievement of this had not been easy, for much of his time and energy was devoted to journalism. He had no private income to rely on.

When Nahum was not writing translations, pastorals, paraphrases and prologues he was writing for magazines and journals on subjects as wide spread as morality, religion, science and history. He accepted in good grace that he had to direct his love of poetry to rest while he earned a living, but he did not anticipate the other changes he would have to make to gain public recognition. It was John Dryden who instructed him in this. "You must be in the theatre if your desire is to meet people and gain attention," he had told him and Nahum, willing as ever to learn, followed his advice.

During the ensuing years Nahum dedicated himself to writing plays and it was his first attempt, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, that gained him notoriety. Initially he was nervous about tackling the great bard; he had never doubted that in *King Lear* Shakespeare wrote the most wonderful collection of jewels imaginable, but he suspected that he had left many of these jewels unstrung and even a little under-polished. His big gesture was to reward Cordelia for the love she bestowed upon her father by having Edgar marry her. The crowds loved it and his success was assured. Unfortunately, as Cordelia's presence in the play increased, so the Fool's presence diminished and in the end he lost the Fool altogether. It was a heavy price to pay, but it did not sit so heavily upon him as the nagging impression that the play was found lacking where poetic excellence was concerned.

Borrowing from historic sources was fashionable in the theatre, but playwrights had to choose their subject carefully. If they ignored the tastes of their audience, the most fickle of God's creatures, they did so at their peril. London's theatre goers had a passion for stories about love and they wanted their tales told with glamorous costumes and spectacular stage effects. Other than that they adored satire and on this subject Nahum suspected that he might become unstuck; humour in every part of his life he had, but when it came to writing comic lines, he simply couldn't do it.

For his second play Nahum attempted the adaptation of another great play that had love as its subject, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, by Christopher Marlowe. It was based upon that part of Virgil's *Aeneid* where Aeneas arrived on Dido's shore and Nahum considered that he could give this majestic work a contemporary relevance by replacing the Gods with a sorceress and witches. In Marlowe and Virgil it was the scheming of the Gods that caused the royal couple's downfall, but Nahum wanted human envy to be the cause of his tale of tragic separation.

When Nahum had finished the play he showed it to John Dryden and Thomas D'Urfey. John insisted that he could not possibly lay his hands on one of the great legends of the age and Thomas insisted that he was tampering with a work that was rooted in literature's Holy Ground. In short, he was advised to dig for his plots elsewhere. The budding playwright had no wish to be regarded as an arrogant upstart who lacked any form of modesty, but equally he couldn't afford to throw away his work, so he changed the names of the characters, set the scenes in Sicily and called it *Brutus of Alba or The Enchanted Lovers*. Thomas Betterton was very taken by it and made an elaborate production of it at The Duke's Theatre in Dorset Garden.

With this success Nahum's confidence grew, but gaining attention in the theatre was one thing and making a living at it another. The

demands of public life brought with them an increase in expenses and because Nahum's recompense from journalism was not enough to support this, he had taken up a position at a boarding school for young ladies in Leicester Fields, where he taught poetry and literature. The school, run by Josias and Cecelia Priest, was much sought after by the nobility and gentry and, because Josias was famous in the theatre for choreography, music and dancing figured highly on the curriculum.

Luckily for Nahum, the Priest's school had one outstanding virtue; it was the place where Henry Purcell taught music and singing. Henry engaged his pupil's interest so profoundly that in addition to teaching them a new work and giving them an intimate knowledge of its composition, he filled their hearts with love. Henry was composer for violins to his Majesty King Charles II. He was organist at Westminster Abbey and the keeper, maker, mender and tuner of every kind of musical instrument in the vicinity of Westminster. He was the rising star at Court, though he displayed no false airs or graces that would cause you to know it.

The young composer had a playfulness that was child-like, but he lived for his music and there was no mistaking his genius. Henry could improvise around complex musical structures with such confidence you could only imagine that the music was written there before him and each new departure in his inexhaustible stream of variations appeared to be richer in expressive beauty than the last. Everyone was astounded by his extraordinary inventiveness and Nahum had a particular attachment to him.

On the subject of attachments, Eliza Ashton must now appear on our stage, for Eliza was the great romance in Nahum's life. She possessed the most delightful figure you could set your eyes upon and Nahum was completely besotted with her. Before he met her, Nahum's notion of love was as light as the wind, but with Eliza it became as deep as the ocean; it changed his dreams and it changed

his writing. He had no idea where this love came from or why he felt it to be so complete, but he accepted that Eliza would always be in his thoughts, inspiring his words.

The instant Nahum saw this young dressmaker at Smithfield Fair a great fire fuelled within him. He watched as she walked through the tented stalls, rifling through trays of ribbons, buttons and lace and he knew that he was in love. He followed her all afternoon, not stopping once, even to take ale, and when he saw her eating gingerbread, he knew that his most pressing ambition was to place his lips against hers. As the evening set in and the musicians played their dance tunes, Nahum asked Eliza to dance with him. He was surprised by her willingness and elated that she enjoyed one dance after another and nothing could bring him back to earth when she promised to meet him the following day; he was in heaven.

When Nahum learned that Eliza had recently lost her husband to an attack of pneumonia, he wondered if her newly acquired independence should delight him, but when he expressed his sympathy for her loss, Eliza confirmed her pleasure in the attention he gave her. They were an unlikely couple, meeting for the most part at her house in St. John's Lane, and despite a few inevitable arguments where they confirmed their differences, they got on well together. Nahum went to extraordinary lengths to win her trust and establish their friendship.

Eliza's working life had been dedicated to making dresses, a trade that she conducted from her apartment, just to the north of Smithfield Market. Before meeting Nahum her visits to the theatre had been rare, but with the playwright at her side she wanted to see performances at every opportunity. The comedies were her particular favourite and when laughing she would hold her stomach as though it ached and great tears rolled down her cheeks. She was amazed by the actors' skills and she asked Nahum to explain every aspect of their art. At first Nahum was delighted with his role,

but later he found in it a source of bitter irony, for the extent of Eliza's enchantment with the comic writers, her love of their wit and worldly wisdom, made him envious and he grew to dislike the role of eulogizing upon their skills. He could not imagine how they could invent so many witty conversations and write about daily life with such mischievous humour.

Nahum, to his credit, decided that he must count his blessings. He knew that few possessed his profound sense of tragedy and though some may have considered it a curse to watch comedy and care only for the possibility that the gaiety may yet touch upon tragedy, Nahum did not regard it so. He revelled in the speed with which he could sense an undercurrent of loneliness in a hero or heroine and smell the smallest pretence that lurked behind their laughter. Once he had the sense of a façade, nothing was more delightful to him than the revealing of these screens that covered a character's shortcomings and it was delight he felt when he found the skilful language needed to give them expression.

So this was Nahum Tate at the beginning of the story. He knew nothing of the work of a librettist, but he was willing and there wasn't a man in all London more deserving of the epithet.

**PART ONE**  
*THERE AND BACK*  
(ADAGIO)



## CHAPTER ONE

### *A DREAM AND A PROMISE*

As he gazed down to The Strand from his bedroom window Nahum sensed the first promise of summer. He watched as fellows placed ladders against buildings and as others prepared to decorate the street for the Whit Sunday procession. The Strand had only just been cleared of the great May Day procession, but London loves to celebrate. The plague and the fire had cost everyone more than they wished to count and Londoners were determined to raise their City from the ashes of those terrible years.

Nahum mused upon a walk across some faraway hills with Eliza. He thought about hiring a carriage from Mr. Garthway's stable in Scotland Yard. He had often promised to take Eliza up to Primrose Hill to show her the views of London. Nahum was daydreaming; it was Tuesday and he was due to teach at the Priests' School that afternoon. He had also promised to give Henry Purcell the lyrics to a song that he had not yet finished writing, so there was no escaping his duties. The song was to feature in his latest play and it was to be his first collaboration with Henry.

This collaboration meant everything to Nahum, but as he settled down to write, his thoughts returned to Eliza's sparkling eyes, her delightful smile and the sound of her laughter. He wrote slowly, stopping now and then to bemoan the fate that kept him and his beautiful muse so often apart and, like many a lover, Nahum could torment himself unremittingly. On this bright morning he began

thinking that Eliza did not enjoy the loving attention he lavished upon her in quite the same way that she once did. This theme was not difficult for him to invent, for Eliza rarely expressed her feelings directly and although he had learned to accept the rarity of her promises and to suppress the urge to question what was in her heart, he never quite came to terms with his vulnerability. Today, his absence from Eliza increased his nervousness considerably.

What was special about Nahum Tate was that this vulnerability never prevented him from declaring his own love. “My heart will be yours forever,” he had told Eliza more times than he could remember and he would not have said as much had his heart not been full to overflowing.

In his imagination he walked through Lincoln’s Inn gardens, over the New Canal at Holborn Bridge, up Cow Lane and then on to Smithfield Market. He imagined Eliza opening her door to him, welcoming him with a kiss, and then he reminded himself that she would be visiting her clients and that he should cease his idle dreaming and get on with his work.

To put an end to it, Nahum wrote a note to Eliza, asking her to give him another date when they might meet. He called out to Harry, his housekeeper’s son, to enquire if he could post it, but neither Harry nor his mother, Ellen, replied and as he reached the kitchen, he saw a note on the table and remembered that they had gone to visit her sister. Ellen’s sister was about to give birth to her first child and she was in need of Ellen.

Nahum, typically, had put Ellen’s absence from his mind. He depended on her a great deal and in recent months he had even caught himself referring to Ellen and Harry as his family. Harry, eight years old, was a complete charm and a walking riot who spent most of his time out on the streets. His mother, in complete contrast, was blessed with remarkable constancy and dedicated herself to her duties as though she were born for this reason alone. From the little

Nahum knew of her relationship with her husband, a sailor married to a life at sea, Harry was the product of a single night of pleasure. Ellen never spoke one bitter remark about the mariner's absence and it was likely that her magnanimous soul never harboured one churlish or unhappy thought about him.

Nahum was intent upon placing the song he was writing in a key moment of the action to deepen the play's pathos. He knew that Henry's music would fulfil his ambition. The play, *The History of King Richard II*, was another adaptation of Shakespeare and the song was to occur when King Richard was in prison.

The writing of this play had been a struggle for Nahum. There were prodigious amounts of facts and actions to describe and it left him with little room for meaningful dialogue. He'd also had a difficult job finding defining qualities for his characters. Nahum's ambition, to relieve King Richard of the responsibility for his own downfall, required him firstly to confirm Bolingbrook as the guilty usurper and secondly to encourage the audience to feel sympathy for the deposed King. In the final act Richard is imprisoned in the Tower and this was where he wanted to deepen the monarch's sense of loss and bewilderment at being so rudely deposed.

*Retir'd from any mortal's sight  
The pensive Damon lay,  
He blessed the discontented night  
And cursed the smiling day.*

The lines pleased him and once he had completed three more verses he wrote out a fair copy and dressed to go for his morning draft of ale. Generally he drank in the White Horse, the tavern opposite him in The Strand, but this morning, having the need to visit Mr. Newsome, his shoemaker in Wych Street, he decided to deal with the shoes first and then take his ale in Covent Garden.

On seating himself in Harpers, a bar at the bottom of Drury Lane, Nahum saw Thomas Killigrew, the director of the Theatre Royal, and when the jolly and rather eccentric fellow recognised him, he beckoned Nahum to join him. Killigrew introduced James Billingsley as a designer from Mr. Wren's office, and, to Nahum's delight, he introduced him as the celebrated playwright. The director enquired what he was working on and hearing that Henry Purcell was composing the music to a song in his most recent play, he boomed his approval.

"Excellent, my dear. I have a high regard for the talents of Mr. Purcell," but before Nahum could capitalize on Killigrew's interest, Mr. Billingsley continued, describing the sets and clever stage scenery he had designed for a production of *Psyche* at the Duke's Theatre. Nahum learned that there was a stage on two levels, the upper one for the gods and the lower one for the mortals.

"There are so many cogs and pulleys employed in this device," Billingsley declared, "that despite the rigours of exact science I must continue to pray, for we can never be certain that it will function as planned."

Nahum, entertained by their talk, accepted an invitation to join them for dinner at the Half Moon Tavern, where they ate a fine dish of roasted veal with a glass of wine. Nahum talked about his play and Killigrew's enthusiasm for it was genuine enough to inspire Nahum to imagine that *The History of King Richard II* could get its first performance at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *TO SIGH FOR YOU, FOR YOU TO WEEP*

After a walk through St. Giles's Fields, Nahum entered the Priest's school and Mr. Singleton, the doorkeeper, handed him a note from Josias Priest. It requested that he and Henry attend a meeting with the headmaster at four o'clock. Nahum enquired if Henry had arrived and discovering that he hadn't, he walked back down the drive to meet his friend.

Henry's journey from Westminster to the school in Leicester Fields would have taken him past New Palace Yard, along King Street, through the gates that sat either side of the Privy Gardens, past the Banqueting House and on up to Charing Cross. From here it was only a few minutes walk along Haymarket to the school. Such a walk could be completed in a quarter of an hour, but Henry had been known to allow himself up to two hours to complete it.

When Henry walked he composed and the needs of his musical composition determined whether he travelled straight to his destination or whether he went round the houses. A musical walk to a celebratory dance would take Henry four times longer than a normal walk and for a melancholy air he would employ such a slow pace it might not qualify for the term walking at all. This of course could have been a blessing, given how dangerous the streets were, for Henry never looked where he was going. He didn't hear the great noise and disturbance surrounding him and it was suspected that he didn't use his sight in the proper sense of the word.

Nahum heard Henry's voice before he saw him.

*How often in the dead of night,  
When all the world lay hush'd in sleep,  
Have I thought this my chief delight,  
To sigh for you, for you to weep!*

When Henry turned the corner, his left hand close against his heart, his right arm directed out in front of him, Nahum imagined that he was making a declaration of love.

"Pastora's Beauties when Unblown," Henry said to his friend.

"What?" Nahum asked, "is this the title of a song?"

"A love song is a song for lovers," said Henry laughing, his boyish laugh causing the birds to fly away.

"Are you in love? Nahum enquired.

"So many questions, Nahum. Must you learn my secrets?"

"Tell me everything," Nahum bid him and Henry laughed again and clapped his hands with glee. Nothing was ever certain about Henry. Nahum once claimed that he could never recall his features in any exact way for his manner always outweighed his physical attributes.

Nahum informed Henry about the meeting with Josias Priest, and they agreed to meet again in the garden before visiting the headmaster in his office. As they parted, Henry told him that he may have some news before the day was out, for his heart was in need of expression, and with that he stepped across the courtyard singing dramatically.

*The pow'r you have to wound, I feel,  
How long shall I of that complain?  
Now show the pow'r you have to heal,  
And take away the tort'ring pain.*

Josias Priest's room was a relaxed place with little in it to suggest that he was Head of School. He invited Henry and Nahum to be seated and immediately launched into a somewhat unexpected speech about the school moving to the Old School House in Chelsea for the next academic year. He explained that the musicians Thomas Lowe and Jeffrey Banister, the previous owners of the school, were retiring and, because it possessed a fine hall where he could show off his dances, he and his wife, Cecelia had decided to move there. Josias wanted confirmation that his music and literature teachers would be prepared to travel to Chelsea, but he did not give them the opportunity to reply. He detailed the alterations he would make to the building over the summer and then proceeded to describe the difficulties he would face moving to new premises.

Nahum, without saying as much, believed that the journey to Chelsea would be a burden, but Henry worked as he travelled and had only enthusiasm for the move, especially as Josias was promising him a large performance space and a new music room. Then Josias informed them that he and Cecelia wanted to mark the opening with an entertainment and he invited Henry and Nahum to help him devise it. The choreographer talked of a prestigious production of songs and dances to entertain the parents.

"Many are members of the nobility," he announced proudly, uncaring that they knew this already, "We must ensure that there are parts for both past and present pupils and we must show them at their best. Think of it as a lively masque with much dancing and singing."

If Henry was asked to compose a song he was gracious and grateful for the attention given, but if he was asked to compose ten songs, then his graciousness and gratefulness increased proportionately. By the charmed smile upon his face, Nahum could tell that Henry was greatly taken with this proposition and by the gentle swaying of his head Nahum suspected that he was already composing the

tunes. Nahum, having little time to dedicate to such activity, asked how much they would be paid for their services.

“Well, my dears,” Josias fumbled, “we do not have any funds to speak of, but we will. There are many wealthy patrons who will be only too pleased to make a contribution.”

Nahum’s thought was that a promise wouldn’t keep him alive, but he remained silent. He was eager to collaborate with Henry, but not so eager that he must go hungry. Henry tried to read Nahum’s mind and Nahum felt the power of his friend’s bidding.

“We will give the entertainment our consideration,” he told Josias and the excitable choreographer congratulated them in such a generous manner that an onlooker could be forgiven for suspecting that they were receiving a Royal Charter to perform for the King.

As Nahum and Henry walked out into the fields beyond the Oxford Road, Nahum continued to complain about the considerable time the school production would take up and the absence of any proper remuneration. Henry, wishing to change the subject, jumped into an abandoned box cart and, laying upon its boards, motioned Nahum to join him. He joked about the school production, claiming that if they borrowed some fairy scenes from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the whole thing would be ready in weeks.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WHEN HER LANGUISHING EYES SAID LOVE

As Henry lay in the box cart, Nahum handed him the lyrics he had written for the prison scene in *The History of King Richard II*.

“I want you to bring out the tragedy of a wretched and dying king,” he told the young composer. “Imagine the pain of a monarch who has been deprived of his crown, imagine his sense of loss and then compose a lament for me.”

As Henry read the page he hummed a tune and upon reaching the end he sang a few sonorous refrains that had more tragedy and majesty to them than anything Nahum could have imagined.

“Is this what you had in mind?” Henry asked. Nahum nodded, astounded and the composer burst into laughter.

“How can you know the sound of an injured heart so intimately?” Nahum cried. “It will bring a tear to every eye.” Henry wore a melancholy expression and did not respond. “Is there something oppressing you?” Nahum enquired, thinking that the news Henry promised to share with him might be the cause of it.

“I will notate the music for you by tomorrow,” Henry said, ignoring Nahum’s question. Searching for a new subject, he asked Henry how the music for *Theodosius* was progressing.

“Do you know ‘the force of love’?” Henry asked and Nahum, knowing that the title of this play by Nathaniel Lee was ‘*Theodosius, Or The Force Of Love,*’ was uncertain how to answer him.

“Without love, life is empty,” Henry declared and jumped up, a broad smile on his face. Nahum took him by the hand, but Henry leapt from the wagon and, hopping from one leg to the other, he performed a comic rendition of a love song.

“If you’re in love we are going to celebrate,” Nahum insisted, but Henry did not cease his antics. “Tell me who the lucky woman is,” Nahum demanded and to his surprise Henry gave him the name.

“Frances Pieters,” he declared.

“Who?” Nahum asked, despite hearing perfectly well.

“I am in love with Frances Pieters,” Henry replied.

“Frances Pieters,” said Nahum, unable to say more. His thought was that the unlikely conjunctions created by love could never be predicted, but this he could not voice. “Your pupil at the Priest’s school,” Nahum then managed to say. It wasn’t a question for he knew there could be no other and Henry started to sing.

*When her languishing eyes said ‘Love!’  
Too soon the soft charm I obey’d.*

“Does Frances return your feelings?” Nahum asked.

“It must be so,” said Henry, “the emotion that passes between us can mean no other thing, but I have not spoken to her about it. It is too difficult a thing yet to discuss.”

As they walked back to town Henry described his feelings for Frances. “I must win her,” he declared, “she must be my wife,” and he gave Nahum a litany of his love. “She is the prize that exactly matches my heart. I have wept tears of happiness for the simple good fortune of being by her side. The very fact that she is alive makes me entirely blissful. She transports me to a realm of sheer joy. Her beauty is perfection itself and her eyes, oh, Nahum, how I wish my music could express the wonder of her eyes a thousand times over.”

Nahum thought the eulogy was not unlike the one he would declare for Eliza. “Was it her beautiful voice that inspired your heart?” he asked.

“If you accept that music prepares and warms the soul to love,” Henry replied, “then you must know that the intimacy of singing heats it to even greater effect.”

Nahum had never taught Frances, but he had tutored her younger sister, Anna, who was a talented and thoughtful writer. Their parents had moved to London from Ghent before the great fire, but their father had died two years previously. It was the father who had insisted that his daughters should learn to dance, play music and sing, leaving money in his Will for his daughters to attend the Priests’ School for one year.

Anna had once told Nahum that she dreamed of becoming a writer and he wondered if Frances held any ambition other than the obvious expectation that she make a good marriage. He wondered if this unassuming young woman of sixteen could ever have imagined that she would inspire Henry’s love; not one of the Court ladies or the numerous actresses and singers who surrounded him had so far managed to do this.

As Henry continued to talk of marriage, Nahum grew more concerned. There had never been a time when the political and social divisions between the Whigs of the City and Tories at Court had been so acutely drawn. They regarded each other with utter disdain and he knew that Frances’ family would think only of City merchants when considering her future. Henry would also have adverse opinions at Westminster to contend with. Nahum could not help wishing that Henry had fallen in love with one of the daughters of his friends or fellow musicians.

The two men sat in the Golden Lion near Charing Cross eating anchovies and olives with their wine. Their thoughts turned again to the subject of the school’s entertainment and they agreed that Josias

had expressed a dreadful view of it. Nahum continued to complain about the amount of work it would entail, but Henry insisted that they should not pass over the choreographer's proposal lightly.

"To be given a venue and a host of musicians, singers and dancers to perform with is not insignificant," Henry insisted and Nahum did not disagree, but he did have a mind to calm his friend's ambition. He returned to the notion of knitting together some existing songs to make a theme, but Henry did not agree.

"Our creative abilities are a gift," he declared, "and we must use them. This kind of blessing can only be repaid with constant engagement. If you are worried about where to start we could take your play *Brutus of Alba* as the subject."

Nahum, taken aback, but mildly intrigued, considered the suggestion. "It's not a subject for an entertainment," he told his friend. "We can't mark the opening of a girl's school with *Brutus of Alba*, it's a tale of disappointed love. We need a celebratory theme not a story about the death of a Queen."

"I have recently composed an overture that would suit the tragedy perfectly," Henry told him and Nahum could do nothing but laugh. After a dish of pullets and larks and a second bottle of wine, Nahum's mood mellowed, he started eulogizing the qualities of his tragedy and, before the night was at an end, Nahum finally agreed. He had no idea how Henry could always manage to persuade others to accept his view.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *FISH DINNERS AND FINE WINES*

Nahum's days were filled with work and his nights were filled with dreams, great passionate flights of fancy involving Eliza. Each day dawned with reasons why he could not visit her and on this day, Wednesday, it was King Richard II who needed attention; he could not take his eye off the royal presence until he had captured him.

Nahum had also agreed to contribute to a literary journal, an article on Milton for Horace and Mary Heveningham, and this he had to complete by Friday. Nahum had only survived the rigours of London life with the support of this inspired couple and he knew he could never fail them. Colonel Henry Horace Heveningham was the King's Secretary in all matters of entertainment, and as far as the King was concerned, Horace was the important one. Having written the libretto for a Welcome Ode to celebrate the monarch's return to London, Horace had invited Nahum to the Palace on Thursday to hear the first rehearsal. Henry was composing the music.

If this weren't distraction enough Nahum had also agreed to go to Greenwich on Saturday and would not be back 'til Sunday night. Poor man, no wonder love so easily passed him by. He sat at his desk apologising to Eliza by letter, cancelling Thursday's meeting, pleading with her to meet him on Monday and promising not to disappoint her in future.

Nahum walked out into the heat and noise of The Strand and made his way to Nancy's laundry in Milford Lane. Ellen Fairweather

worked for Nancy in the afternoons and when Harry could not be found, Nancy's son, William made a good substitute postman. The price of the letter's delivery being agreed, Nahum walked down to Wood Wharf to take some air before returning to work.

Lost in thought, it was the boatman's cry that brought him to attention. "Anyone for All Hallows the Great Church," he called and Nahum, remembering that Anna had told him that her family lived next to that church, couldn't help asking the boatman if that was near the place where the fire started.

"That's right," the boatman replied. "I'm dropping this fella at the pier by Old Swan Lane. Is that any good to yer?"

Nahum said it was and he stepped into the skiff and was on his way before he had time to consider the consequences. It had been some time since Nahum had last travelled down river and the number of new buildings east of Blackfriars surprised him. The houses were brick and they stood as tall and as straight as soldiers, their windows the size of doors.

When they arrived at Old Swan Lane, only yards from London Bridge, the boatman directed Nahum up the lane and told him to turn left on Thames Street. He passed a number of alleyways leading back to the river and then the burnt out remains of All Hallows the Less. Next to this was a new house, then Red Bull Alley and then All Hallows the Great. The fire had not completely destroyed the great church and, with a new roof and its stones cleaned, it was back in use.

Nahum returned to the small churchyard of All Hallows the Less, sat on a wall gazing at the house between the two churches and wondered if this was the Pieters' residence. Next to the churchyard was another new house, with stores and outhouses attached, and, being attracted to a sign upon the building that read, *The Spaniard – Fish Dinners and Fine Wines*, he walked round to the entrance to see if he could take some refreshment. The door was closed.

Returning to All Hallows the Great, Nahum asked a verger, who was tidying hymn books into piles next to the organ loft, if the parish records were kept here and learned that the old records were destroyed in the fire. “But the new records we have,” the verger told him and he escorted Nahum to the registrar’s office where the records could be read for the price of twopence in the Poor Box.

“Everything is arranged by street,” the registrar informed him. “What’s the address your looking for?”

“It’s next to the church,” Nahum replied.

“That’s Mr. Muddiman’s,” said the registrar. “The secretary at the Merchant Taylor’s School.”

“No,” Nahum declared. “It’s the Pieters family I’m after.”

“The Pieters family? Goodness man, they own The Spaniard. Anyone round here could have told you that.”

Nahum, taken by surprise, could find no words of explanation, but the registrar wanted none and headed off down the aisle. Nahum followed after and by the time he caught up with him, the registrar had taken four ledgers from the shelves and placed them on a table. The man promptly vanished and Nahum sat with the great books, each ledger having a title clearly labelled on the front: Rates; Births; Deaths; Marriages.

In the Poll Tax ledger Nahum discovered that the mother’s name was Amy. The occupants were given as two unmarried daughters, a married daughter and her husband, three apprentices and two servants. Under Births he discovered that the married daughter had a husband, John Howlett, a soap maker, and a son, also John, who had been baptized at the church the previous year. The marriage of this couple was recorded as having taken place under licence with the consent of the mother.

In the ledger for Deaths, Nahum found the record of Frances and Anna’s father, John Baptiste Pieters. Listed here was the entire estate at the time of his death, everything in the seventeen rooms,

including the napkins, was named along with everything in the two cellars and wine vaults, which contained eighteen hogsheads of Claret, Malmsey, Rhienish and Canary. There was also a store containing a hundred skins of gilt leather. <sup>1</sup>

When Nahum returned to the registrar, he asked him if he ate at The Spaniard. The answer was that the place was too noisy for his liking. “Wine by the gallon is consumed there on a good night,” he elaborated, “and a great deal of singing can be heard well into the evening. But it’s not a disreputable house,” he declared adamantly, so as not to be misunderstood. “Mrs. Pieters would never admit anyone who couldn’t behave.”

Nahum, amused by the tale, went back to The Spaniard and found the large dining room full of guests. He sat at a small table by the window. The tables and chairs were covered in Spanish leather and hanging on the walls were Spanish tapestries. He tried to fathom this family’s connection to both Spain and Holland, but as complex connections of this sort were common in London, he gave himself up to the enjoyment of a lobster.

On his return journey he was tempted to pass Wood Wharf and go on to Westminster to give Henry his news, but he decided against it. He smiled at the thought of recounting his adventure and listened to the boatman, who described, in an entertaining fashion, his fights with the Lambeth boat boys.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PARADISE LOST

‘Notions of Liberty in Paradise Lost.’ This is the title Nahum has given to the Heveningham article. From an early age Nahum had been inspired by the truths Milton wrote about so eloquently. He had grown up believing that every man on this island was privileged because of the dignity Milton had brought to the English language and for the descriptions he had offered of the English mind. Freedom, moral integrity and the demands of liberty were the bedrock of Milton’s vision and his advocacy of freedom for the press had made a great impression on the young Nahum.

Only one of Milton’s opinions troubled him. The great man held that a monarch should lose his head if he was found to be wicked or tyrannical and Nahum couldn’t reconcile himself to this view. He could appreciate that the poet preferred ‘Queen Truth’ to King Charles, but that a King should be deposed was a step too far for Nahum. It was this opinion that inspired him to rewrite *The History of King Richard II*.

While Nahum was grappling with his article, a postman came to the door with a letter from his sister Ann, who lived in Ireland. Ann wrote that their sister Mary, having given birth to her third child, had not recovered from the ordeal and was now so unwell she might not recover. Ann was asking Nahum to visit them in Dublin as soon as possible. He was shocked and, realising that he had to go, he was irritated by the news. The journey would take weeks to complete.

The horse ride to Liverpool was dangerous and would easily take a week. The sea journey would be two days, but only if all went well. He thought about the horribly uncomfortable packet-boats, the smell of the animals, the behaviour of the passengers, and with this he shrank from the responsibility of supporting his sister.

It would be easy to rebuke him for this, but whether the journey was undertaken in summer or in winter there was little difference between the discomforts they presented. At times strong gales could drive the traveller to take shelter in the harbour at Holyhead and at other times they could be becalmed on the sea for days in sultry heat. Either way, life on the little craft was unbearable.

Nahum was born in England, at Sudbury in Suffolk, and his family were forever crossing the Irish Sea. His father, Faithful Tate, was a minister at Sudbury and it was not until Nahum was seven that they returned to Dublin. His grandfather, who was also a minister of the church and christened Faithful, was the first to travel abroad. He had little choice. In 1641 there was an uprising and his family house at Ballyhays in County Cavan was sacked. Nahum's grandmother, along with her sons and daughters, were treated with shocking brutality and two of the children died in the attack. The Tates were quiet, literary people, not suited to savage times. Grandfather Faithful moved first to Dublin and then to Suffolk.

Nahum doubted that his literary career would survive another trip to Ireland. He put Ann's letter into a drawer and continued with his Milton article.

*The question of predestination is much debated in our times. Do we have the free will to do as we please or are we ordained to carry out God's preordained plan? This is at the heart of Paradise Lost. For Milton, 'will' is the power that allows us to put reason into action and reason is our only salvation. Our freedom lies in our obedience to the will of God and our imprisonment lies in our disobedience.*

As he sat reflecting upon his morning's work, it seemed to Nahum that he knew better what these opening lines meant when he was younger. On this day he was unsure where he stood in relation to them. He went for his morning ale at the White Horse and then proceeded to Westminster, hoping to meet Henry in the Coffee Shop before going to the Banqueting House. He was in need of an ally, for he was nervous about going to the Palace of Westminster alone. The King of course was not in residence, he had been in Windsor since April and he would not return to London until September, when the *Welcome Ode* would be performed, but even with the King absent there was too much chicanery at the Palace for his liking.

Nahum searched the Coffee Shop for Henry. He was not in the room closest to the water and he was nowhere else nearby. This surprised him, for Henry's days had a clear pattern. He would rise early, write out notation for the music in his head, play the organ at Matins and then rehearse the choir. After this he went to the river, bought red herring in bread from one of the stall holders and then visited the Coffee Shop. It's the same Coffee Shop his father and Matthew Lock frequented when they were the old masters of music. It had quite a crowd of customers in those days and news of the latest scientific discoveries was discussed alongside the works of the poets and probably the composers too.

Nahum looked for him in Westminster Hall, among the rows of stalls run by law stationers, booksellers and seamstresses, but he was nowhere to be seen. He checked the two taverns that flanked Westminster Hall on either side, one called Heaven and the other called Hell, but he was not there, so Nahum went alone into the Privy Garden. To his great relief he saw Horace standing by the Court Gate, reading a letter. After their hearty greeting, Horace, wearing a frown that was uncommon for him, told Nahum that he was greatly put upon by the king.

“John Blow has just returned from Windsor with a letter,” he explained, “and the King orders my immediate return. He has too many events of state that need my organisation and he is impossibly nervous about his return to London. He imagines that by entertaining the Court and Parliament together at Windsor he will encourage them to work together, but I doubt he will enjoy much success. They are all impossible. I was to go with Mary to see Shadwell’s production of *Psyche* at The Duke’s Theatre in Dorset Garden this evening and she will complain bitterly if she is left to attend alone.”

“I would be delighted to accompany her,” Nahum offered. “I had a meeting with James Billingsley recently and I am eager to see the machinery the young architect has devised.”

Horace readily agreed and, much relieved, he walked Nahum to the concert chamber, where he introduced him to John Blow.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *WELCOME, WELCOME, WELCOME*

John Blow was organist for the Chapel Royal, composer in ordinary to the King and master of the King's music. He and Nahum exchanged a few words and even after so brief a meeting, Nahum could not be other than impressed by his presence and in awe of his intelligence. Henry had often talked of Mr. Blow and if anyone could be regarded as Henry's mentor in musical composition it was he. John had secured for Henry the post of organist at the Abbey and it was he who had insisted that Henry should be invited to compose the *Welcome Ode*.

John clapped his hands and requested everyone's attention. He asked Henry if he had managed to establish a musical response to Horace's libretto and Henry informed him that he had.

"In fact, I have completed the composition," Henry told him and realizing the surprise that this statement provoked, he laughed and everyone joined in.

"Shall we hear what you have achieved? John asked, or do you need more time to prepare?"

Henry smiled, picked up his violin and walked towards the young man seated at the harpsichord. A young woman joined them on the platform and without introduction they began to play. The music flowed, conjuring a growing anticipation of what lay ahead, and then, just as the musicians were whisking into a highly punctuated and sprightly dance tune, they burst into song.

*Welcome, Welcome, Welcome,  
Vice regent of the mighty King.*

The choral fanfare took Nahum by surprise, but the music didn't rest here. Henry and his male accompanist launched into a duet that was so delightful it could have charmed an emperor. The woman joined them in a chorus and Henry followed this with a solo. It was a dance-like serenade, the young composer echoing the melody of his song on the violin. Nahum had no idea that so much music was required for a Welcome Ode. Henry played another rousing duet followed by an innocent and intricate chorus and ended with a ritornello of astonishing beauty. John was on his feet clapping like thunder and cheering noisily.

"My dear Henry," he began, "you have indeed composed the Welcome Ode. The final chorus was astounding and that section in the overture where you superimposed the chorus over the opening melody was pure genius. I am proud of you and a little complemented by the fact that the dotted rhythms were not dissimilar to my own."

Henry laughed.

"How is it," Horace asked, "that you can manage to align the individual word accents to the music so closely?"

"I have no idea," Henry replied, "other than that the words seemed to join with the music of their own accord."

Tremendous laughter accompanied this statement by Henry and John declared that had he not been so well know to him he would insist that Henry was teasing them.

"You do indeed possess a particular genius," John told him with great formality, "but that words should exhibit their independence on your behalf is beyond belief."

The master of the King's music turned to congratulate Horace on the expressive quality of his words and confided in him that no

composer before Henry had displayed such eloquent talent for the coupling of music with language. This, of course, was precisely why Nahum longed for the day when Henry would set his words to music. Henry's compositions gave off the very odour of the theatre and though he had not yet been given a chance to show his talents in the theatre it was inconceivable that this shortcoming would remain for long. Henry, having arrived in this world with an appreciation of the importance and intricacies of dramatic artifice, could only get better.

"Have you scored the parts for all the instruments?" John asked and when Henry replied that he had, John declared that there was nothing further for anyone to do but recruit the musicians and set up the rehearsals. He thanked Henry for simplifying the process immeasurably and for bringing delight to their day.

Nahum, having time to kill before the evening's performance, invited Henry to take a drink with him, but he was already late for an appointment at the home of Lord and Lady Baggott. Horace, joining them to say goodbye, applauded the Baggott's love of music.

"They are great supporters of new compositions," he declared, "and, unlike the King, they will pay handsomely to hear them." Horace then handed Nahum a purse, heavy with coins and asked him to entertain Mary well. "If you have time, look in on her now and then, and tell her that I will write with my news tomorrow."

Everyone left the Banqueting House together and Nahum had a glass of wine in Marshes before taking his journey down river.

The Duke's Theatre was near the new canal at Blackfriars. As Nahum approached the imposing portico that faced the river he saw Mary Heveningham expounding on some subject to a group of friends. Nahum stood for some time, hoping to find a suitable lull in her monologue so that he might introduce himself, but for fear of missing the opportunity altogether, he had to interrupt her.

Upon informing Mary that the King had directed Horace to return to Windsor, she embarked upon a litany of complaints.

“Why does the King have such pressing need of my husband?” she exclaimed and Nahum comforted her.

“None can do the job as efficiently as Horace” he said and Mary assumed a proud countenance and thanked Nahum for agreeing to accompany her.

Mary’s talk of the production was eager and there was no doubt that she loved the character, Psyche, but she would have continued forever had Nahum not informed her that most of the audience had already taken their seats.

This production of *Psyche*, an English adaptation of a French comedie-ballet, was an extravagant collaboration. Betterton asked Shadwell to write it. Matthew Locke composed the vocal music and Draghi composed the instrumental music and the dance tunes. It was a collection of music, curious dances and splendid scenes, all elaborated by extraordinary machinery; not a drama as such, but an entertainment that had something of the masque about it.

At first Nahum found it unusual, he was uncertain about its qualities, but once he recognised its themes he warmed to it. He suspected that Josias would like it well enough for his opening entertainment. When the applause died down, Mary asked Nahum how Psyche’s sisters could have instigated such a number of horrible intrigues against her and, thinking that the performance displeased her, he became concerned, but the contrary was true.

“I loved it,” she declared, “and when Venus took Psyche from Cupid I could have cried. They made us believe that their love was a lost cause and we could never have guessed that Jupiter would descend from the clouds to unite the lovers.”

Nahum concurred with Mary’s view and he applauded Billingsley’s sumptuous scenes and magical machinery.

## *CHAPTER SEVEN*

### *MUSICAL DRAMA*

Nahum invited Mary to supper and discovered that she had arranged for them to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Perryman. The news delighted him because he had met Belinda Perryman at one of Mary's literary evenings and he was a great fan of hers, especially her smile. She was a bright star in the firmament of married motherhood and she awakened powerful instincts in Nahum.

Once the quartet of diners were seated about the supper table, Nahum discovered that Richard Perryman had a noisy and bombastic manner and it irritated him. The meal, pigeon breast stewed with Madeira and Spanish plums, was excellent, but Nahum felt great sadness for Belinda. He could not imagine how she could suffer this fool for a husband and he thought only of rescuing her, despite the fact that Belinda didn't appear to be in need of rescue. She calmly rested her hand on her husband's arm, offering him constant reassurance and boosting his abominable confidence.

Nahum gazed at her beautiful eyes and waited patiently for those brief moments when she smiled. Twice she addressed a small remark to him and he replied graciously, but in the wake of her loud husband he was without opportunity to develop a conversation. He imagined her facing a losing battle and wondered how it was possible for her to keep a sacred respect for the marriage vows when under such extreme provocation. He could not imagine how she could honour and obey Richard when he could not return these

virtues, unless she was indeed the shining example of honourable consistency he had made of her in his fantasy. Nahum couldn't decide whether this laudable discharge of her faithful duty was the noblest triumph of woman or whether it was sheer folly.

That night Belinda appeared in Nahum's dream. At first he was performing in *The History of King Richard II* with Eliza, but she disappeared. Nahum - King Richard - carried out a hopeless search for Eliza, his Queen, and when he returned to the theatre he discovered a new set of performers acting in *Brutus of Alba*. It was then that Belinda Perryman arrived and the scene changed to Carthage. Belinda was playing Queen Dido and Nahum was playing Aeneas, but no one took any notice of him. He tried desperately to inform Belinda that she was supposed to be in love with him, but, being busy with her company of ladies, she didn't hear him.

The following morning, as Nahum worked on *The History of King Richard II*, the dream continued to haunt him. He was editing some detracting language that Shakespeare had used about Richard, taming some of the vilifying talk spoken by the traitors so that Richard could be seen as an active and just prince, but he could not rid himself of the rejection he felt. Only later, when he wrote the scene where the Queen and the Duchess of York meet Richard on the heath, did he manage to return to his finer feelings for Belinda and find the words that the Queen needed to express her deep affection for her husband.

It was a ragged morning for Nahum and it was about to get worse. As he was passing Charing Cross, on his way to see Henry, he was jostled by a couple of ruffians who stole his purse. It was a disconsolate fellow who limped along King Street, but once at the Abbey, his day improved. He was greeted by the sonorous sounds of the choir, the anthem being a psalm that Henry had set to music, and he sat in the Lady Chapel allowing the beauty of their voices to wash over him.

*Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee.*

Most of Henry's days had been spent at the Abbey. At the age of seven he was a chorister for the Chapel Royal and he continued in this role until his voice broke. After this he repaired instruments and copied musical notation for the church. Henry and his music were inextricably linked to this place; it was the centre of his world and the home of his composing spirit. When the choir finished their rehearsals, Nahum crossed the South Aisle and entered the Cloister to visit the Old Monk's Refectory. This room, at the western end of the Cloister was where Henry had his studio.

John Blow and Nicholas Staggins were also visiting Henry and after introductions were made Nicholas asked Nahum if he had enjoyed Shadwell's *Psyche*.

"Indeed I did," the poet replied. "The rustic music surprised me, as did the bacchanalian dances, but I found it most enjoyable. Maybe *Psyche's* relentless torture at the hands of her sisters was a little too much to bare."

"Yes, there was possibly too much tragedy here," Nicholas replied. "I was much heartened when the river god rose out of the water and dissuaded *Psyche* from her terrible ambition to throw herself in."

"His arrival was enchanting," said Nahum, "and so was *Cupid's*." When he commanded a song in praise of love, ten statues leaped from their pedestals and began to dance."

"And soon great quantities of cupids were flying around," Nicholas added, "dropping flowers on the stage. One could be forgiven for thinking that they'd emptied the heavens for the occasion."

"The stage was divided in two," Nahum told them. "Jupiter had a palace in the clouds and the mortals inhabited the stage below. For the finale Jupiter descended to earth on a machine."

Henry and his guests talked on, but before long the three masters

of the King's music resumed their discussion about the qualities of musical drama. The theme of John Blow's argument was that he wanted more than sumptuous scenes of grand design and he wanted more structure to the music, not the assorted dance accompaniments that they were currently offered.

"Music must be used to intensify the emotions," he declared. "It should take responsibility for the structure of the work and the sung lines should have much more musical interest. A diet of unvaried recitative will only bore an audience."

"In Italy," Nicholas asserted, "the narrative is not delivered in reported speech at all; they have a Greek-style chorus to do this. I saw a production of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* in Mantua and they made excellent use of the chorus. It gave the work a dramatic possibility that I have never seen in England. Here we make the role of narrative too important, we imagine that our audiences need these interlocutions dispersed among the music to carry the story."

"But, unlike Italy, we have no entertainments with continuous music to provide an example," John told him. "There is absolutely no reason why we should not establish opera here in London. If our musical repartee was more sustained and our performances were more distinct from musical theatre we would find new audiences."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *LET RHYME TAKE THE PLACE OF REASON*

Nahum had not previously been treated to such an amount of talk about music and he loved hearing about ways in which instrumental and vocal sequences could work together without interrupting the poetry. That these things were being carefully considered, that musical strategies for holding a narrative theme were being discussed, filled him with delight.

John Blow repeatedly urged his friends to consider the composition of operas and more than once Henry gave Nahum a gleeful nod, which Nahum read as excited anticipation for composing the school entertainment. John Blow was already devising an opera with John Dryden, the theme for the work being taken from the tale of *Venus and Adonis*, and he informed them that he was hoping to persuade the King to have it performed privately at Court.

“The King is always looking for some masque-like entertainments,” he told them. “It’s this kind of thing that will improve his image, not all this political wrangling, so let us make operas, the King will pay us for them.”

John could have delivered his entreaties for the remainder of the day, but Nicholas interrupted him to express his need of a drink. There followed a disagreement about where they should go, Nicholas preferring to drink wine at Marshes in Whitehall

and John preferring to drink ale in the Sun tavern down by the river, but Henry interrupted with the suggestion that he play a new composition for them. His guests were of course eager to listen and the young composer sat himself at the harpsichord.

The piece was the song from *The History of King Richard II* and Nahum could hardly believe the charge of emotion that it inspired. That Henry had altered some of the words intrigued him, but he was not prepared for the number of times that Henry repeated his lines. The greatest reach of Henry's imagination came with the increased definition he gave to Nahum's phrasing, a technique that caused the emotions to fly between the words as though they were setting up a dialogue. At the end of it Nahum could hardly believe that these were his lines, so far had Henry carried the words with his musical devices. The meaning Henry had extracted was pure enchantment for Nahum and the sadness of Henry's tones was enough to move him to tears. Nahum put his arm round the composer and kissed him on the head.

"Your elaborate embellishments on wholly unimportant words reminded me of Matthew Locke," John told him. "Locke knew more about declamation than anyone, but he did not have your instinctual inspiration for communicating text. It is completely moving, my dear," and he asked where it was from.

Henry described the tragic prison scene at the end of Nahum's play and then offered to give them another new work and this one, he claimed, would lighten their spirits. Back at the harpsichord Henry's sounds began like a gentle call for attention and then slowly, in measured steps, they developed into a majestic fanfare of rich and fast moving action. It seemed to his listeners that the music was soaring, inviting excitement and filling them with expectation. All were amazed and Henry laughed joyfully.

"It's the overture to my opera," he told them, and, despite their questions, Henry would only talk about it when he had a drink in

his hands. Nicholas took a coin from his purse, tossed it confidently into the air, asking John to call, and when the coin landed John was the winner; the Sun was their destination. Once there, Nahum felt a certain pride as Henry talked of the school entertainment, but his anxiety came to the fore when John told him that his intention to adapt his play, *Brutus of Alba*, was flawed.

“There is a world of difference between writing a libretto and writing a play,” John insisted. “Any attempt to adapt a long narrative text to initiate songs for an opera will condemn you to fighting the inclination to keep everything.”

The Master of the King’s Music advised them to consider a modest number of scenes with a few songs in each; this, he declared, would give them plenty of material for an opera. Henry agreed with him and Nahum was confounded. Henry had suggested using the play’s theme and now he was agreeing to such a reduction in the number of scenes that it made the play of no use. Nahum asked John to define the role of the librettist and any other advice that he thought fit to offer. John, slightly bemused, indulged him.

“The job of the librettist,” he began, “is to convert everything to the short stanza.” Nahum fed on every word. “You must use as many short verses as possible. Try to vary the length of the verses and employ stops wherever you can. Let Henry help with the refrains, for his trained ear will make easy work of them. You must also write words with open vowel sounds. The audience will understand nothing if the consonants get clogged.”

Nahum nodded intently, etching the words into his memory.

“The most important thing to remember,” John continued, “is that comprehension is only a small part of the equation. Think more about pleasing the hearing of the audience rather than gratifying their understanding. Listen intently and allow rhyme to take the place of reason, all the rest is common sense. Practice modesty in everything and, if you can, leave your big ambitions at home. The

finest ambition you can have is to let Henry get to the music as soon as possible and the finest attitude you can adopt is to trust that you do not have to know everything. What you don't know now you'll soon learn."

After this Nahum went to the landlord for paper and quill pen to write down John's instructions and when he returned the three masters of the King's music were singing catches and bawdy songs. The tavern revellers were handsomely entertained and following their performance three mariners took to the stage and sang of the pleasures of being sailors. Their light hearted tunes were quite distinct from the harsh reality of life at sea and they accompanied each song with a little dance. Henry watched, transfixed. Later he returned to the stage to sing alone.

*To thee, to thee, and to a maid  
That kindly on her back will be laid  
And laugh and sing and kiss and play  
And wanton all a summer's day,  
Such a lass, kind friend and drinking  
Give me, great Jove, and damn the thinking.*

Most catches had a similar sounding tune, but Henry, with considerable attention, wrote new melodies to his favourite words. John remarked that there was longing in his voice and he asked Nahum if Henry was in love. When Nahum said that he was John declared that when Henry was not filling them with desire for innocent pleasure he was breaking their hearts with love. They all drank a great quantity and Nahum forgot to give Henry the news that he had visited the house of his beloved Frances Pieters.

## *CHAPTER NINE*

### *WITH COW PARSLEY FOR COMPANY*

Nahum remembered very little from the previous evening. He recalled singing sea shanties outside the tavern and attempting to imitate Henry as he walked and composed, but he wished that neither had occurred. He had no idea how he got home, but he did remember John Blow giving him instruction and then came the recollection that he had written notes. He moved to his coat as quickly as his sore head would allow, searched the pockets and, to his great relief, found his page of instructions.

It was Saturday and Nahum was due to travel to Greenwich with his dear friend Button. Nahum and Button were visiting his Uncle William, Button's patron, his mentor and his last surviving relative. A more intelligent and generous man you could not hope to find. Thomas Boteler had been known as Button since his school days. According to him, Thomas Boteler was first converted to Tommy Bottle, changed for a short time to Tummy Button and finally became Button. The sequence of thought had everything of Button's character about it and they all suspected him of inventing it. Once you are familiar with the fellow's antics you will know why.

Nahum, with aching head and dizzy spells, sat drinking coffee in the Old Quay coffee shop by Charing Cross when Button paraded in wearing a bright red coat and an extravagantly coloured hat. Nahum had great doubts about his ability to engage with Button's playful and excitable energy this morning.

“You look peaky,” his friend told him.

“I was up late, with Henry.”

“How is Henry, still on the fiddle?”

“I am working with him on an opera.”

“So you have an ear for music and a hand in writing it?”

“I am only writing the words.”

“Quite right, opera is hardly something to sing about. Have you given up on the theatre then?”

“No, I have nearly finished Richard II.”

“He was finished years ago.”

“How is your play progressing?”

“Did I tell you about my horseplay?”

“Why do you always answer a question with a question?”

“Do I?” Button asked.

Later, when they had settled themselves on the boat, Nahum felt bound to inform his friend that he was in need of serious calm and Button willingly left him to his nausea while he treated the boatmen to his numerous jokes and tricky speeches. The river, being choppy, caused Nahum’s sickness to increase until eventually he had to relieve his rebellious stomach of its awful contents. He claimed that the journey was worse than any he had taken on the Irish Sea and it was with great relief that he stepped onto the jetty at Greenwich. Sadly, this was not the last of it, for the carriage, on its journey to the manor house, found many a hole and rut to crash into and soon Nahum was again united with his queasiness.

On arriving at the manor house, a footman walked solemnly towards them and formally informed Button that William Boteler, his uncle, had died the previous evening. Button took the news calmly, but he walked round the courtyard, kicking stones for nearly an hour before he was ready to escort Nahum into the reception room. Button poured them both a large cup of wine and they drank to William. When the old man’s secretary arrived, Button and

he went to the library to sort through papers and Nahum poured himself another glass of wine. The alcohol re-engaged his spirits for a short while, but before long he was asleep in the chair and remained there until the dead of night, when he had no idea where else he might take himself.

The following morning Button continued to be busy with William's secretary, so Nahum walked out into the meadows, with cow parsley and hawthorn to keep him company. He walked by the river, knee deep in sweet-smelling moist grass, relishing the goodness of the fresh green, but in truth, he was lonely. He wanted Eliza there with him and he imagined her wrapping her arms about his neck, pulling him down to lie with her under the warm sun. He imagined her starry eyes smiling at him, promising him hours of pleasure and the lush water meadows seemed barren without her.

When Nahum returned to the house, Button informed him that he would remain there for the funeral and to take care of William's affairs, so Nahum took the boat back to the City alone. As he approached The Strand he hoped that Ellen had returned, but he knew the instant he entered that she was still with her sister. That night he prayed for Ellen's return and for Eliza's love.

The following morning, the day he was to see Eliza, his heart fluttered like a bird constantly flitting from one place to another. He took his shirts to Nancy's laundry in Milford Lane, had a cup of ale in the White Horse and went to Covent Garden to deliver his essay on Milton to Mary Heveningham.

Mary was at home, but Simon Fellows, Horace's secretary, was not and the inevitable consequence of this was disappointment, for Nahum would not be paid for the essay without Simon there to do it. Mary talked of a great number of matters that preoccupied her, the speed of her delivery as fast as ever, and before long Nahum had agreed to translate something to read at her next literary evening. As she talked on, it occurred to him that he had no time to

compose a new work for this occasion, so, with the Milton essay in his hand, he suggested that he read this. Mary promised to consider his proposal, but she intimated that she and Horace may yet chose a theme from antiquity.

Nahum departed later than he expected and, feeling the need for sustenance, he went for dinner at the Half Moon tavern on Drury Lane. He looked about at the guests, hoping that Thomas Killigrew would arrive and give him the opportunity to re-enliven the director's interest in *The History of King Richard II*, but there was no sign of him on this day. With little to distract him, Nahum ate a hasty meal and by midday he was walking about the gardens at Lincoln's Inn, thinking only that he would soon be re-united with Eliza. He was too excited to return home, but his walk was not a leisurely stroll and by the time he was properly conscious of what he was doing, he was passing Holborn with more than hour to spare before meeting his beautiful mistress. Rather than return to the gardens, or make some form of attempt to steady his nerves, Nahum went directly to the Pied Bull at Smithfield and drank two mugs of ale, which only served to increase his charged state.

CHAPTER TEN

*A TRYST WITH A LOVER*

If you can imagine how it feels to approach a lover's door with so much excitement in you that you cannot understand how you have not yet burst into flames, then this was how Nahum felt. His imminent combustion caused him to knock vigorously on Eliza's door and he waited with his heart in his mouth for her arrival. In his mind's eye Eliza was the most beautiful creature imaginable, but when she stood before him, his imagination did not know the half of it; Eliza was more invigorating than the sun. She invited him to the drawing room and Nahum kissed her repeatedly while declaring his love.

The happy couple sat on the sofa, Nahum talking of his writing and his trip to Greenwich, but his emotions were too active for conversation; he could think only of losing himself in his lover. He stood up, pulled Eliza to her feet and held her with such intent that they fell back onto the sofa. He kissed her passionately and ran his hand along her legs and inside her skirt. Then, unbuttoning his breeches, he drove himself towards her with a speed that she had no way of checking.

Eliza was taken aback, but Nahum, his passion having gathered overwhelming momentum, was aware of nothing; he didn't even know what aspect of his desires he should attend to first. When everything happened together at an alarming rate, he melted into her embrace as though he were performing an act of worship, his

heart pounding as he devoured every aspect of his contact with her. After this great surge, Nahum surrendered to a state of helplessness, closed his eyes and expressed his profound gratitude. With his head nestled into Eliza's neck, he took great breaths there, kissing her and repeating his words of surprise and undying love.

Eliza's attachment to this activity was less than intense and when Nahum attempted to engage her further she pulled away. They lay quietly for a while, Eliza trying to sense the moment when his ardour had cooled so that she could release herself. Nahum, after watching her sit up, straighten her skirt and tidy her hair, decided he should make an attempt to contact her in a more sociable manner. In his usual fashion, he talked of those moments he had thought of her, when the memory of her beauty had inspired him, and when these themes were exhausted he talked of his writing and the new opera he would work on with Henry.

Nahum was anxious to keep Eliza entertained and this anxiety soon found a subject that suited it; he started to talk of Henry's love for Frances and the concerns he had about it.

"Her family will not agree with it," he told Eliza. "Their love will flounder on the divisions that separate the City and Westminster."

"Love often causes division," Eliza offered. "Our love does."

"This is never true," Nahum declared, and he laughed to brush off the statement. "What opposing concerns hinder us? We are free to enjoy each other's company as we please."

"Do you imagine that Henry does not feel this way?"

"I'm sure he does, but he's wrong. His infatuation with Frances will bring him nothing but misery. I wish he'd find a mistress to distract him. He should not love her so exclusively."

"Is this what you do, Nahum?"

"Of course not. Eliza, I love you. I have no time for others."

"But if you had more time you would not love me exclusively."

Nahum tried to explain that he did not mean 'time' in the way she

interpreted it, but the harder he tried the more upset Eliza became. She did not want to forget his words and she did not want to forgive him. Nahum could not understand why he deserved her aggressive tone. He pleaded with her to accept that her words did not match his modest crime, but Eliza continued and accused him of caring more about his friends than he did about her. Nahum declared that this was never true, but Eliza charged him of loving selfishly. He tried to take her hand, but she pulled away and stood up.

“Eliza what is happening to you?” Nahum cried. “I would never knowingly offend you.” He stood next to her, trying to put his arms about her, but she freed herself again and told him that his being there had nothing to do with love. The charge was ridiculous, yet it worked on him and he was overwhelmed by aggression. He grabbed her by the hand, but she pushed him away, saying that she was not going to be consoled by him. He pleaded with her to stop this pretence and accused her of taunting him, claiming that he had never treated her in a casual fashion.

“Oh! Is this what you think, Nahum Tate?” she cried. “Given your casual regard for me, I’m surprised you dare refer to it.”

“What on earth do you mean?” he demanded.

“What do I mean? I mean that you do not really care for me. Our being together is a convenience for you. All you do is write and I wait here for nothing more than to witness your satisfied passion. In return for this I’m offered a few love poems. Do you ask anything about my life? No. Well I have one and I want it to be different to the life I’m leading now.”

The words cut Nahum deeply and he had no forewarning of them. He gave her frustration the time it needed to express itself, but it was enough to confound an angel and Eliza did not relent. She told him that their friendship had not grown in any fashion worth mentioning because he was only interested in himself.

“Your work, your friends and me; in that order,” she cried

accusingly. “Do you imagine that your words are so attractive that a person should just lie down before them?”

There was such a warlike tone in Eliza’s voice that Nahum’s world turned black; some horrid power inside him assumed control. He could not listen to any more. He grabbed her shoulders and pushed with all his strength. Suddenly Eliza lay sprawling on the sofa and Nahum, the brute, was frightened by his action.

“Get out of my house,” Eliza screamed. “Leave now and never come back. The very thought of you sickens me.”

Nahum strode out the door with Eliza’s voice following him down the stairs. He walked quickly, seeing nothing of the world before him. He walked passed Clerkenwell Green, charging through Woods Close to the fields beyond, never stopping ‘til he was high on the hills by Sadlers Wells. There he stood still, the night haunting him with wretched misery, while he breathed into himself, praying that his wildness and stupidity would recede.

He took in the sight of London, desolate now, where previously it had given pleasure, wondering how such blackness could have overtaken him and why Eliza would not allow him to retrieve his fallen position. He consoled himself with the thought that her anger must have a reason, but when it occurred to him that another man might have come into her life, he shivered and stood wavering between jealousy and guilt. He worried himself over the question of marriage and, with the intention of asking Eliza to marry him, he walked back down the hill, passing the fields, woods and gardens that meant nothing to him on his way up. He stood by Eliza’s door unable to knock and unable to understand why he could not do so, until all sense of himself was gone. Despondent and exhausted, Nahum returned home and wrote endless letters of apology. He was too stuffed with remorse to explain anything about his actions and he fell asleep with his clothes on.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *A BAN ON TRAGEDY*

After an early morning visit to the Three Rings coffee house, Nahum returned to his study to read through the anguished cries and heartfelt promises he had written the night before. His strained justifications and claims of bewilderment were an attempt to touch his sorrow and guilt, but nothing resembling his broken heart appeared on the page. He wrote Eliza a letter of apology and realised that he had less than an hour before the start of his first class at the Priest's school. Having nothing to wear, he ran to collect his shirts from Nancy's laundry, changed his clothes and made for Leicester Fields. Knowing that Josias was bound to question him about the theme for the entertainment, he took with him the notes he'd made following John Blow's advice and a copy of *Brutus of Alba*.

It was uncharacteristic of Nahum to be self-conscious with Anna Pieters, but after Henry's news about Frances and his visit to her house, Nahum imagined that his words might reveal something of his knowledge and when the lesson was over he left quickly. He was sitting in the lobby when Henry appeared, looking more dejected than Nahum felt. Nahum asked why he appeared to be downhearted, but the composer told him that there was nothing worth telling and, when Nahum suggested that they cancel their meeting with Josias, Henry replied that they may as well cancel life itself. With that he shuffled down the corridor in the direction of Josias Priest's office and Nahum followed after.

Josias, pleased to see them, asked if they had given any thought to his opening event and Nahum replied that they had considered devising a musical entertainment in the form of an opera. “Something like the production of *Psyche* at Dorset Garden,” he told the surprised choreographer.

“I doubt that our purse will extend to such finery,” Josias admitted, “but give me your thoughts on it.”

Henry sat in silence, looking miserable, so the task was left to Nahum. He asked Josias if he had seen his play *Brutus of Alba or the Enchanted Lovers* and the choreographer said that he knew the story well enough. Nahum handed him the play script.

“It was originally written as *Dido and Aeneas* after Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage*,” he said and when he saw Josias making a play of the book’s weight, Nahum offered to simplify the plot significantly.

“I would have thought that Virgil’s tale was simple enough,” Josias declared. “The tragedy ends with the death of Dido. Does your play change this significantly?”

Suddenly Nahum felt miserable and exhausted. “The action takes place in Syracuse, rather than Carthage,” he told Josias, “but the roles are basically the same. A Queen replaces Dido and Brutus replaces Aeneas.”

Josias then asked about the number of male roles and Nahum, looking sheepish, said that he would have to amend these to suit the predominantly female cast.

“The entirely female cast,” Josias corrected him. “Can you omit the male roles and still have this play?” he asked.

“The music will carry the narrative, not the libretto,” Henry interjected. “It will be an entertainment of songs and dances, so we shouldn’t worry about the details of the story just yet.”

Josias laughed. “Are you telling me that it’s not a tale about a soldier and a queen whose lives are ruined by their passion?”

“The opera will not offer so much detail,” Henry retorted. “The Italian and French audiences don’t turn their operas into lectures, they hear emotion in the music.”

“Well Henry, if there are songs then there must be words. Our entertainment is to celebrate the beginning of a new school and a production that ends with the death of the heroine by her own hand is not something that will inspire my pupils to dance or their parents to applaud. Don’t make them weep, Henry.”

“I will make it a moral tale, not a tragedy,” Nahum offered.

“Gentlemen,” Josias cried, exasperated, “why you are clinging to this so adamantly, there must be any number of themes that would serve us equally well.”

“And you might yet get one,” Henry told him, “but we can’t describe the thing before we have composed it. Trust us.”

“I do,” Josias proclaimed. “I trust you to devise something that will express the charm and grace of my pupils. I will not have them perform scenes of lovemaking and death.”

“It’s my job to compose the music,” Henry declared “and it is your job to choreograph the dances. Nahum’s job is to weave elegant words and we must all work on this together.”

“Henry, my dear, I am prepared to follow your lead, but please know that I am under considerable pressure with this change of schools. I suggest we sleep on it. In the meantime I will read the play and see what dances I might extemporize on this tragic theme. If the choreography of disappointed love is a challenge beyond my grasp I will let you know.” With that Josias opened his door and wished them good day.

Henry and Nahum retreated to the garden and when Nahum asked what ailed him, Henry declared that he wanted to be rid of his love for Frances. “My passion is too fierce,” he claimed, “and it causes me nothing but despair. I could easily perish by the very charms that once inspired me.”

Being faint with exhaustion and in need of some solace himself, Nahum fell silent. He had no words of consolation for Henry, so he listened while the composer continued to voice his woe.

“I am so irresistibly drawn to Frances, so captivated by her beauty, that I can think of nothing else,” Henry admitted and when Nahum suggested that he try to temper his feelings, the irony of his words was not lost upon him. “I have always conducted myself with restraint,” Henry continued, “but my misery is made greater by timidity. If I disguise my feelings, the abysmal hollowness of inaction haunts me. It is better that I am cut by swift disdain than remain forever on the terrible threshold of indecision. Every sound she utters is music to my ears. The smallest glance of her eye or movement of her hand will always fuel my love. I am doomed to bathe in my love’s beauty and receive nothing but rejection.”

Henry’s agonized tirade was no different to the anguished litany that had filled Nahum’s heart the previous night and for reasons he couldn’t comprehend he was consumed by the thought that he would never love anyone else. When he suggested that they take a drink together, Henry offered neither opinion nor objection.

As they walked to the Bell on Long Acre, Henry explained what had happened to spark his charge. “Frances was late for her lesson,” he began, “and then I noticed that she was standing in the doorway flirting with Monsieur Spurrier, the French teacher. She even glanced at me now and then to see if I was watching,” he cried, as though what he had seen was impossible. “She’s tormenting me, Nahum, playing with my pathetic feelings for her.”

Nahum tried to explain that she probably meant nothing by these actions, but Henry was under the spell of love and he could not help but read intention into casual events. So here they were, two fine fellows at the height of their creative powers, both drastically reduced and intimidated by their incompetent sensibilities.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *THE ART OF LOVE*

Once they were in the Bell tavern, Henry again took up the subject of opera and as his thoughts flowed his mood lightened. Nahum realised that music, even as a topic of conversation, could veil Henry's turmoil, tranquillize his spirit and re-enliven his enthusiasm.

"We must dance an opera, we can't write it," Henry instructed. "We must initiate our tale with actions, not words."

Nahum was about to ask how dance could evoke narrative themes, but Henry's words silenced him.

"If we had ten songs, ten chorus refrains and ten dances each lasting two minutes, we'd have an opera that lasted an hour."

The young composer's grasp of the enterprise, like John Blow's, was clear and Nahum, having lived twenty-seven years to Henry's twenty, had to admit that the inspiring fellow was more like his mentor than his junior.

The two friends drank a good deal to soften their spirits and Nahum was tempted to tell Henry about his visit to the Pieters' house, but he told him of the events at Eliza's apartment instead. Henry gave him a startling reply.

"Anyone who loves the country as much as you, Nahum, should return to it whenever you can. Stop working, my dear fellow and regard how things change."

Nahum retorted that these words could equally well apply to him, but he did announce that he might go to Dublin.

“My sister, Mary is unwell and Ann has asked that I visit them,” he informed his friend. Henry encouraged him, suggesting that he take a rest from his feelings for Eliza, and Nahum was amused by the distinction Henry made between his advice and his own actions. He invited Henry to accompany him, claiming that there was no finer place than Irish hills to write an opera, but Henry insisted that he was nowhere if he was not at Westminster. Later, forgetting his horrors of the journey, Nahum commended the Irish landscape and his elaborate descriptions worked wonders on him, causing the sharp edge of his melancholy to soften.

Words came to Nahum in his sleep that night and they irritated him. “You have made a literary ambition out of love and a poor show of it in life.” He recalled them with dismal forboding while sitting in The Strand Coffee Shop, but Ellen was in the kitchen when he returned and her presence put an end to his melancholia. He told her that he could not manage without her and Ellen had replied that she had no thought of leaving. This pleased Nahum, but when he talked of his impending trip to Ireland, it was Ellen’s turn to express concern about surviving without him. Nahum promised to leave enough money to keep her while he was away and then he worried about finding the finance to honour his pledge.

For the remainder of the day our playwright converted *Brutus of Alba* into an opera. He omitted all the male characters, apart from Brutus, and reduced the scenes to six. In the first, Brutus tells Dido of his battles and their feelings for each other grow. In the second, the Queen, nervous about her love, is encouraged by her sister. In the third, the sorceress and her witches plot the Queen’s downfall and conjure a storm. In the fourth, the Queen and Brutus hide in a cave after a sorceress has administered a love potion to them. In the fifth, a spirit disguised as Mercury informs Brutus that Jove

commands him to depart for Albion. In the sixth, Brutus tells the Queen he must depart and the Queen either dies or faints.

Nahum was pondering the two possibilities when Button knocked on his study door. "I've been waiting for you for hours," he complained. Nahum looked surprised and Button informed him that he had been teaching Harry magic. Then Harry entered Nahum's study.

"Mr. Button taught me how breath can warm hands and cool soup," the boy announced and he persuaded Nahum to go with him to the kitchen where he treated him to some clever manoeuvres with six glasses of water and two other tricks involving numbers. "I want to go on the stage," Harry told him and Ellen told her son that she wanted him to go to bed and it was to bed that Harry went.

The two friends went to the White Horse, where Button talked of old William and Nahum talked of Eliza.

"Love makes my heart sink," Nahum admitted.

"If love makes you sink when it should make you fly, you should love another," Button advised.

"One cannot choose who to love," Nahum declared.

"Then who should do the choosing?" his friend asked.

"Perhaps love selects us," Nahum mused. "Perhaps it beckons us on and once we are enchanted, it makes a fool of us."

"You were a fool to banish the Fool, not for loving Eliza," Button told him. He had never forgiven Nahum for dropping the Fool from *King Lear*; it was he who had encouraged him to write the play and though Nahum had dedicated it to him, Button took no pleasure in the work.

"I should not make love my subject," Nahum admitted.

"Well that's love and Fools off the agenda then," Button said.

Despite professing that love should not be his subject, Nahum wrote to Eliza with love every day. He wrote also to his sister promising to be in Ireland two weeks hence and he busied himself

collecting fees for completed articles. While he was with Roger Tonson in Holborn, the editor informed him that he was looking for a writer to translate Ovid's *The Art Of Love*. Thinking that Nahum was the obvious choice, Roger was surprised by his refusal. Undeterred, the editor pressed his case, promising Nahum a small advance and a late September date for its completion. Before long Nahum accepted this commission and also one other; an article on London gardens, to be finished by the following week.

Carrying Roger Tonson's Latin edition of Ovid, Nahum went to Covent Garden to collect payment for his Milton article. Mary was out and Horace was still in Windsor, but the secretary, Simon Fellows, greeted him and so did his dear friend, Thomas Flatman. Thomas, a poet, a writer of songs and a painter of miniatures, was so completely in love he could talk only of Caroline. Nahum, feeling rejection more strongly on account of his friend's elation, could talk only of Eliza. To Nahum's good fortune, Thomas proved himself an expert in affectionate consolation.

Nahum talked of the article that he must write before visiting his family in Ireland and discovered that Thomas had a particular love of gardens. Thomas located a book in Horace's library called, *Upon the Gardens of Epicurus*, by Sir William Temple. This work concerned the formal gardens of Europe, but it also touched upon the irregular gardens of China, and these, according to Temple, had more beauty than their European equivalents. The Chinese were interested in arrangements that possessed no order or recognisable disposition of parts and while this intrigued Nahum, he was more delighted that it was Chinese belief that beauty should strike the eye with startling consequences. This was exactly how Nahum had reacted to Eliza's beauty; it gave his response to her some validity and justified the foolish leap of his heart. Nahum departed the library with a bag containing fifteen shillings, books by Ovid and Sir William Temple, and a heart that was a little less oppressed.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *WORDS TO CHARM THE RAGING SEA*

The early morning sky shook with ominous rumbles, threatening thunder and Nahum decided to wait before visiting Mr. Garthway's stable. While organising his papers he discovered that the notes he'd made on John Blow's advice to a librettist were in a crumpled state, so he wrote them anew. "Convert everything to the short stanza. Use short verses but vary their length. Employ stops wherever you can. Let Henry help with the refrains. Use words with open vowel sounds. Don't over concern yourself with comprehension. Please the hearing of the audience rather than gratifying their understanding. Allow rhyme to take the place of reason."

Nahum pinned the sheet to the wall above his desk and, once the sky's rumbles had ceased, he went to Scotland Yard to enquire about hiring a horse to take him to Liverpool. Mr. Garthway reminded Nahum of the considerable arrangements he had to make for his journey and if the list of things he had to hire wasn't the worst of it, the expense certainly was. Saddle, bridle, saddle-cloth and saddlebags; a cloak, riding suit, boots and spurs; a sword, a belt and a holster for his pistol; when he complained of the cost, Mr. Garthway gave him the hat for free.

"Your alternative," he told Nahum, "is to take the coach. They are now making the run to Chester, but the journey takes six days and so weary are the passengers after half a day of jolting and jostling that they all vow never to travel by this means again."

Nahum remained with the notion of taking the horse and then made his way to the Old Monk's Refectory, where Henry was singing and dancing while writing notation.

"*Theodosius, or The Force of Love,*" Henry announced without stopping, but when Nahum mentioned he had come from the stables to hire his horse for Ireland he declared that life in Westminster without Nahum's company would be difficult. Before Nahum could respond, Henry enquired if he had written the scenes and he handed Henry the pages. The composer was delighted and instantly wanted to show it to Josias, but Nahum was in no mood for this.

"Should we determine how the musical and dramatic structures work together?" Henry asked, but Nahum pleaded exhaustion and invited him to supper, claiming that he knew a place where the food and the entertainment were surprisingly good. Henry agreed.

Nahum, of course, took Henry to The Spaniard Eating-House, but he didn't mention that it was owned by the Pieters' Family. Within minutes of sitting down Nahum sat frozen to his chair. A woman of about forty, looking the very image of Frances, moved to within three yards of their table. Henry had his back to her and Nahum did not feel ready to tell him that the woman standing behind him might one day be his mother-in-law.

Henry talked of the enjoyment the *Psyche* performance gave him and he suggested to Nahum that he invent some moving machinery for *The History of King Richard II*. The prospect of flying Richard's detractors about the stage, amused Nahum, as did Henry's suggestion that they fly Mercury and the witches about the stage for the school entertainment, but he did not take it seriously when Henry said he would ask James Billingsley to consider it.

Henry did not question their presence at The Spaniard. He enjoyed the food and when a group of male singers sang Tudor songs in four-part harmony from the stage, he accompanied their melodies with joyful humming and finger tapping. He was singing

their songs on the boat upriver before Nahum surprised him with the news that The Spaniard was owned by Frances' family. Then Henry jumped upon Nahum, tickling and punching him in such a strident manner that the boat rocked perilously and the boatman demanded that they cease their antics. It was all Nahum could do to convince Henry not return to The Spaniard that evening.

That night Nahum dreamt that he was King Richard, lying in a cell in the Tower. His jailers, as Henry had suggested, were flying around him, tormenting him with jibes and stabbing him with sticks. When they vanished into thin air, a table carrying plates of delicious food rose up out of the floor and, as Nahum moved towards the thing, it sank back into the floor.

It was a tortured dream, but once awake Nahum found it amusing. He wrote some notes to remind himself, following this with another letter to Eliza. He went to the kitchen to discover the whereabouts of his postman and saw Harry curled up on his mother's lap. Ellen was stroking the boy's hair and she explained that he had been fighting. Harry denied it, but he had a large bump on his left eye and a cut on his lip. Ellen told Nahum that it was time Harry had something to occupy him or he would be forever on the streets.

"I ain't working," the boy complained, and Nahum was horrified at the prospect of Harry being sent to work before his time.

"If he learned to read and write," Nahum told Ellen, "he could discuss his differences rather than fight about them."

Just then there was a loud rap at the door and Nahum, answering it, was met by a young man who handed him a letter. It was from Eliza, inviting him to visit her at six the following day. He stood in the hallway kissing the page and feeling the depth of his love. When he returned to the kitchen he told Harry that he would teach him to read and write. Ellen stared as though he were a creature who had just landed from the moon, but Nahum insisted that there was no reason why Harry should not go to school.

“How soon can I go?” Harry asked and Ellen scolded him.

“First you must thank Mr. Tate, if he is going to teach you to read, and then you must think about what it means to study rather than roam the streets.” Harry made a complaining noise. “You see?” Ellen said. “I’m not sure that you can do it, even if it were to be the making of you.” She turned to Nahum, thanked him for his kind offer and gave Harry a push to indicate that he should do likewise. Harry was thoughtful and stared at Nahum.

“Don’t worry, I’m going to be good at it,” he told his prospective teacher at last and Nahum sent Ellen a look of bemusement.

On returning to his study to consider King Richard, Nahum remembered his flying dream and the table covered with provisions rising up through the floor before the monarch. He saw no reason why he should not include this and he decided that the song Henry had composed would occur when the table sank down again. The playwright worked on, happy at the prospect of meeting Eliza, and in the following scene he invented a messenger who entered the King’s cell with a letter from the Queen. He had Eliza’s letter in mind when he wrote the words for the King:

*O sacred character, oh heaven born saint!  
Why! Here are words would charm the raging sea,  
Cure lunatics; dissolve the wizard’s spell,  
Check baleful planets and make winter bloom.*

The only regret he had that day was that he couldn’t read these words to Eliza to prove the extent of her inspiration upon him.

## *CHAPTER FOURTEEN*

### *NO WAY TO TREAT A HEART*

With the morning sun blazing from a blue sky, Nahum decided to go to the city in search of gardens. He knew the gardens in the houses of Somerset, Arundel and Essex, those by the Temple and King's Bench Walk, the pretty parterres and tree-lined avenues of the Grays and Lincoln's Inn gardens, but he was not familiar with the city gardens. He took a boat to the pier by Old Swan Lane, walked up Ebgale Lane to Thames Street and then along Fish Street. There he came across a splendid pillar of marble with a golden ball of fire at the top; it was the monument that marked the place where the fire started. He walked through Wool Church Market, down Thread Needle Street, past the Royal Exchange and on to Broad Street without discovering a single garden.

In the Cross Keys, Nahum asked the landlord where a garden might be found and he was directed to walk up Austin Friars and turn left at the Dutch Church. The impressive church surprised him and the Drapers Garden had the prettiest parterre of roses he had ever seen. He walked up Three Tun Alley to London Wall, past New Bethlehem Hospital and into a vast expanse of green which was referred to as the Lower Walks of Moore Fields.

As he was walking down Artillery Lane he passed Bethlehem Church Yard and saw a great many children playing happily, but the Old Artillery Garden was a sorry piece of ground. From there he went up Chrispin Street to Spittle Fields where sheep were grazing

on the grass. He walked through Spittle Yard, had boiled beef and carrots at the Bull and Bush in White Lion Yard and then crossed Folgate to make his way down Hog Lane. Here the Gardeners Gardens, with their rows of vegetable beds, inspired him, but in the Upper Walks of Moore Fields he fell asleep on the grass.

Nahum's spirit was heavy when he woke. As the time approached six o'clock he became nervous about meeting Eliza. When he had walked down Old Street to Goswell Street and into the Charter House Gardens, his anxiety turned to sadness, for Eliza and he had once taken their evening strolls here. With the clock on St. John's Tower reading past six o'clock, Nahum bid his spirit to be brave and he walked down Swan Alley to St. John's Street to face his fate. Once in St. John's Lane, he knocked upon Eliza's door.

The beauty of Eliza's eyes provoked an explosion in Nahum. He never understood how he could resist the desire to take her in his arms. In the drawing room, Eliza invited Nahum to sit on the sofa, while she sat opposite in a chair. Initially, their words, attempts to discover a means of recovery, were difficult and nervous, but once they had agreed to put the past behind them, Nahum invited Eliza to sit with him.

"I want you to stop writing to me," Eliza told him and Nahum felt tears in his eyes. "I do not want to feel your concern for me every day."

Nahum did not know how she could say this. He had never felt such love before. "I love you," he said.

"Stop Nahum," she pleaded, "it is inappropriate to talk like this now. We must live our lives separately."

"How strange that you say this when I have come here to ask you to marry me. I know that I can make you happy."

"Oh, Nahum, do not ask this. I do not want to marry you. This is not for us. What I'm trying to tell you is that I want to be free of your attention."

“But you said you wanted a different kind of life.”

“I cannot marry you, Nahum, I am not in love with you.”

“Eliza, your words break my heart.”

“I cannot mislead you, Nahum.”

“So I’m a useless weed that needs pulling out by the roots.”

“I cannot ignore the feelings that govern my heart.”

“But I know that you have feelings for me.”

“I do not love you, Nahum.”

“Perhaps you are uncertain about your feelings.”

“I never loved you, Nahum. It was a mistake.”

“You find love fearful. You do not know your heart.”

“Nahum, if I were in love with you, I would know about it.”

“I don’t believe you. You are afraid of losing control.”

“Why do you always tell me what I feel?”

“Why is your heart hardened against love?”

“I cannot describe these things. We must talk calmly, sensibly.”

“Is it sensible to deny your feelings?”

“Nahum, I do not know why you love me. I hate it. I despise your horrid gratitude to me.” A storm gathered across Eliza’s face and tears welled up in her eyes. “You are a fool to worship me as you do. I am not worth it. You love something I can’t see. You are too close.” She wiped her tears. “I want you to stop persisting with this so-called love. Show me that you care by granting my liberty.”

Nahum moved from the sofa, knelt before her and took her hand. “I want to hold you close to me, Eliza. I want to dry your tears and kiss your lips.” Eliza prevented him from getting close. “By all the saints,” Nahum cried, standing up, “I can’t go through this again. Why must you always spurn me?” Eliza did not move. “What is it this time? Has another man won your affections?”

“Nahum, many men win my affections.”

“You are saying this to goad me,” Nahum declared, and whether she had or she hadn’t he was consumed with jealousy. He could

be jealous of Eliza enjoying her own company, let alone that of another man. “Why?” he shouted. “Why do this to me now? I am guilty of loving you, but you...you are guilty of hating me for it.”

Tears collected in Eliza’s eyes. “You are impossible,” she cried. “Why can’t you give me anything I ask for? I gave you everything when I had it to give.”

Nahum knew that she had. She had made his dreams come true. He moved towards her and lifted her by the hands so that she stood next to him. “I will not shout at you, I promise,” he declared, “but please, please tell me that the affection we shared was true, that there was love between us.” Eliza remained silent. “I will do as you ask. I will not write to you everyday. I will wait. I will wait quietly in the hope that one day you will love me.”

Eliza stepped back. “I will never love you, Nahum,” she said and Nahum could not mistake the resolution in her voice.

“This is no way to treat a heart,” he moaned and he walked out of the door, down the stairs and away from the building that had brought him such wretched misery.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *SUMMONED OFF TO HOWL*

Nahum returned to his study, took his play *Dido and Aeneas* from the shelf and read the words of pain he'd given to Aeneas after Dido had rejected him.

*I am summoned off to howl disconsolate in flames again. I go – winged with hope I entered, but return stripped of my plumes and encumbered with despair. Not one tender look or a pitying, parting sigh. It is all my banished soul has to sustain me with until I am restored to those dear eyes again.*

Nahum's broken spirit did not revive by reading these words. He wondered if the pain of rejected love could indeed have mortal consequences and thinking that it could, he made a desperate vow that death would not rear its wizened form and invite him with its solution. He knew that the price of his survival would be the renunciation of all feeling and a hibernation that would last until the pain was no longer.

With all feeling dead in him, Eliza was still under his skin. It rained all day and Nahum wrote about gardens without the pleasure his craft usually invited. By evening he was utterly lost and by night he was howling at the moon. The following morning brought no revival, he rejected it, but he completed his article on gardens and

made a copy of the opera scenes so that he had something to show Josias after his lessons.

As he passed through the school lobby, Mr. Singleton, the doorkeeper, handed him a note from Josias; it requested Nahum's attendance in Henry's music room at four o'clock. In a desultory fashion Nahum instructed his pupils to make fair copies of previous work and he dismissed the class early for fear that his emotions would erupt. He did not tell them that he would be in Ireland for the remainder of the term and he never made eye contact with Anna. At four o'clock, entering Henry's music room, Nahum heard Frances Pieters' extraordinary soprano voice.

*Whilst they're in doubt their flame increases,  
And all attendance they will pay;  
When once confess'd their ardour ceases,  
And vows like smoke soon fly away.*

The astonishing purity and generous warmth of Frances' voice had done much to charm and seduce Henry, but so had her blue eyes, her rosy lips and her youthful figure. When she had finished her song, Henry addressed her in a gentle, instructive manner.

"You should sing the word 'fly' as if you were flying away," he said. "Try to exploit the expressive potential of the melisma."

"What's a melisma?" Frances asked, fluttering slightly.

"A melisma has a number of notes on the same word. It is an ornamental device, but meaning can be communicated by it." He sang. "*And vows like smoke soon flyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy away.*"

Frances smiled at Henry, surrendering to both his words and his charms, and when she sang the phrase again Henry was gushing with his praises. This clever and passionate man was helpless with gratitude for her attentive response and Frances, ablaze with her song, could not prevent her shining heart glistening for all to

see. Their communication was entirely in the hands of Eros and whatever had occurred the previous week to disrupt their love had now passed over.

When Josias flounced in, he interrupted the lesson, but he did invite the pupils to stay and listen to their music teacher. Henry played them the overture that Nahum had heard at the Abbey.

“It’s a musical paradise,” Josias declared, and he asked if this music would occur at the beginning of the performance.

“I suspect that you would like the entertainment to start with dancing,” Henry told him, “so a prologue with dancing will precede the overture.” Josias beamed and Henry picked up his violin. He played a tune with the sprightly tones of a sailor’s hornpipe and danced about the room, singing. “Come away jolly sailors, our ships are departing, tra la la, la la la, la la la.”

It reminded Nahum of the night in the Sun Tavern when the sailors entertained the masters of the King’s music. He was amazed at the speed Henry could take up events that entered his orbit. When his performance was finished the room exploded with cheers and laughter and Josias asked if he would teach it to the pupils.

“It is too early for rehearsals,” Henry admonished him, but Josias declared that it was never too early to rehearse. He dismissed the pupils and asked composer and librettist to accompany him to his office. Neither had any enthusiasm to meet and Henry wanted more from Frances than a brief parting glance filled with longing.

“My dear, Nahum,” Josias began, “did you prepare anything to indicate the scenes?” Nahum handed Josias his scenario and in headmasterish tones he told them that he was still very uncertain about the subject. “Cecelia is even more perturbed by it than I am,” he added, “but I am willing to accept it as a starting point if it enables us to proceed with haste. The timing of events is everything.”

“The timing of what events?” Henry asked.

“Well, we must determine how quickly we can progress with the

work,” Josias exclaimed. “You must have considered the timing. Who is doing what when and how long it will take, that sort of thing. Cecelia is trying to organise the school programme. The term finishes in four weeks and we must start packing shortly after that. I would like to choreograph some of the dances before we move, or we will be left with too much to do in Chelsea.”

“I cannot possibly compose the dance music yet,” Henry insisted. “The choreography must wait until September.”

“But it is unlikely that I will have a hall in September,” Josias complained, “the builders will still be constructing it.”

Henry told Josias that his demands were impossible and Josias declared that the situation was impossible for both of them. Henry suggested that he hire a hall somewhere in Chelsea and Josias laughed at the impossibility of this suggestion.

“Make a start on the prologue,” he pleaded. “We don’t need to be telling any kind of tale in the prologue.”

Henry sighed, but he agreed to comply with the choreographer’s wishes and, the moment he’d done so, Josias asked if they could make a start on it there and then. Henry looked to Nahum.

“I must now tell you my business,” Nahum announced and Josias was instantly aware that he wasn’t likely to be pleased by his news. “I must travel to Ireland,” Nahum began, “and I doubt that I will be back before the end of term.”

It was Josias’ turn to sigh then, but when Nahum explained the circumstances of his sister’s illness, Josias accepted his absence with some equanimity. Suddenly, there was no reason for Nahum to remain there. He would have liked to spend some time with Henry, but Josias had staked his claim on the composer’s attention, so Nahum, with cursory embraces, left them to the making of a prologue.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *REMEMBER ME, REMEMBER ME*

Nahum walked slowly home. He was extemporising a song with a sad refrain, feeling the rhythm of the words as they connected with his steps, just as Henry would feel them. He was singing about the images of Eliza that he held in his mind's eye and it occurred to him that they were possibly more real to him than the people in his life. It was a vague thought, a rare glimpse, its fleeting presence floating away as quickly as it had floated in, and when it was gone, it was the rhythm of his strides that was again the centre of his preoccupation.

The musicality of his words caused Nahum to muse upon his attitude to metre, how his emphasis had shifted from the arrangement of feet in a single line to a sense of connection that occurred across larger sections of work. It was the sound of words grouped together that now concerned him rather than prosody - that rhythmic arrangement of syllables in a verse - and this, he thought, might be entirely to do with opera.

Nahum reunited with these thoughts the following day, as he was walking to Mr. Garthway's stable, but by the time he had made his arrangements for departure they had flown from him, just as his thoughts about the reality of Eliza's presence had flown from him the previous day. It was Ellen who woke Nahum from his fantasies, asking if there was anything Harry could study while he was away.

“He could practice writing the alphabet,” Nahum suggested, and he offered to buy him a pen and ink when he was out.

“You’re a saint,” Ellen told him and Nahum smiled, adding the purchase of paper, as well as the pen and ink, to his list of things he had to accomplish on this day.

His first task was to visit Mr. Killigrew at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, and the second was to visit Roger Tonson in Holborn. With *The History of King Richard II* and the article on gardens in his bag, Nahum stepped out with the feeling that a stage in his life was coming to an end, that this trip to Ireland was a watershed.

Neither Killigrew, nor his secretary, John Petty were at the theatre, so Nahum, with some reluctance, left his manuscript with William Prizeman. William, a young man who was in charge of the candles, insisted that Nahum’s manuscript would be safe with him, but as the playwright walked up Drury Lane he was concerned about the amount of trust he had placed in William.

When he arrived at Roger Tonson’s office in Holborn, Nahum discovered that he too was not at work, but luckily his brother, James was, and James was easily up to the task of handing out money. With his article deposited, Nahum walked from the building with that pleasurable feeling that comes when a bag of silver coins is weighing heavily in the pocket.

Nahum visited Mansard’s the stationers to purchase quills, paper and ink and then returned home to hand all his gains to Ellen. Ellen was greatly perturbed that Harry had not returned home for lunch, so Nahum sat with her while he wrote out the alphabet for Harry to copy. When Harry did eventually turn up Ellen jumped on him.

“Why is it that you never do anything right?” she cried.

“Because I do everything wrong,” Harry replied and Ellen gave him a clip round the ear for his rudeness. He was instructed to wash and warned that if he did not behave he would be sent to bed rather than receive the present Nahum had bought him.

Harry, seeing the paper, pen and ink, asked if he was going to make a start on his lessons.

“You most certainly are not,” Ellen told him, “but Nahum might show you how to make letters,” and with that Harry rushed to the sink. He washed in seconds and consumed a large slice of bread at a similar speed, but as Nahum was explaining how letters were formed, Harry fell asleep. As Ellen was carrying him to bed, there was a rap at the door.

“Button presents himself to you,” said his friend. Nahum threw open the door. “I am here to bid you goodbye and to remonstrate with you for not informing me of your departure.”

“Oh, Button! I forgot about you,” said Nahum, pulling him in.

“And what if the whole world should follow suit?”

“Button, they would not. Mine is an extreme case.”

“Not as extreme as mine, I suspect.”

“Forgive me. What would you have me do?”

“Remember me, Nahum, Reverse my fate and remember me.”

“I will Button and should we also go for a drink?”

“Some wine to revive the memory might be appropriate.”

“How could I forget about you, Button?”

“That, I think, should be my question.”

“Come, we will go to the White Horse.”

“Does he have the power of memory?”

“No, but he has the wine,” and with that the two crossed The Strand to the tavern. When Nahum asked his friend what he would get up to while he was away, Button suggested that he would go in search of new friends to improve the attention he craved so unsuccessfully. Nahum insisted that he had not really forgotten about him and, filling his glass a second time, he toasted Button with the words, “Whatever you wish.”

“Whatever I wish?” Button declared, and chinking his glass he declared, “Remember me and forget my fate.”

“And what is the fate I should forget?” Nahum asked.

“Why, the fate that causes me to be forgotten,” said Button.

“You will never be forgotten,” Nahum told him and he thanked his friend for being so attentive to him.

The early morning sky was beautiful and the air was still when Nahum stepped into The Strand. He had no bag, for on this journey he could only carry the clothes he was wearing to the stables. Even at first light Garthway’s stable was busy and the smell of horses filled the air. Mr. Garthway helped Nahum with his riding suit and the fitting of his spurs and then introduced him to a handsome dapple-grey with the name, Jupiter.

“He will be your closest companion for the next four days,” the stable man told him, and Nahum spent a little time patting the horse, checking the bridle and stroking the saddle, just to get the feel of it.

With his clothes packed in the saddlebags and his sword and holster on his belt, Nahum mounted Jupiter and trotted from the stables. They were out into the country lanes before most folk were awake and, to ward off the sinking realisation that he was alone, Nahum bid his spirit to gather strength by being without companions. There was something sobering about accepting solitude, he thought, “even something victorious,” he told himself, but then he checked his enthusiasm; solitude would never be his preferred path to a new beginning.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *A TROJAN KNIFE IN HER LAP*

The number of travellers riding north had increased since Nahum last made the journey and on the first day alone he met up with two argumentative Presbyterian ministers, a merchant who boasted of his many conquests, a group of travelling players who entertained him with sparkling wit and a family travelling to Chester by coach. They confirmed the horrors of the journey just as Mr. Garthway had related it, and Nahum was very pleased that he had travelled with Jupiter. Indeed, it was with mixed feelings that he stabled the horse at the Rose and Crown in Liverpool, he'd had five good days with his companion, but it was with the singular feeling of excitement that he booked his passage to Dublin on the 'Princess May'.

At three o'clock in the morning, high tide, Nahum was at sea. The weather was fair, there was a good breeze and the 'Princess May' was a handsome vessel. By sunrise the next day he was gazing at the approaching coastline of Ireland with anticipation running so high in him he could feel it in his chest. When they pulled into Dublin Bay the decision was made to drop anchor at Ring's Head, for the tide was too low for the boat to progress to its mooring further up the Liffey. This created some concern, but after a short row upriver, Nahum was deposited on Irish soil and he thanked God with all his heart to be in this place he called home.

Nahum proceeded along Rogerson's Quay, grateful to have his land legs back again, and he breathed in the air of Dublin as though

he had never before tasted sustenance like it. He gave Trinity College a cursory and nostalgic glance and made his way along Church Lane to William Street as though it were a walk he took every day. His feelings as he walked through Castle Market and into Drury Street changed from excitement to foreboding, this being the street where Mary lived, but he saw Mary from a distance, standing in the doorway, and he could tell that she was as bright as day. He ran to her and they embraced with tears of relief in their eyes.

Apart from feeling weak, on account of the blood she had lost, Mary was as fit as a fiddle. The news of Nahum's arrival travelled fast and within the hour his younger brothers, John and Theophulus, and his older sisters, Fidelia and Ann had joined him. His brother's wives, his sister's husbands and their numerous children, all gathered to greet him and when his Uncle Theosophus, his children and his children's children arrived, there was enough of them for a party. The beautiful children ran about the house excitedly and he couldn't remember when last he'd celebrated so well. Nahum's older brother, Faithful was the only absent member of the family, but he would pass through Dublin soon on his way back to his Parish at Kilbride.

Over the next few days, Nahum revisited the places that had once been part of his life. The street sellers, performers, musicians and children were no less noisy than they were in London and he was surprised that the area around Wood Quay had developed into a busy publishing district. Fishamble Street was the place he generally frequented, either in the Leather Bottle Tavern or Dick's Coffee House. He enjoyed the company of Thomas Cotter, who ran a bookshop behind the coffee house, and when Thomas introduced him to Richard Pue, a writer who published a newspaper called Pue's Occurrences, Nahum could often be found in his company. On some evenings he would eat with Richard and his wife Fiona, and on one occasion he told them that he could imagine returning to

live in Dublin. “It’s quiet now,” Fiona told him, “but it will not last. The North is in turmoil again and the disturbances always travel to Dublin before long.”

Nahum waited on for Faithful to arrive. In a letter he had sent to Ann, Faithful pleaded with his brother to wait for him, but Nahum was growing restless about getting on with work and earning money. The next morning, Nahum visited the library at Trinity College in the hope of finding a copy of *The Art Of Love*. A charming librarian took it upon himself to assist him, but all he could find was a copy of Ovid’s *Heroides*. Nahum was not familiar with this work and the librarian informed him that it consisted of a series of epistles in which Ovid expressed the thoughts of antiquity’s heroines. Nahum, excited, took the book to a table and quickly learned that Ovid was relating the sorrows of women who had been deserted by their lovers. In the seventh epistle Ovid gave voice to Queen Dido’s lamentations.

*...could you find  
wife who will love you as I have loved you?  
Like devout incense thrown on smoking altars,  
Like wax torches tipped with sulphur, I  
am burning with love: all day long and all night,  
I desire nothing but Aeneas.*

As a sign of her love Dido had offered Carthage to Aeneas. It lacked nothing but a king and his ability to reject the offer astounded her. His drive to establish a new kingdom in Italy was more important than the love she offered him. This bewildered the Queen. Aeneas attempted to explain that his mission was given to him by the gods and no mortal reason could intervene to prevent him completing it. He could not and therefore would not be guided by love.

*You should see my face while I write this letter:  
a Trojan knife nestles in my lap;  
tears fall from my cheeks on its hammered steel blade  
and soon it will be stained with my blood.*

Ovid's tragic Dido was quite unlike Virgil's vengeful queen and there were words here that were similar to those Nahum had used when pleading with Eliza. *You can accuse me of nothing more than love*, the Queen declared, but she was harder on her prince for breaking his solemn pledge than Nahum had been with Eliza. *I know you will again be false*, she told him, reminding the high minded general that he had left his wife in Troy. *You told me that, and I should have known*, she accused him, for Aeneas had left his wife for dead. Poor Dido, thought Nahum, the knowledge of this will not help her, it will not ease her torturing pain. He read on.

*...it is Dido, swollen with child,  
whom you abandon with part of you.  
To the mother's fate must be added the child's,  
You will cause your unborn child to die.*

The words threw Nahum into a panic. It seemed to him that the loss of a child could have caused Eliza's anger. He could not imagine the anguish that would result from this and to suffer it with desertion was a thing that could never be forgiven. It was a wild supposition, but Nahum allowed himself to be drawn into it. He left the library and wandered disconsolately to the Liffey, where he stood lost in contemplation on the Ormond Bridge. He willed the motionless Liffey to flow with greater current, to wash away his misery at being without Eliza, but that night he lay awake, bemoaning the wretched fate that had made him guilty of everything and loved by no one.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *THROWING RICHES TO THE WIND*

When Faithful invited Nahum to visit his parish in the Wicklow Mountains the visitor accepted. He was reluctant at first, but he had longed for an opportunity to refresh himself in the landscape and with Faithful he would lose himself in the hills and feed his eyes on their beauty. They had set off at dawn and the sun was barely in the sky when Faithful asked his brother why marriage had thus far passed him by. The question bit Nahum hard and he thought it typical of his brother that he should head straight for a weakness. He told Faithful that it was mere circumstance and before long Faithful was listening to Nahum singing the praises of Eliza. Having understood that Nahum's love for Eliza Ashton was unquenchable, Faithful learned that they were already separated and this was not a territory he was familiar with. He told his brother that there were many contradictions about love here and Nahum exploded.

"I'm aware of the contradictions," he shouted, "but it's the truth for all its confusion."

Faithful rode on in silence, instantly gathering that the subject was a delicate one. Nahum though, had a sense of his thoughts and he was too irritated by them to let them go unanswered.

"I still intend to ask Eliza to be my wife," he declared and after describing his powerful attraction to this woman of incomparable beauty, Faithful felt duty bound to instruct his brother on the dangers of beauty when it is given too much regard.

“Physical attraction should not count for so much,” he advised. “Beauty is an illusion, a mirage to be avoided at all costs. Stay close to God, Nahum; rid yourself of those obsessions that live in the eyes and stay close to God.”

Nahum wanted to explain the Chinese idea of beauty, of the truth it held for gardens and other things constructed to delight, but he imagined that anything striking the eye would be too much for his brother. He was, of course, right. Faithful, the strict older brother and Pastor in the Church, had only Nahum’s spiritual well being in mind and he continued to press his alternative view.

“Your condition is like that of Narcissus,” he told Nahum. “You gaze at yourself and see love, but it’s a reflection without substance. Throwing your love at another is like throwing riches to the wind. It serves only to make you poor. Marriage is a duty, Nahum, and you should only enter into it when you are ready to dedicate yourself to the service of your wife and your family. This is the true nature of love; responsibility. Aim for this and drive away this expectation that your eyes deserve so much in return.”

Nahum shut his ears to Faithful’s critical sermon; he knew it of old, but this did not prevent him from reflecting on it. He mused upon his vision of Belinda Perryman, who took responsibility for being a wife, and he mused upon his vision of Eliza, who inspired his desire. He realised that he hardly ever thought of Eliza without feeling desire and he suspected that thinking about her constantly was probably excessive. There were times when he reminded himself of this, but he always ignored it, for the realisation that Eliza’s presence in his mind’s eye might blind him to the people that stood before him, carried with it the uncomfortable certainty that this was a very strange way of inhabiting the world.

Somewhere in the back of Nahum’s mind, in a place where he stored difficult inclinations that he did not want to accept as realisations, was the knowledge that he did not attribute love to its

rightful place in the scheme of things. He wasn't entirely certain that his love for Eliza was true in every instance and on the rare occasions he questioned it, he quickly came to his own rescue by expressing his unshakable and wilful belief that his fantasies of her expressed a truth because love was the reason for their existence.

In this place of hardly knowing, Nahum suspected that he held on to these feelings for his beautiful muse because it gave him some defining qualities for love, but what he didn't suspect was that he wanted to control it - not love's particular aspects, for he accepted that these must flow in every possible direction - but love's narrative aspects and the manner in which it affected his imagination. He was a poet, Eliza's image had to be more present than life, and even if there was a lie here, it was a lie that was essential to his creative spirit and he could never give this up.

If this fictional state were described to Nahum, he would probably agree that it was tragic, but only publicly; secretly he would embrace it as *his* tragedy and he would celebrate it as a worthy attribute of his literary armoury. Nahum needed a tragedy because it gave him energy and it could bear fruit endlessly. It was a difficult notion to explain, so Nahum ignored the destructive possibilities and kept out of recognition's way the falsities present in his love for Eliza; he could never admit that this decision made him unfaithful to her.

"You're right," Nahum told his brother, "but you're also wrong. It's more difficult than you imagine. Eliza has enabled me to love myself, but this is a creative thing as well as a destructive one."

"What do you mean?" Faithful asked and Nahum wasn't certain that his own words made sense, so unfamiliar were they to him.

"I have a young head on my shoulders," he began again, shakily, "and for this some leniency is due. That I ask too much is certain, but love is nothing without passion and desire. How can you prescribe what a reasonable amount of self-gratification might be?"

"When it's full of your egotism, then it's unreasonable."

“But my love for Eliza is not egotistic. I always wanted the best for her. I continually looked for ways to please her and I did much to improve her circumstances after her husband died.”

“But if the extent of your altruism was designed to charm her into loving you in the way you wanted to be loved, then it is egotism and not altruism.”

This was too much for Nahum and he gave himself up to silence and the beautiful scenery. Faithful too seemed happier when they were no longer arguing and once the Wicklow Mountains came into view they didn't return to the subject of Nahum's love.

Faithful's small Parish of Kilbride, near the Pollaphuca Lakes, was an idyllic setting and Nahum was increasingly charmed by it. He found the modest simplicity of Faithful's family life equally idyllic and the household, organised by his wife, Catherine, and enjoyed by his three lovely children, was in such stark contrast to the complexities of his own life that a little nostalgia for their ways crept up on him.

When Nahum returned to Dublin he quickly made his farewells and took the first available boat for Liverpool. ‘The Earl of Lancaster’, an old and uncomfortable ship, added greatly to his melancholy about leaving, but at the Rose and Crown in Liverpool Docks he met John Wiltshire, who turned out to be the best tonic Nahum could receive. John Wiltshire, a sea captain who was on his way to Deptford to take charge of a new ship, invited Nahum to travel with him and once Nahum had the measure of the humorous way he described life at sea, he was entirely grateful. John's adventures on the ocean made Nahum's problems sound like minor events in a rock pool and his descriptive style had a charming influence upon Nahum. When it was his turn to relate a humorous tale he adopted John's manner and the mariner laughed ‘til he was fit to burst.

**PART TWO**  
*A SPIRAL DANCE*  
(ANDANTE)



## *CHAPTER NINETEEN*

### *THE NEWS FROM LONDON TOWN*

Somewhere in Nahum there must have been the hope that he would get closer to his feelings in Ireland, that the distance would give him a perspective on his life, but, having returned Jupiter to Mr. Garthway, he stood in Scotland Yard uncertain what direction to take. His desire to visit Eliza was so powerful it perplexed him and his thoughts about visiting Henry were mixed, for he felt unready. As it happened, he did neither. He returned to The Strand, washed and changed his clothes and then went to the White Horse, where he ordered mutton stew and a glass of wine. He was feeling very pleased with himself until William Hawthorne, the landlord, informed him that Ellen and Harry were now in his employment. The news caused Nahum much discomfort and he sat preparing a speech for Ellen. When she arrived and explained that she could continue as his housekeeper and cook for the White Horse, he hugged her.

“Harry is working,” she declared enthusiastically, “which means he’s not spending all his time on the streets.” Ellen was so pleased to see Nahum that he thought she would never stop asking about his travels and Harry could not wait to show Nahum the writing he had completed. It was a truly impressive effort and Nahum offered to start lessons with him on Monday.

Nahum, not wanting to read his letters or stir his thoughts about work, checked through his library to see if he had a book that would

be simple enough for Harry to read. When he was Harry's age he'd read *Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Beans*, the adventures of a boy who climbed a beanstalk and discovered a wicked but wealthy giant. Having no book that was suitable, Nahum settled down to write out what he could remember of Jack's story and he continued with this task all that day and the following, until he decided it was time to go in search of Henry.

Nahum tried the Coffee House in Westminster and the Monk's Refectory, without success, so he set off for Henry's house in Tothill Street. There he learned from Elizabeth, Henry's mother, that Henry was in Windsor, playing his new anthems to the King.

"We don't expect him back before Monday," she declared and invited him in to take some refreshment.

Sitting in the drawing room, Nahum wondered how Henry, his mother, his brother, Daniel, and his sister, Katherine could all fit into such a small house. Henry had never shown any ambition to move away from home and the family must have counted this a blessing, given he was the only one among them who earned an income. His wages from the King were by no means generous, and what he was due he generally received late, but for the Purcells this was not a burden; their lives were modest and their time was dedicated to singing God's praises.

After his time with Elizabeth, Nahum walked to St. John's Lane and knocked upon Eliza's door. He received no reply, but a neighbour informed him that Eliza would be at the theatre in Drury Lane at this time of day.

"It's her new place of employment," she announced. "She dresses the actors, or so she says, you never know what really goes on in those kind of places." Nahum nodded, surprised. "She arrives home at all times of night," the woman continued, "and when she's here, there's nothing but noise coming from the apartment. Even in the early hours I hear fellows carrying on in there."

Nahum had no wish to be informed of this and he walked quickly away without a word for the neighbour. He tried to call on Button and then on Thomas, but neither were home, so he went to the Half Moon Tavern and drank one glass of wine after another until it was too late for him to visit anyone.

The following morning Nahum opened his letters. The first was from Thomas Killigrew.

*Dear Nahum,*

*I read The History of King Richard II and I was most impressed by the drama. I would like to produce it and, as chance would have it, the production I had planned for December has been cancelled. I would be delighted to have your play performed in its place. It is short notice, I know, but there is time enough. Please let me know your views as soon as you return.*

*Your friend and colleague,  
Thomas Killigrew.*

Nahum could not have been more delighted. He wanted to read the play to confirm its charms, but Killigrew had his only copy. The next letter was even more of a surprise; it was from Anna Pieters.

*Dear Mr. Tate,*

*I hope that your family are well. I am sorry that you had to leave us before the end of term and I hope that you do not mind that I write to you, but I have a favour to ask.*

*Our year at school being finished, Frances and I are now helping our mother with the business. Frances is involved with the trading activities and I, to my disdain, am engaged with buying food and helping to prepare it. We miss living at the boarding school and I particularly find it difficult to be optimistic about my future. I suspect that my life will get filled up with chores.*

*As you probably know, Henry comes to sing at The Spaniard each Tuesday and Thursday. We are not allowed to listen to him on account of the bawdiness, but my mother is rather fond of him. He has asked my mother's permission for Frances and I to sing the roles of the Queen and her sister in the new school entertainment and my mother has agreed on condition that he teaches us at home, so we are practicing with Henry on the days he sings here.*

*He told us that you are going to write the libretto and I want to ask if I could sit with you sometime when you are writing. It would make me completely happy to think about writing again. Would it be possible for you to attend our lessons and write some of the words here?*

*Yours most sincerely,  
Anna Pieters.*

*PS. I will understand if you feel this request to be too demanding and I am only asking if you would like to do it.*

*P.P.S. The opportunity Henry has created gives Frances greater happiness than anything she could have dreamed of.*

Nahum was delighted with Anna's news and mightily impressed with Henry's ability to establish a position for himself in the Pieters' household.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### LOVERS WALK AND PARADISE ROW

The following day was hot and hazy, typical of London in August, so Nahum decided to take a boat to Chelsea to see the new school. At Wood Wharf he met a lady and gentleman, also bound for Chelsea. Their destination was The Pound, by the Apothecary Garden at the end of Paradise Row, and when Nahum asked if this was close to the Old School House, the woman informed him that the Beaufort Steps was the pier closest to Lover's Walk. The couple suggested that Nahum share their skiff and he agreed. Nahum introduced himself and learned that the woman was the Duchess de Mazarin and the man was her secretary, Nicholas Campion. The Duchess was eager to learn about developments at the school and Nahum, after admitting that he knew very little, told them that he had taught at the Priests' school when it was in Leicester Fields.

"Josias Priest and his wife, Cecelia have asked Henry Purcell and I to compose an operatic entertainment to celebrate the opening of the school," he said.

"Nahum Tate," the Duchess declared. "I know you now. Henry Purcell has often played at my house. I love him. Did you know Thomas Lowe and Jeffrey Banister; the two teachers who ran The Old School House? We worked together on *Beauties Triumph* by Thomas Duffret."

Nahum then remembered who the Duchess was; she looked after the guests at the King's social engagements and she lived in one

of the King's apartments at St. James's Palace. Her own colourful parties and grand musical entertainments were renowned.

The Duchess was delighted that the first English opera would be performed in Chelsea and asked if it would be in the French or the Italian style. Nahum, hoping that a vague answer would suffice, claimed that its style was not easily defined, but the Duchess pressed him to tell her about the theme.

"Love is at the heart of it," he stammered.

"And who are the lovers?" she asked.

"Gods and mortals both," he replied.

"Sounds delightful," she cried and, after offering to accompany him to the school, she told the boatmen to drop them all at the Beaufort Steps. "I have seen your plays," she declared. "*King Lear* was truly excellent."

Nahum thanked her and they talked of theatre until the boat drew up to a very elegant wharf. Laid out in a grand, formal manner, it resembled a city square with impressive towers at the corners and beautifully wrought metal gates and railings. Beyond the gates, a driveway stretched to a Manor house in the distance, which, the Duchess informed him, belonged to the Duke of Beaufort. Turning left along the river, they passed Lindsey House, which belonged to Robert, Earl of Lindsey; the King's Lord Great Chamberlain. Nahum, impressed with the company Josias was keeping, was escorted along Lover's Walk where he caught sight of The Old School House.

This impressive building had two great wings on either side and it faced playing fields, tennis courts and a bowling green. It was covered in scaffolding and numerous building materials were laid out in the courtyard. Being Sunday, the gates were locked and they could not enter, so the Duchess invited Nahum to join her for dinner. As they were returning down Lover's Walk he informed her that Josias was very concerned about the school being ready in time

for rehearsals and the Duchess, as quick as lightening, said that she would ask Robert, the Earl of Lindsey if they could use his house. Nahum, not wishing his news to be taken as a request, tried to retract, but the Duchess insisted that nothing is ever achieved by proceeding delicately.

“Robert makes very little use of his house these days,” she said, “and he would like nothing better than to have it populated with young ladies. He’ll probably pay us a visit just to see them.”

Nahum was greatly attracted to the Duchess and delighted with the little hamlet that was Chelsea. They walked down Beaufort Street, past an elegant church and along the embankment to the Apothecary’s Garden and Paradise Row, where the Duchess lived. The rooms of her house were not grand in scale, but Nahum was impressed with the quality and quantity of furniture, tapestries and paintings that filled them.

After a dinner that consisted of a leg of veal cooked in bacon, a capon, some sausages with fritters and many glasses of very fine claret, the Duchess again asked Nahum about the opera’s subject and this time he decided to be honest with her.

“Please excuse my vagueness, Your Grace, I returned from Dublin only yesterday and I have not yet had the opportunity to discuss the latest developments with Henry. Before my departure, my play *Brutus of Alba* was the subject. It is set in Sicily.”

“*Brutus of Alba*?” the Duchess cried. “I hope you do not call it that. The name is fine for a play, you understand, but Brutus just doesn’t ring out as a name for a hero in the opera.”

“The story belongs to Dido and Aeneas,” He told her.

“Dido and Aeneas; then why don’t you call it that. Dido and Aeneas are beautiful names and Carthage is a much better setting for romance than Sicily. Why change the names and location of a beautiful, classical story? It is known to everyone and perfect for an opera. Did you change it for a reason?”

“I was advised to hide the play’s provenance out of respect for Virgil,” Nahum replied.

“But Virgil’s work is a prose poem not an opera. If you are going to sing in honour of this tale then honour it, the rest is all stuff and nonsense. If you ask me, Dido and Aeneas should be the opera’s subject and its title.”

Nahum, delighted with her response, silently thanked God for the Duchess de Mazarin, but her vigour did not rest here. After describing many of the productions she had been involved with, the Duchess expressed her interest in helping the school with its opera. Nahum thought it a marvellous idea, but he stressed that it would be a very modest production.

“My dear man,” the Duchess exclaimed, “if this is to be England’s first opera, there is no way on God’s earth that it will be a modest production and with Henry Purcell composing the music I suspect it will be the finest opera in England.”

As Nahum was leaving, he told the Duchess that everyone would be delighted with her offer of assistance and she promised to call upon Josias and Cecelia Priest the following morning. The Duchess ordered Nahum a carriage and he travelled elegantly with a pretty moon and a star-filled heaven for company. The landscape he travelled through was the one Henry walked through when composing and Nahum’s spirit connected with his friend’s, causing him to feel great anticipation for the days that lay ahead.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

*CHASTE MODESTY DOESN'T  
STAND A CHANCE*

“How can ‘once’ start with an ‘o’ and not a ‘w’?” Harry asked. He was attempting the frustrating task of following Nahum’s directions to sound out the words, ‘Once upon a time’, letter by letter.

Nahum, realising that any attempt to explain how the letters ‘o’, ‘n’, ‘c’, ‘e’ made the sound ‘wunce’ was never going to be easy, told his pupil to skip the first word and prayed that not too many others would produce a similar conflict. The need to get Harry to associate letters with a sound was far more difficult than Nahum imagined and after an hour of such activity the only success was the quality of the patience they afforded each other.

The leap from here to starting work on Roger Tonson’s commission to translate *The Art Of Love*, was something Nahum was used to, but he’d forgotten the power of Ovid’s subject.

*Should anyone here in Rome lack finesse at lovemaking,  
Let him try me – read my book, and results are guaranteed!  
Technique is the secret. Charioteer, sailor, oarsman,  
All need it. Technique can control Love himself.  
As Automedon was charioteer to Achilles,  
And Tiphys Jason’s steersman, so I, by Venus’ appointment,  
Am made love’s artificer, shall be known as  
The Tiphys, the very Automedon of Love.*

This was Ovid's advice to the men of Rome.

*But the theatre's curving tiers should form your favourite  
Hunting ground: here you are sure to find  
The richest returns, be your wish for lover or playmate,  
A one-night stand or a permanent affair...*

When Nahum first read these instructions they aroused in him such an eagerness for pleasure, he longed to do their bidding.

*... As spectators they come, come to be inspected:  
Chaste modesty doesn't stand a chance...*

He remembered that one time, Button and he attempted to follow these entreaties, but their performance was so woefully inadequate they succeeded only in gaining a poor reputation.

*Don't forget the races, either: the spacious Circus offers  
Chances galore. No need,  
Here, of private finger-talk, or secret signals,  
Nods conveying messages: you'll sit  
Right beside your mistress, without let or hindrance,  
So be sure to press against her wherever you can –  
An easy task: the seating divisions restrict her,  
Regulations facilitate contact.*

What he would have given to be with Eliza then.

Nahum entered the foyer of the Theatre Royal and from here he could hear Thomas Killigrew bellowing instructions. Killigrew, directing his actors on stage, stopped everything when he saw Nahum and invited him to his office to discuss *The History of King*

*Richard II.* The director, searched his shelves for some time before declaring, in a tone of surprise, that the manuscript was not there. Nahum, distraught, impressed upon him that this was his only copy and Killigrew, now bewildered, insisted that he had not lost the play. He marched off in search of his secretary, John Petty, and Nahum followed. After searching offices, auditorium and stage without success, they asked William Prizeman what he knew, but William had seen neither manuscript nor John Petty.

At that moment squeals of laughter and the sound of a chase came from backstage and Eliza Ashton ran onto the stage. As she saw Nahum and Killigrew she froze. John Petty appeared next and he too froze. Nahum received a quick sign of recognition from Eliza before she glanced across to the opposite side of the stage, where a fellow was climbing down the scaffolding. This fellow landed by the wings just as Eliza threw the shoe she was holding to John Petty. The secretary caught it, but before he could put it on Killigrew demanded to know the whereabouts of Nahum's manuscript.

"I sent it to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for approval," Petty replied, and though Nahum should have been relieved at hearing this news he was so taken up with Eliza's beauty that he wanted to shout "I love you," or some such expression.

"Did you hear that?" Killigrew shouted from across the stage.

"Oh, yes," Nahum replied, "Robert, Earl of Lindsey, the King's Lord Great Chamberlain. The Duchess de Mazarin and I were talking of him only yesterday."

It was an unusual response, but given the state Nahum was in he was grateful to have said anything remotely intelligible.

"Prizeman will fetch it," Killigrew offered, "and I will have copies made before returning it to the Chamberlain's office."

Nahum nodded; he could see Eliza walking towards him.

"I'm pleased to see you," she said. "You're back from Ireland."

Nahum acknowledged her comment with a nod. Words failed

him. It was her beauty that stunned him to silence. Eliza, needing to distract attention away from her frolicking, started to describe her work at the theatre and Nahum, with great intensity, studied her lips and the sparkle in her eyes. He imagined that she was flirting with him and he wanted to gather her up, to take her away from these various men who provoked such jealousy in him. He tried a vague suggestion that they should meet up, but Eliza, understanding him, shook her head, almost imperceptibly. She glanced quickly at the fellow who was still standing under the scaffolding in the wings and when Nahum saw him studying them, he walked away with uncontrollable fury.

Killigrew followed Nahum out through the auditorium and into the street. He had no idea if Nahum's fury was directed at him, but he apologized profusely for not copying the manuscript and invited him to have dinner at the Half Moon tavern. Nahum, worried what Killigrew would think of his connection with Eliza, told him that she had once worked for his Aunt; the image of her smiling eyes, infectious laugh and coquettish behaviour searing itself through his memory as he spoke.

What Nahum loved most in Eliza was her playfulness, but naturally only when it included him; when it was directed at others, it caused both amorous longing and disappointment to occur in the same instant, and this could only spell doom. He wondered if Eliza was prone to reject those who fell in love with her, but whatever the answer, he loved her, he would always love her, and Faithful was wrong to suggest that his love was a figment of his imagination, an illusion he created and fed upon. Poor Nahum, life for a poet could not be more complicated than this.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### *MUSICAL KEYS*

As Nahum entered the Abbey cloister, he heard Henry's voice and he stood at the door of the Monk's Refectory listening to him. The young composer was not singing words, he was vocalizing a series of sounds and building his violin notes around them. Only when he was finished did Nahum open the door and Henry cried out at seeing his friend.

"I knew you would come," he declared, "that you would be here today. You're not a moment too soon."

"I was outside," said Nahum, "listening to your improvisation."

"Oh no, dear fellow, I was not improvising, I was playing patterns of regular rhythms over repeated sequences of counterpoints." Henry picked up his violin and started again to play and sing. "Can you hear how the notes are uniformly augmented to create a series of canons and inversions that weave in and out of the underlying structure? They are my fantasias. Do you like them?"

"They're wonderful," said Nahum, "I have never heard anything like them before."

"The King dislikes them." Henry laughed. "He is only interested in simple melodies to accompany the royal supper. He also prefers his musicians to be dressed in richly coloured taffeta trimmed with tinsel. I have been with the King in Windsor and I am so maddened by the silly court that I have to compose fantasias to get their ridiculous frivolities out of my head."

Henry handed Nahum a pile of manuscripts, each containing several pages of musical notation for violin. They appeared remarkably complicated and looked indescribably beautiful. Henry took great pride in his notation. Nahum could not read music well, but he could see the structure of the composer's thinking on the page, his deliberate gestures and his boldly formed figures, and he imagined that he could understand Henry's musical intentions.

"I love your methodical mind," Nahum told him. "Who could imagine that dancing required so much structure."

"Oh, Nahum, I'm very pleased you're back. I'm in love and it fills me with so much music I can't stop composing."

Nahum handed him Anna's letter and asked how he had managed to win Mrs. Pieters' affection. Henry laughed.

"I visited the eating-house every night," he replied. "One night, when the entertainers didn't show up, I offered to sing and when Amy heard the uproarious cheering I received, she asked me again." He laughed excitedly and continued. "I asked Amy if Anna and Frances could sing in the opera and she has agreed. At first she asked endless questions. I knew how careful she was about her daughters so I had to be vague about the subject, but eventually she was more flattered than she was concerned."

"You're unstoppable," Nahum told him.

"Oh I'm not done yet. I must still charm Amy whenever I can; I suppose it's the job of a 'would-be' son-in-law. Anna was a great help with the courting. When she recognised our need to exchange intimacies she buried herself in pages of music."

"She has a maturity and self-confidence that is striking," Nahum declared. "It's extraordinary that one so young knows how to encourage love's emotions."

The two shared their news at great speed, Henry learning about Killigrew's interest in *The History of King Richard II* and Nahum's continued obsession with Eliza.

“I wish I were better at soothing anguished states,” Henry told his friend, “but any attempt I make is useless. I don’t even like words of wisdom when I’m miserable. If I’m feeling like an old rag lost at sea, then I want to be left alone to be one, to flop about helplessly and not be offered advice. I would do anything to bring your smiles back, Nahum, but we can do nothing about rejected love. Was there no-one in Dublin who inspired your interest?”

“No,” he replied, forlorn, “but someone in Chelsea has.”

“Who?” asked Henry. “When?”

“The Duchess de Mazarin, yesterday,” he said, nonchalantly.

“You can’t be serious,” Henry cried, incredulous.

“Very serious,” Nahum insisted, “but not in the way you read it,” and with that he described the day he spent with the Duchess. When he told of her insistence that the title of the opera revert to *Dido and Aeneas*, Henry lifted the poet’s hands, kissed each one and declared that the Duchess was always right. Nahum then told of his time in Dublin and talked of reading *Heroides* in Trinity’s library.

“Ovid has given Dido a very powerful presence,” he said, “and I should like it if her character in our opera could be as emphatic as the one Ovid has given her. He saw the world through Dido’s eyes and it was a revelation. When I wrote *Dido and Aeneas* the action centred on Aeneas – he was after all the hero of Virgil’s *Aeneid* – and in *Brutus of Alba* I did the same thing; in fact, I didn’t even give the queen a name, she was just the queen. This is a mistake and I should like our opera to voice Dido’s cares.”

Henry was lost in concentration – his head raised, his eyes closed and his fingers moving; Nahum knew that he had momentarily lost him to musical composition. With the sounds of Dido’s voice coming from him – ta, tee, tee, tum – Henry gathered up his manuscripts and covered the table with a large roll of paper. It was filled with words and diagrams and Henry informed Nahum that the entire opera was notated here.

“The section on the left shows the six scenes,” he explained, “and the text describes the predominant emotion of these scenes. Each scene has its own key and each key is aligned to specific dramatic events in the narrative.”

He was moving too quickly for Nahum to follow.

“No-one has aligned musical keys to dramatic situations before,” Henry asserted. “In my structure the scenes progress by alternating between minor and major keys.<sup>2</sup> I had to reverse the order of the first two scenes you gave me, because Dido’s emotional turbulence at being in love had to be in a minor key and Aeneas’s declaration of love had to be in a major key. I hope you don’t mind; it doesn’t seem to upset the meaning.”

While Henry elaborated upon the conjunction of moods and keys he added notes to express his current inspiration.

“If we shift the emphasis from Aeneas to Dido,” he continued, “it marries perfectly with my sequence of keys. The minor keys for Dido will be C and G and the minor keys for Aeneas will be A and E. Nahum, the timing of your return couldn’t be better. Now is the perfect opportunity to start on the opening scene. I need a song to rehearse with Frances and Anna tomorrow.”

This whirlwind of genius astounded Nahum.

“A moment please,” he pleaded. “I need to be better acquainted with your vision before we work. Can I suggest a bottle of wine?”

Henry agreed and they spent the remainder of the evening at Marshes in Whitehall.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### *BANISH SORROW, BANISH CARE*

Nahum had not finished writing *Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Beans* in a legible hand before Harry's second lesson, but he read him what he had. Poor Harry, he could not believe that on this day he was not to hear what happened after Jack climbed the beanstalk. Nahum re-read the story three times and then asked Harry to read it with him, but Harry, rather than reading the words, read Nahum's lips. Nahum gently instructed him to place his finger on the words and not take his eyes from them. Harry, having no idea what reading was about, relied on audible cues to approximate the words, so there was a slight gap between Nahum's speech and his own, creating the effect of an echo. Nahum tried another tack; he invited Harry to read by himself. His pupil, with considerable confidence, related the story without once looking at the words. Harry took great pleasure in this, and showed no sign of frustration when Nahum explained that this was not reading, he just laughed. Nahum felt real affection for young Harry; the boy's remarkable good nature being a thing he marvelled at.

Then came the questions. Harry wanted to know who the funny little man with the beans was, whether the beans were magical and if they would be useful. Nahum told him that he would have to wait for the next instalment to receive the answers.

"But you know what kind of man has magical beans, tell me," Harry pleaded, but Nahum would not and Harry was cross.

“With books, you can’t have everything at once,” Nahum instructed. “You must give the story time to unfold.”

“But just tell me if he’s a wizard,” Harry continued. “Has he come to help Jack because he’s so poor?”

“My you’re an insistent, fellow,” Nahum declared, but Harry persevered with his appetite to find answers.

“Would you swap a cow for coloured beans? Is Jack being stupid? Is being stupid better than being clever? Have you ever been stupid and did it turn out to be better for you? If Jack couldn’t swap a cow for beans, would that mean he’d never see magic?” On and on the questions came and it was only when Nahum insisted that he knew nothing about magic, that young Harry eventually relented.

“Why the glum look?” Ellen asked her son when she came for him. On learning of his complaint she laughed, telling him to give Nahum some rest. She handed her employer a letter and, recognising it as the hand of Josias, Nahum tried to guess its contents. He was mostly right. Josias was delighted to have met the Duchess de Mazarin and he requested his presence at a meeting on Saturday at the Duchess’ house.

On his way to visit Henry at the Abbey, Nahum made a detour via Drury Lane in the hope of seeing Eliza. He knew that he was torturing himself, re-enlivening his pain and disappointment, but to him love seemed to demand this. In Virgil’s *Aeneid* it was the gods who tortured Dido and Aeneas and in *Brutus of Alba* it was a sorceress, but in his own life Nahum created havoc completely unaided. For reasons he did not understand, he knew that the opera *Dido and Aeneas* would also have a sorceress as the bearer of malign influence.

“We must work on Dido’s first song,” Henry told his librettist the moment he was inside the door. “I must have something for Frances to sing this afternoon.”

Henry played a light-hearted tune on the violin.

“This expresses the chorus’ pleasure for the love between Dido and Aeneas,” he announced. Then, playing plaintive chords on the harpsichord, he told Nahum, “this is to be Dido’s first song.” Stopping, he went to the table and wrote out changes to his notation while humming the melancholic melody. When he had finished, he sang it through, stopping occasionally to make further corrections, before declaring that it was complete.

“Give me words to accompany the melody,” he instructed.

“I can’t write words without knowing the action,” Nahum said.

“Dido is expressing the uncertainty she feels about her love for Aeneas - that’s all. You don’t have to write poetry, Nahum; just give her words of everyday speech to sing.”

Nahum had presumed that it would be his task to initiate the songs; words always came first. This sudden reversal surprised him. Henry, taking no notice of his bewilderment, sang da, da, di, di, da, da, da, da in an exaggerated way.

“There are four repeating bars in the first section,” Henry announced, “and each repeat starts with the same set of words.”

Nahum remained completely blank. Henry asked if he should sing something to get him started and Nahum nodded, gratefully.

*My, my, my dear Anna, I am so encumbered.*

*My, my, my dear Anna, I am so encumbered by my love.*

Nahum still looked blank, so Henry continued.

*My heart when...ev...er he app...ears*

*Does some...thing so de...light...ful find*

*My Joys could not be more sub...lime.*

Nahum, amazed that Henry could invent words so quickly, soon realised that the composer had actually borrowed them from

another song. Somewhat relieved, he started writing furiously to Henry's exaggerated, but rhythmic, da, di, di, da sounds. When he felt that he'd achieved something, Nahum sang his words to Henry, who, with eyes closed and an intense expression, either nodded or shook his head to signal his reaction. It seemed to Nahum that Henry's head was bigger and older when he was composing.

Later, as if frustrated, Henry began shouting words to further encourage his librettist. 'Monosyllables,' he said or 'rhyming' and Nahum did his best to respond. The speed of Henry's lyrical drive left Nahum no time for questions and when the intensity became too much he asked the composer to stop. For a while, Nahum sat quietly, considering his words, while Henry continued to notate. With this task complete, Henry took up Nahum's words and sang them to him very slowly, stressing every syllable.

*My, my, my dear Anna, I am pressed  
With Torment not to be confessed.  
Peace and I are strangers grown,  
I languish 'till my Grief is known,  
Yet would not have it guessed.*

Nahum loved it, but he was shocked that Henry could keep up this pace over such a long, difficult process and he wasn't finished yet. On their way to the Pieters' House, Henry sang the chorus line that preceded Dido's song and he asked Nahum to compose words to accompany it.

*Banish sorrow, Banish care,  
Let not Grief approach the fair.*

This was their store of material for the first rehearsal.

*CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR*

*MY HEART WHENEVER YOU APPEAR*

At the Pieters' house, a maid escorted the two friends to the drawing room where Frances and Anna sat waiting for them. Anna, delighted that Nahum had accompanied Henry so soon after her request, asked him so many questions one after another that he told her that the one 'yes' would have to suffice for all of them. Henry was grateful for this efficiency for, despite his excitement at being with Frances, it was music he wanted to create, not endless chatter.

Exercises for the voice were Henry's way of commencing rehearsal and he asked Frances and Anna to make such a strange assortment of breaths, noises and facial expressions that Nahum felt his presence was an invasion of their privacy. Neither Frances nor Anna had any such feelings though; Nahum could not possibly detract from their enjoyment of following Henry's instructions.

Once their receptivity and unity of sound had been achieved, Henry took up his violin and played the chorus line he and Nahum had composed on their journey down river. He sang the words to Anna and Frances a number of times and asked them to repeat them to the accompaniment of his violin. After various instructions about lightening the tone and achieving a more open expression to express friendship, Henry declared that the second line was not right.

"Let not grief approach the fair," he said with an expression that indicated how the words left a sour taste in his mouth. "It cannot begin with let not, we must have stronger words here."

They all attempted suggestions, but it was Anna's solution, 'Grief should ne'er approach the fair,' that was declared the best. She was delighted with her success and once they had given it enough rehearsal they began work on Dido's first aria. Frances was taken aback when Henry used the name Dido, not having heard it before, and Henry explained that they were now reverting to the original characters, Dido and Aeneas.

"The title of the opera will take also their names," he added. "You will be Dido, Frances and Anna will be her sister, Anna."

"Oh, no," cried Anna, "I don't want to have the same name and role in opera that I have in life. Surely we can change my name."

"Well, Mr. Librettist," Henry asked, "what is to be done?"

"In *Brutus of Alba*," he announced thoughtfully, "I changed the sister to the queen's lady-in-waiting, a role which you may also not like, and I called her Amarante, but this will never do because the location is now Carthage and not Sicily."

"I'm happy to be the lady-in-waiting," Anna declared, "and any Carthaginian name will suit me fine."

No one knew a Carthaginian name and when all decision seemed hopeless, Nahum suggested the name Belinda.

"*My Be..lin..da*," Henry intoned. "It has more rhythm to it than 'my dear An..na'." He closed his eyes and sang. "*Ah! Belinda, Ah! Belinda, I am pressed - with torment not to be confessed.* 'Ah' is more open than 'my' and it suits the mood of longing better."

Nahum was delighted to have honoured Belinda Perryman.

"In this aria," said Henry, addressing Frances, "Dido expresses anxiety about her first stirrings of love. Try to conjure a deep, resonant sound - you will need plenty of breath - and, if you can, prolong the exclamation 'Ah!' without losing it's precision. I want Dido's yearning to sound profound."

Frances was radiant. *Ah! Belinda, ah! Belinda*, she sang, and Henry was ecstatic to hear her sing phrases that exactly matched

the yearning in his heart. When the happy couple progressed to *Peace and I are strangers grown, I languish 'til my grief is known*, Nahum imagined that he could hear their hearts beating.

“Languish longer over the several notes sung on the ‘lan’ of languish,” Henry instructed and they laughed at his words.

Frances paid homage to her love by following every instruction precisely. Neither she nor Henry allowed their feelings to affect the quality of their musical sensibilities; their love being confirmed and enriched by the very phrases they sang.

When the maid entered to inform Frances and Anna that Mrs. Pieters wanted her daughters to return to work, it was a rude intrusion into their musical paradise. Anna obeyed instantly, thanking her teachers for their instruction, but once the maid had stepped outside, Frances took the opportunity to whisper briefly into Henry’s ear. Henry swayed. Nahum thought that he was going to faint and he ran to his side.

“I could die from sheer delight,” Henry told his friend.

When the two friends were seated in the restaurant dining room Henry announced that he must soon inform Amy Pieters of his love for her daughter. Then he let out a disconsolate sigh.

“One minute love is lifting us up to heaven,” he exclaimed, “and the next it is dropping us back on earth. Now that Frances is not with me, I am completely despondent. I will die if Amy responds badly to my expression of love. Perhaps I should ask Frances if she will marry me before I talk to her mother. Next Thursday, Nahum, next Thursday I will ask Frances to marry me and then I will ask her permission to request Amy’s approval. I need your assistance in this, Nahum, please say that you’ll help me.”

They decided that the best way for the two lovers to be together was to create a writing task for Nahum and Anna that would be carried out in a nearby room. With a strategy in place, Henry relaxed and after enjoying the delicious halibut and several glasses

of canary wine, Henry declared himself too jolly to sing for the guests. Nahum, looked at him surprised, but Henry had no intention of disappointing Amy; he sang like a bird.

*A thousand sev'ral ways I tried  
To hide my passion from your view...*

*When her languishing eyes said 'love',  
Too soon the soft charm I obeyed...*

*My heart, whenever you appear,  
Does something so delightful find...*

*Ye happy swains, whose nymphs are kind,  
Teach me the art of love...*

Henry matched the longing in his heart with his songs, but for Nahum, listening alone, it emphasized the loneliness in his.

That evening, on arriving home, Nahum found a letter from Eliza awaiting him. She apologized for the conflicts that had grown up around them and asked if he would assist her in something. “If the answer is yes,” it read, “please meet me at the Pied Bull by Smithfield on Sunday – six o’clock.”

“If the answer is yes?” Nahum laughed. “Dear heart, the answer is yes a thousand times and that many kisses too.”

He had no idea how he might help her, but he fell asleep clasping the letter to his heart.

*CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE*

*FEAR NO DANGER TO ENSUE*

The following morning Nahum believed that he and Eliza were lost in a union that energised them to the tips of their fibres, that they were distinct, that the world was theirs and that they loved each other completely, for all time. It didn't enter his thoughts that she did not love him. He stood at his window, gazing down at The Strand, watching some fellows early about their business, braving the wind and the rain. The sky, though mostly grey, changed quickly. Here and there clouds of a whiter hue embraced the grey and though there was little prospect of their breaking up to reveal the sun in the blue of heaven, Nahum still loved the weather and everything else about the day.

‘Whether these fellows in the street have love in their hearts,’ he mused, ‘or whether they are escorted by sorrow, they both get as wet as each other. The tinker is as soaked as the sailor, the rich man as drenched as the poor, but the one who has love imagines that the clouds have already parted because their hearts are already enjoying the sunshine.’

He wrote to Eliza, agreeing to meet her on Sunday and proceeded with Harry's lesson. The sounding of letters was still a thing that was beyond the young fellow and he persisted in his request that his teacher read him the whole story. Nahum promised to write it all out before the next lesson.

Nahum had two letters, one from Thomas Flatman, inviting him to visit him on Friday week, and the other from Roger Tonson, reminding him that the Ovid translation was due in September. He took stock of his progress; the three sections of *The Art Of Love* were over a hundred pages long and so far Nahum had completed thirteen. Suddenly the euphoria that greeted him earlier had gone, he was worrying about money and, to prevent himself wasting time on this, he settled down to tackle more of his translation.

*The first thing to get in your head is that every single  
Girl can be caught – and that you'll catch her if you  
Set your toils right. Birds will sooner fall dumb in springtime,  
Cicadas in summer, or a hunting dog  
Turn his back on a hare, than a lover's bland inducements  
Can fail with a woman. Even one you suppose  
Reluctant will want it. Like men, girls love stolen passion,  
But are better at camouflaging their desires:  
If masculine custom precluded courtship of women  
You'd find each besotted girl taking the lead herself.*

After dinner Nahum went to visit Henry. Having completed the songs for Scene One, Henry was covering various diagrams with small pieces of paper and writing new notation over them.

“The recitative and the dances dictate the drama more than the songs do,” he said, by way of saying ‘good morning’. “A song can express a character’s hopes and fears, but the recitative can describe the action and situate the songs in the plot more precisely.”

They discussed the role of the chorus in their opera and Nahum informed Henry that in classical theatre the chorus was often the voice of the community. “It is they who offer insights, instructions or encouragement,” he told the composer, “and they can even take on the inner voice of a character.”

“Excellent,” Henry declared. “Then the songs and the recitative must support each other and we must integrate the chorus more precisely.”

They studied Scene One with these thoughts in mind and agreed that at the end of Dido’s first aria, Dido and Belinda would introduce Aeneas with recitative and the chorus would describe the Carthaginian court’s hopes for a marriage. While he added another set of instructions to the large plan, Henry told Nahum that there would be a song from the chorus before each dance and a dance at the end of each scene. It was in this manner that the extraordinary palimpsest of narrative and musical ideas developed; Henry, composer, dramatist and map maker for the entire process.

Henry wanted to play everything he had composed thus far and he began searching through his papers for the prologue. Nahum had no idea that he had written one until it was in his hand.

“The prologue is a masque,” he declared. “We must have dances at the start, so the masque will be here rather than at the end.”

The expressive sequence of melodies that Henry played, were the six dance tunes from the prologue, and he followed this with the opera’s delightful overture. After playing a few bars from Belinda’s opening aria, Henry sang the chorus that Frances and Anna had sung the day before and followed this with Dido’s first aria. Having improvised some recitative where he was short of it, Henry then returned to his plan and added further notes.

“We must have a song from the chorus to break up the recitative,” he declared. “It is too long.” He sat at the harpsichord, played a few bars to represent the chorus and then repeated the recitative. “Here is the dance that will end the scene,” he told Nahum, improvising a dance tune of considerable charm.

“It sounds altogether too cheerful for a tragedy,” Nahum joked.

“Indeed it does,” Henry replied, “but first we will please our audience and then we will invite their tears.” He considered for a

moment. "I must also admit," he continued, "that I am thinking of tomorrow, when I will ask Frances for her hand in marriage. If the chorus are to express their joy at Dido's feelings for Aeneas, then I shall ask her to sing this before introducing my subject.

Henry improvised a bright melody to suit his purposes and asked Nahum to invent the phrases. As before, Henry nodded when he liked his librettist's offerings and shook his head when he didn't. Now and then Henry shouted advice like, 'too intellectual', or 'listen to the sweetness of the melody,' and Nahum, who had grown accustomed to his methods, did his best to respond. After an hour of revising phrases, Nahum was shocked when Henry told him that they would have to start again.

"Why, for heaven's sake?" he asked, with some irritation.

"Because deep emotion needs simple expression," Henry told him, but this wasn't the last of it. After the next round of attempts Henry made another request that they start over; this time it was the paucity of open vowel sounds that did not satisfy him. It was the extraordinary rigour of Henry's decision-making that was the basis of his art and very few would believe the amount of work he could put into a song no longer than six lines.

*Fear no danger to ensue,  
The Hero loves as well as you,  
Ever gentle, ever smiling,  
And the cares of life beguiling.  
Cupids strew your path with flowers,  
Gathered from Elysian Bowers.*

*CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX*

*WHEN MONARCHS UNITE,  
HOW HAPPY THEIR STATE*

Nahum returned home to discover Button sitting in his kitchen. Since before Nahum's return from Dublin, Button had been in Windsor helping Horace with the King's entertainments. He claimed that His Majesty had demanded such an amount of letters and pamphlets to be written that Horace would have been there 'til Christmas had he not assisted him.

"The amount of nastiness exhibited by the women at court was quite shocking," he declared. "Believing themselves to be God's gift to the world, they look down on anyone who must work for a living. They imagine their ignorance goes unrecognised, that only they are witness to their dark plots and petty squabbles, but believe me Nahum I've seen it all. I drink to Ellen, who has fed me a plate of marrowbones and plenty of ale, and damn the ladies at court."

"Oh Button," Nahum exclaimed, "I guess you fancied one of them and she snubbed you."

"Then you guess wrong. For me attention is everything. You've been too long in the wild lands to remember, so you're out of bounds and your view is beyond the pale," he joked.

Ellen, entering, had no idea that Button was making reference to the way Dublin's borders were described, and she expressed her disdain for Button's words. Nahum explained and Ellen, still bewildered, poured Nahum some ale and brought him a plate

of marrowbones. She left the two friends to talk of their recent adventures, but when she heard Harry in the kitchen, having arrived home late as usual, she quickly returned. Harry, full of bravado, had found himself a mug, poured some ale and was about to drink it when his mother marched in. She lifted her son by the collar and pointed him in the direction of the stairs. Harry, complaining that this wasn't fair, asked Nahum if he would finish writing out Jack's story by tomorrow and Nahum promised to do so.

Nahum was becoming accustomed to Harry's cheekiness, but he was still surprised next morning when Harry, standing by his bedroom door, said in a very precise manner, "Mother," followed by the letters, "M-O-T-H-E-R." Next he said, "Jack," giving the letters, "J-A-C-K." He then offered, "Late," but the letters he gave it were "L-A-Y-T."

"Thank you for the reminder," Nahum laughed from his bed. "As a matter of fact I am late. L-A-T-E."

Despite his tardiness, Nahum still gave Harry his lesson and translated more Ovid before leaving for Westminster. He had agreed to meet Henry at the pier, but as he was turning off King Street he saw the young composer, walking across New Palace Yard.

Henry was singing as though he were engaged in a royal performance. His violin was strung across his shoulder and the movement of his limbs was nothing short of eccentric. His steps, governed by the tempo of his song, had a regular rhythm and his arms, moving independently of each other, rose up and down in an irregular fashion. His hands, operating independently of his arms, twisted and danced in every direction and his fingers expressed the punctuation in the music.

Henry sang like this when any little passage of music required orchestration. He was never under any pressure to remember what he'd composed for the music remained in his head until he had time to notate it. As he was approaching Nahum he suddenly stopped,

with the toe of his right foot pointing towards the ground and when he was satisfied with his emphasis, Henry moved forward again. He took a few steps backwards and few more steps forward until he finally reached the place where Nahum was standing.

“Listen to this,” he bid his friend and he sang the new chorus part that divided the recitative at the end of Scene One. “Walking is by far the most fruitful method of composing, you must try it with me,” he exclaimed.

“Well I can’t write and walk at the same time,” Nahum told him, but once they were in the skiff heading down river, he wrote while rocking in the boat, because Henry was singing again and Nahum, rather self-consciously, was extemporizing phrases to accompany the composer’s tune. There was little resolution to their composition, but there was no doubt that their spirits were in excellent shape when they arrived at the Pieters’ house.

After a series of exercises, Henry sang the chorus refrain he had composed the previous day. He prayed that the eulogy for marriage, would encourage Frances and, after teaching Anna the chorus melody at the end of Scene One, he asked her to go with Nahum to another room to write the words. Anna was surprised by the request, but when Henry informed her that he had to rehearse Dido’s aria with Frances, she responded innocently.

Anna took Nahum to the breakfast room. They started with Anna singing the melody and Nahum writing the words, but then they switched roles, writing and singing alternately.

*When Monarchs unite how happy their State,*

*Their triumph at once on their Foes and their Fate.*

Their rhyming couplet complete, Anna - listening at the door - remarked that it was very quiet in the drawing room. She opened the breakfast-room door and Frances, in tears, flew past her and ran up the stairs. Anna ran to her sister and Nahum ran to Henry. The composer was looking up at the ceiling, his arms in the air.

“I am pleading for God’s help,” he declared. “Frances cannot imagine how we can be married. She says that she loves me, but she will not allow me to speak to her mother about marriage. The suggestion terrified her. I will marry her, Nahum, even if I have to steal her away, I will marry her.”

Anna re-entered the room. “It’s not what you imagine, Henry,” she cried. “Please do not be upset. If you make a commotion my mother will hear and our singing will end.”

“Anna is right, Henry,” Nahum urged him. “We must not alert Amy to any drama.”

“Allow me to explain,” Anna pleaded, “it is not a difficult thing to understand.” Henry sat down. “My mother has many difficulties at present and she is unlikely to be sympathetic to your request. Her import business is in great trouble and her maid, who has been with her many years, is seriously ill. There is a great amount of sickness in the city and my older sister, Amy, has recently left us to live in Richmond. She is with child again and it is safer for her to be with her husband’s family, but it upsets my mother to be without my sister and her grandchild. There is no doubt that Frances is delighted by your expression of love, but you must let matters rest until she is certain that the time is right to discuss this with our mother.”

“God help us,” Henry cried, putting his hands on his head.

“We must also cancel Tuesday’s rehearsals,” Anna continued. “We are hosting a large party to celebrate the birthday of a local alderman and there will be no time to sing. Please be patient with us, Henry. There is a better time to talk of marriage.”

Henry nodded slowly to show his agreement.

“If you can remain in the room for the period of the lesson,” Anna instructed, “my mother’s suspicions will not be aroused,” and with that she returned upstairs to be with Frances.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

*IF GRIEF HAS ANY POW'R TO KILL*

For the supposed duration of the rehearsal, Henry and Nahum sat alone in the drawing room. Other than making a comparison between Frances's agitated manner to Anna's calm maturity, they said very little. Later, as they sat in the restaurant dining room, silence continued to be their companion until Amy joined them.

"Did the rehearsals go well?" she enquired.

"Indeed they did madam," he told her. "Allow me to introduce my friend and colleague, Nahum Tate. He is writing the libretto for the opera." Nahum and Amy shook hands.

"Were you also at the rehearsal?" she asked and Nahum said that he was. "I think we should have been introduced before the lesson began, don't you," she declared.

"Indeed we should madam," Nahum exclaimed. "I apologize."

"Well, I'm pleased to meet you," said Amy, softening. "Anna has often talked of your excellent teaching."

"Thank you," said Nahum, "I will ensure that you will not have to consider my neglectful behaviour again."

"I'm sure I will not," said Amy, firmly, "and if you'll allow me, I will mention one further thing. You may be aware that Anna has an ambition to help with writing the libretto, but my view on this is clear. In these times, we must ensure our survival by keeping busy and if Anna is distracted from this purpose, more than she already

is, it will be to the detriment of the family. She is a persuasive girl, but I hope that you will not encourage her in this ambition.”

“Of course,” said Nahum, bowing his head to show agreement.

“Now, if you will excuse me, I have many matters to attend to. Entertain my guests well, Henry,” she said and, in a flurry of skirts that expressed both haste and determination, she departed.

“The effect she has is like a hurricane,” Nahum commented and Henry nodded. They sat on in silence until Nahum felt moved to sing the words that he and Anna had devised for the chorus.

*When Monarchs unite how happy their state,  
They triumph at once on their Foes and their Fate.*

Henry told him that they were excellent, but they didn’t cheer him and he had a great reluctance to sing for the guests.

*Ah! Powerful Love! What cursed arts  
Hast thou to torture human hearts...*

This was his first song and he followed it with,

*If grief has any pow’r to kill,  
I have receiv’d my doom.*

There was little doubt that Henry was perturbed, but Nahum was more concerned when he returned to the table, picked up his violin and played one of his fantasias. Given how badly the King had received these works, he doubted the reaction of this audience. He need not have concerned himself. The dinner guests stopped eating to listen, so captivated were they by his virtuosity. After each new piece the shouts of appreciation grow ever louder and when Amy returned to the dining room her broad smile was perfect illustration of her pleasure. What she would never know was that Henry was playing for his life.

The following day it was Nahum's turn to receive bad news. It started well enough; his lesson with Harry; his translation of Ovid; a letter to Horace asking if he had a copy of *Heroides*; a promise to visit him soon; but then he went to the Theatre Royal. He was in Killigrew's office with *The History of King Richard II*, thinking of those precious days when Eliza's love spurred his pen to dance, when Killigrew entered and handed him a letter. It was from the Lord Chamberlain's Office and it read thus.

*We have read The History of King Richard II, and it is the opinion of this office that anyone who produces this play will be carrying out a highly irresponsible act. If it were performed at the Theatre Royal it would cause the King's subjects to remember his father's unhappy fate and might serve to incite opposition to the King. It will certainly increase the King's vulnerability and jeopardise his position at a time when the Court is experiencing considerable strains. Therefore, permission and license to perform The History of King Richard II will not be granted. This injunction is binding on all subjects of the King and any who give offence in this matter will be answerable under laws pertaining to acts of treason. Yours faithfully, Robert, Earl of Lindsey, Lord Chamberlain.*

"It is beyond understanding," Nahum cried. "How in God's name can a history of times long past be suppressed as a libel upon our own? I have everywhere given King Richard the language of an active, prudent prince, someone who prefers the good of his subjects to his own pleasure. I even inserted a new scene with the Queen to show the King in the best possible light."

"But maybe there's something in his character, in his timid ambition, that causes the connection," Killigrew suggested.

"The malignancy of the King's fortune is the reason for his unhappy state, not the poverty of his character," Nahum countered, "and if he suffers from an extremity of distress why should this be read as a weakness of ambition? Every scene confirms my respect

of majesty and the dignity of court. No page breathes anything but loyalty and for this I am accused of crimes against the King.”

“Gently my friend,” Killigrew soothed him, “it will not help.”

“But I am wronged by this letter and I must be given an opportunity to explain my good intentions. You must help me. The Lord Chamberlain must be made aware that this decision could not possibly represent the King’s best interests.”

“Nahum, I doubt that this decision is reversible.”

“Oh yes it is. I will speak to the Duchess de Mazarin about it tomorrow. She will lobby the Lord Chamberlain on my behalf.”

“Nahum, please calm yourself. You cannot make such commotion. It will jeopardise your chances of a new production in December.”

“And what chances are these? I have no other plays to offer.”

“Well, we might retrieve something of this yet. You might change the names of the characters and set the scene in a land far from merry England to avoid the comparison.”

Nahum could not believe that he was again being encouraged to change a play to please others.

“Changing Carthage for Sicily was one thing,” he exclaimed, “but *The History of King Richard II* is nothing if it is not an English tale. It relies on its association with England. Here the audience will remember their King. An abstract tale from the other side of the channel will not affect them.”

Killigrew continued to counsel the distraught playwright against acting rashly and he promised to produce any revised version he might write, providing the Lord Chamberlain accepted it. Nahum thanked the director, picked up his manuscript and once again stormed from the theatre. The business had set him alight and he stomped about Lincoln’s Inn gardens for some time before settling himself in the White Horse. He did not visit Henry as promised.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### *DIDO AND AENEAS*

The demand from William, Nahum's landlord, to pay his outstanding bills brought Nahum rapidly to his senses about re-writing his play. His pockets contained three pennies, not enough for the food he had just eaten, and he had no other coins at home. The rent on his house was long overdue and he had not paid Ellen anything since leaving for Ireland. He had no choice; he must rewrite *The History of King Richard II*. When he told Henry about it, the young composer encouraged him to follow Killigrew's advice.

"The opera will make your reputation," he promised.

On the boat to Chelsea, Henry sang in a declamatory manner.

*When Mr. Priest went off to Town*

*He wore his brightest dressing gown.*

Nahum laughed, but Henry told him to concentrate on the four stresses per line that were essential to the rhyming couplet.

When Henry and the Duchess met they were like old friends, but there was something frosty about Cecelia's manner. Josias was nervous. The morning's events started with Henry playing what he had composed thus far. After giving them the prologue and the overture, he improvised the melodies of the first scenes, adding short descriptions of the action - Dido is melancholy; Belinda celebrates love; Aeneas arrives; Aeneas courts Dido; Aeneas asks Dido to confirm her love. He also added the key changes. C major; G major with cadence change to E minor; C minor; G major again.

The Duchess sat with hands together as though praying. On and on went Henry with his schematic vision. The sorceress calls the witches - F minor. They plot Dido's downfall - F major. The hunting party at Diana's Grove - D minor. The storm - D major. Mercury arrives - A minor. The sailors prepare to depart - B flat major. The witches celebrate - B flat major. Dido's grief - G minor.<sup>2</sup>

Henry's final G minor had extraordinary melancholy and the applause was rapturous. The Duchess rose from her chair, took Henry's hands in hers and kissed his cheeks. She turned a great smile of pleasure to the Priests and waited for them to speak.

"The music has great charm," Cecelia announced, "but Henry's ingenuity could honour any theme, so," and she gave the word considerable emphasis, "there is no reason why the story of Dido and Aeneas should be the chosen one." No one moved or spoke. "I trust," Cecelia continued, "that the theme is not entirely fixed."

"It is entirely fixed," said Henry.

"Fixed, even if it doesn't have the best interests of the school at heart, even if I object to the tale?"

Henry nodded.

"It will not be performed, no matter how you dress it in beautiful key changes."

Josias shrank into his chair, trying not to be noticed.

"Mrs. Priest," the Duchess addressed her, "it is extraordinary to claim that you have no need of beauty."

"I never said this," Cecelia retorted. "I have a care for beauty, but I am also mindful of its context. It can detract or it can inspire."

For Nahum this sounded too much like Faithful's view.

"I wonder what you would chose," said the Duchess, grandly. "Suggest something that will keep us on the straight and narrow."

"Keep the music," Cecelia replied, "but change the story."

"May the good Lord save us," Nahum cried, incapable of withstanding yet another demand to change his characters.

The Duchess spoke softly now. “You have in your garden the first shoots of a marvellous flower,” she began, “but you have no idea how to nurture it. You cannot object to the subjects of life and death as if they were issues of comfort and discomfort. You cannot propose an opera and then offer your guests a few romantic dances. The opera needs connection to themes of antiquity. It must establish some resonance for us if we are to associate it with greatness.”

“I did not ask for an opera,” Cecelia replied curtly, “only for an entertainment. Besides, there are operas without love and death as their abiding passions and in this instance they are inappropriate.”

“This work could establish your school as the finest in the land,” Henry declared, “and I will not revise it. I am already in rehearsal with Frances and Anna Pieters.” Josias was amazed. “I will compose this opera for myself and write no other work for the school.”

“Mrs. Priest, you are about to lose one of the great performances of our age and I cannot contemplate it. If you would only broaden your view we could address your concerns.”

“If the subject is disappointed love and if it must end with the death of the heroine, then it is not for me,” Cecelia replied.

“We do not have the resources for an opera,” Josias exclaimed.

“We can find the resources,” the Duchess said. “Money is never the problem. If we invited the King, we’d find many with fat purses eager to attend, but not if our offer is a few dances.”

Gradually it became obvious that Cecelia was beginning to melt. Her repeated injunctions were that no passion between Dido and Aeneas must be performed and Dido must not kill herself, but on these points they all agreed. Cecelia’s last request was that Nahum should write an epilogue to emphasise the virtuous lives of her pupils. He agreed, but the thought of it was loathsome to him.

For the finale the Duchess was unbeatable. She promised that Betterton and Killigrew would lend them costumes and sets and Robert, Earl of Lindsey would allow them to use Lindsey House for

rehearsals. Suddenly everything seemed possible and arrangements were being made. Josias would meet with Frances and Anna Pieters. Henry would give Josias the dance music by the beginning of September, he would find a bass vocalist to sing Aeneas and arrange for some in the Abbey choir to sing the base and tenor parts in the chorus. Josias, in lieu of a fee for their work, would double their wages during the coming term and the Duchess and Cecelia would meet regularly to plan the production. When they made a toast to the success of *Dido and Aeneas* it was excited anticipation that filled the room and Josias and Cecelia left with smiles.

The Duchess, having elected herself to be in charge of dressing the performers and styling the scenery, was eager to learn what information Henry and Nahum could give her. She was astounded that they had not prepared a description of the scenes or a list of the characters, but Nahum promised to do this. When he mentioned the sets James Billingsley had designed for *Psyche*, the Duchess became excited about the prospect of flying gods about the stage, but Nahum informed her that there were no gods.

“Then we shall fly the witches,” she cried with some enthusiasm, “and it seems to me that I should talk with James Billingsley as soon as possible.”

The scenery was their topic for the remainder of the evening. By the end of it they had agreed that a sumptuous palace was to be the most important feature, that the prologue and the hunting scene would have pastoral settings, the witches’ scene would take place in a cave and the sailor’s would dance with a harbour as their backdrop. They, all three, said good night with considerable joy in their hearts.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

*THE TASK OF A KNIGHT-ERRANT*

“No sooner is he out of church than his rudeness begins,” Ellen complained, and she pulled the reluctant Harry behind her and gave him a shake. “Walk along nicely and ask for nothing more,” she bid him. “You will not starve.”

Nahum, Ellen and Harry were leaving St. Clements church, heading for the Sunday market. Nahum had his arm about Harry in an attempt to keep him cheery.

“Have you finished writing about Jack yet?” the boy asked.

“Now don’t you start worrying Mr. Tate just because you’ve failed with me,” Ellen rebuked him. “Just make sure that you work hard at your lessons. How is his reading coming along, Nahum?”

“Oh, he’ll be reading before long.”

“Must he be reading before he goes to school?”

“I expect so,” Nahum replied.

“What age do they start?”

Nahum admitted that he had no idea and promised to find out, but Ellen’s questions surprised him. He could not remember if he had promised to place Harry in a school and he doubted the possibility, whether Harry was reading or not. The distressing thought of disappointing Ellen stayed with him all morning, but by the time he had finished writing out *Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Beans*, he felt less concern about it. He went in search of Harry and read him the whole story.

Harry loved the voracious appetite and thunderous voice of the giant. “Fe-fi-fo-fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I’ll grind his bones to make my bread.” Nahum’s words struck terror in the boy and he had many requests to repeat them. He also had many questions to answer.

“If the giant knew that Jack was in the castle before he saw him, how could Jack steal gold? Why did Jack and his mother spend all the gold? Why does Jack go to the castle again when he has a chicken that lays golden eggs? How does he know the golden harp is there? To the last question Nahum replied that there were more important things than gold and Harry asked what these were.

“Music,” Nahum told him. “The harp plays music whenever it is requested and it will teach Jack about beauty. You too will need to learn this before you become a man. You have to be brave enough to fight and brave enough to be sensitive and you can’t steal sensitivity you must own it. That’s why the harp cried out when Jack was stealing it. It only plays to the person who owns it.”

Harry took the story with him to his bedroom and Ellen expressed to Nahum her surprise at Harry’s behaviour when with him. She wanted to say she was grateful, but she couldn’t find the words.

Nahum, trying to cool the errant anticipation that accompanied him on his way to Smithfield to see Eliza, reminded himself that it was neither brave nor sensitive to love a woman when she could not return that love. He knew that the intimacies that filled his imagination had no place now and while he waited in the tavern for Eliza to arrive he practiced the art of controlling his excitement.

The moment Eliza entered, every promise vanished. Her beauty struck his eye so powerfully that he had to steady himself before greeting her with a kiss. Only Eliza could do this to him. He poured her a cup of canary wine, pulled his chair further from her than he wished to be and talked excitedly about anything that might help to detach his thoughts from the desire to embrace her.

Eliza, as usual, took control. She explained how she and a group of friends - costume dressers, prop makers and scene painters - had been meeting at her apartment to practice acting.

“We all wanted to perform in a play,” she told him, “so we took a scene from *A Country Wife* by William Wycherley and agreed to rehearse it each day after work.”

“Knowing your love of comedy and Wycherley’s extraordinary talent for writing them, the news doesn’t surprise me,” Nahum declared. “Are you aware of Wycherley’s recent misfortune?”

“That’s why we chose him,” Eliza exclaimed. “We wanted to get one of his plays produced to make him some money.”

Wycherley had married the Countess of Drogheda without her family’s consent; they objected to him. Recently, the Countess died and her family inherited the fortune, leaving poor Wycherley in debt. The misfortune that Eliza wanted to rescue him from was his incarceration in Fleet Prison and the attention he was receiving from Eliza seemed more real to Nahum than the concern she directed at him. How he could feel envy towards Wycherley he did not know.

“Has Mr. Killigrew agreed to produce the play?” he asked.

“No, but he has invited us to present a scene to him next Friday. That’s why I asked to see you; we need you to help us.”

“But what could I possibly do?” Nahum asked.

“Attend the audition and speak up for us. You have some influence with Killigrew; he will listen to you.”

“Well, I can speak up for you, Eliza, but Killigrew can see for himself how beautiful you are. How could he refuse you?”

“Nahum,” she exclaimed, horrified. “This is not about me. I don’t want him to accept us for any reason other than we deserve it.”

“But your beauty deserves it,” Nahum declared and the look on Eliza’s face expressed her anger and disappointment.

“I want to act, Nahum, and this is all I want.”

“I’m sorry, Eliza, I didn’t mean ...”

“But you always do this, Nahum. You always turn it round to your feelings for me. Talk to me about acting. Be my friend.”

The request shocked Nahum; he had no idea how he could be her friend, not even what it might mean. He accused her of being angry and forbidding and she accused him of being needy and grasping. He pleaded with her to consider his loneliness and she pleaded with him to allow her independence.

“You separate me from that which defines me,” he moaned.

“But you must learn to treat me as a friend.”

“That’s a task for a knight-errant, not a simple Irishman.”

“Nahum, you’re not a simple Irishman. You must try to love me with some courtesy.”

“Eliza, the thought of loving you with the courtesy of a knight fills me with foreboding. Submitting to pain and loneliness without the hope of ever gaining your heart will turn my joy to despair.”

“Nahum, forget about courtly love. I am inviting you to a comedy not a life of abstinence. I’m not asking you to do anything other than sound enthusiastic about the scene we are acting for Killigrew. If you can’t do this, so be it. It will not be the end of the world.”

“Please don’t ridicule me for loving you, Eliza.”

“You are the limit, Nahum Tate, and you are your own worst enemy. Why do you always come back to the same thing? Move on to something else for goodness sake.”

There was nothing Nahum could say or do to influence Eliza’s opinion and once again he gave in, this time by agreeing to attend the rehearsal and to make a great show of his enthusiasm. Eliza expressed her gratitude, but she added that he had an odd heart.

“It would benefit from a little comedy,” she suggested.

When Nahum fell silent, Eliza deemed it an appropriate time to depart. The closest Nahum got to receiving a kiss was the one she blew off the palm of her hand as she stood in the door.

CHAPTER THIRTY

*THE SICILIAN USURPER*

An old fellow sitting at the next table addressed Nahum.

“Women can be difficult,” he said sympathetically.

“Aye,” said Nahum, “but this time I’m the difficult one. I am fated to keep my ardour alive, never allowing it to cool.”

“You believe in such a thing as fate?” the old fellow asked.

“Well, destiny then,” Nahum replied, “if destiny is different from fate. I don’t know. What is it when you are hopelessly devoid of will and operated by forces outside you?”

“Oh, well,” came the fellow’s reply, “that’s love.”

“Destiny always rears its head when love is in the air.”

“The notion of destiny creates security when you have no other means of verifying what you’re doing.”

“So following the heart is like believing in fate, is it?”

“The heart is a bewildering thing.”

“Eliza said that I had an ‘odd heart’.”

“If you ask me, that’s the only kind we’re given, but when you’re my age you’ll look back and long for some of the foolishness that was in your youthful heart. It teaches you how to live.”

He stood then and lifted his stick off the back of the chair.

“Life never stays the same for long,” he said, patting Nahum on the back, “and whatever anyone else thinks, it’s a free world; you don’t have to stop loving her unless you want to.”

With that he left the tavern, relying greatly on his stick.

The following morning Nahum woke with the determination to rewrite *The History of King Richard II* in a day. To lighten his philosophic view he told himself that this could be one of many plays that needed Sicily as the narrative island of exile. He cancelled his lesson with Harry and gave the play a new title - *The Sicilian Usurper*. He changed the character's names and the places they inhabited in the time it would have taken him to make a direct copy and by the time Button arrived in his study it was complete.

"I've changed *The History of King Richard II* into *The Sicilian Usurper* in one day," he declared proudly.

"And I," Button told him in his usual foolish fashion, "have usurped history for the second time in two days."

Nahum, sent his article on gardens hurtling through the air and Button caught it. He would have read it had Nahum not handed him Sir William Temple's book, *Upon the Gardens of Epicurus*.

"The Chinese gardeners delight in the play of order and chaos almost as much you," Nahum informed him.

When they were in the White Horse, Nahum related the tale of Cecelia's attempted sabotage of their tragedy.

"I agree with Cecelia," said Button, "why have more tragedy?"

"And what would you chose to perform?" Nahum asked.

"I would adapt Sir Philip Sidney's *Dido* from the *Arcadia*."

"You must remind me of it," said Nahum.

"Well," said Button thinking, "there is a villainous husband who is attempting to murder Dido, his tenth wife. He left his first wife because she was over-wayward, his second because she was too soon won, the third because she was not merry enough and the fourth because she was over-gamesome. I think that the fifth had become sick; the sixth was foolish enough to be jealous of him and the seventh he left because she refused to carry his letter to a lover. What a husband is this? The eighth he left because she was not secretive enough and the ninth because she lacked any liberal

views. As for Dido, he could find no fault with her other than she was no more beautiful than other women.” Nahum laughed. “Don’t laugh,” Button cried, “I would have Henry set to music the vitriol of the poor wives as they beat this terrible husband to death. That’s the education for young ladies at boarding school.”

“You never take anything seriously,” Nahum asserted.

“On the contrary, I am always serious about telling the truth.”

The two friends spent hours that night in extravagant talk and Nahum felt much the worse for it the morning after. He had a demanding Harry to deal with, making up for his lost lesson the day before, and at its end Nahum had promised to extend the story of Jack. Harry insisted that the story could not finish where Nahum had left it, with the Giant dead at the foot of the beanstalk.

“You have not explained who the little man with the beans was,” Harry complained, and Nahum agreed to write more words.

That morning Nahum had a letter from Horace, inviting him to borrow his copy of *Heroides*, and a letter from Anna, apologizing for the explosive emotions in the Pieters’ house. She complained of the drudgery of domestic duties and the temper of her mother.

*I wish I could banish care and sorrow, she wrote, Frances has such a troubled notion of love. I bid her to shake the clouds from her brow and enjoy the fortune that smiles upon her, but nothing I say works upon her for the better.*

*Please ask Mr. Purcell to be patient with us. I am certain that it will not be long before our household returns to its happy state and Frances can enjoy the stirrings of her heart.*

*I should like to think more on the narrative of the opera and if I had a description of the characters and the sequence of scenes I could do this. Would you please send me something.*

This final request reminded Nahum that everyone was clamouring for a text giving an overview of the performance and it was time that he set about writing it.

Nahum was not long with Henry before he agreed to spend the afternoon walking in the fields beyond Tothill Street. Henry paid no attention to the direction, the terrain or the pace of their walk; all was as erratic as the movement of the composer's arms and hands.

"You're a picture of comic eccentricity," Nahum told him.

"I agree," said Henry, "but my method is sound. I keep the tempo with my left hand and the melody with my right; this allows me to work on different orchestral parts at the same time. I'm moving my left arm to follow the sounds of the bass viol and the movements of my left hand to express the sustained notes."

"You are joking," said Nahum, incredulous.

"I'm not," Henry laughed. "With my right arm I'm expressing the harpsichord refrain and, because I'm creating an improvised realisation of the chords suggested by the bass, its movement is more complex than the left."

Henry sang, his voice echoing the melody, his legs punctuating the rhythm and his movements a riot of exaggerated speed changes.

"I use my feet for punctuation," he called out and, standing still, he pointed his toe in front of him and then dug his heel into the ground. Nahum was astonished.

"They probably study your musical walks in Heaven," he exclaimed, "and I'm not referring to the tavern."

Nahum's words chased Henry's melodies all afternoon and as they were taking their leave of each other the composer asked if he would write out his words that evening and be with him early the next day.

"I must have this sequence of refrains by Thursday," he declared, "or Frances and Anna will have nothing to sing."

Nahum promised that he would, but the moment he was home, he lay on his bed and fell asleep.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

*SHAKE THE CLOUDS FROM HER BROW*

Nahum was up early. By the time Harry arrived he had described the characters, notated their stage appearances in each scene and had clarified in note form the dramatic development of the narrative. He was writing a description of the various locations when Harry burst in with the words, "Have you..." and here Nahum stopped him.

"Before you ask," he cried, his hand held high to silence the boy, "I have not had time to write the new ending yet."

"I can't think what you do all day," Harry told him, sounding not unlike his mother, and as Nahum attempted to give him one of Ellen's clips about the ears, he ducked and ran around the table. Nahum laughed once again at the boy's cheek and later, as Harry was pouring over the words, he realised that it would not be long before his pupil was reading.

Nahum copied a description of the scenes for Anna, wrote assuring her that Henry waited for Frances with a patient heart and then made copies of the scenes for Henry, the Duchess and Josias. After that he wrote to Horace confirming that he would visit him on Saturday. There was no translation of *The Art Of Love* on this day, but he did take his morning ale at the White Horse before posting the letters and running to the Old Monk's Refectory.

At the Abbey, Nahum showed Henry Anna's letter.

"I wish Frances had less concern about love," said Henry. "'Shake the clouds from her brow,' he was reading from the letter. "These

are nice words from Anna. It's exactly the advice Belinda should give Dido. Take her letter, Nahum and conjure from it some words for Belinda's opening aria. You can mix them with the words we devised on our walk. Did you write the words to the songs?"

"No Henry," his librettist replied, "I fell asleep."

"If you repeat the lines to yourself a few times before your sleep, you will count the meter of their rhymes during the night. It hardly takes any time. I hope that you can remember them."

Nahum laughed and Henry sat at the harpsichord. He conducted with one hand, played the music with the other and acted upon every word Nahum uttered. The slightest inflection of Nahum's speech inspired Henry to change the pace of his music or alter its accents, but generally it was Nahum who had to alter the rhythm of his phrases to suit Henry's melodies. The composer's originality, his melodic ideas and his creative insights, were inexhaustible and even though Nahum was fully charged, after three hours of it he felt drained by the intensity of this activity.

"You must learn to steady your concentration," Henry told him. "Trust your senses, relax and enjoy the sustenance you receive from the rhythms."

"My apologies," said Nahum, "I'm a poor student."

"Oh don't take it personally," Henry told him. "What I tell you I also tell myself. I'm only sharing my love of working with you."

By the end of the day they had completed the first scene.

Belinda:     *Shake the cloud from off your brow,  
Fate your wishes do allow.  
Empire growing, Pleasures flowing,  
Fortune smiles and so should you,  
Shake the cloud from off your brow.*

Chorus:     *Banish sorrow, banish care,  
Grief should ne'er approach the fair.*

Dido:           *Ah! Belinda I am pressed,  
 With torment not to be confessed.  
 Peace and I are strangers grown,  
 I languish till my grief is known,  
 Yet would not have it guessed.*

Belinda:       *Grief increasing, by concealing,*

Dido:           *Mine admits of no revealing.*

Belinda:       *Then let me speak, the Trojan guest,  
 Into your tender thoughts has pressed.*

It was a hot night and Nahum's dreams were easily transported to Carthage. Eliza was Dido again. Nahum was singing *shake the clouds from off your brow* and Eliza declared that she would if only he had some money. When he awoke, his sultry mood was enough to upset his day, but to add to this he received a letter from his landlord, reminding him again that he was behind with his rent. As Nahum headed down river with Henry, the poor state of his accounts cast a shadow over the excitement that this day promised. He could not leave this issue in the back of his mind any longer.

Anna opened the door to them before they had reached the steps and the two friends were completely taken aback. She looked ashen and spoke with urgency in whispered tones.

"The rehearsal is impossible. You must return without delay. I will write to explain. Please do not enquire further. You must not remain a minute longer."

"What's happening?" Henry demanded. "You must tell me, it is too urgent to be left unexplained."

"It's my mother," Anna replied. "Oh, please don't ask now."

"I will not leave until I know," Henry insisted. Anna was horrified. She mumbled a few words and Henry shouted at her to speak up.

"Frances was on the stairs, weeping," Anna said, still barely above a whisper. "She was complaining that love could only bring

turmoil. She could not have known that our mother was listening, but she was. When we realised, it was too late. My mother was in a such a rage. She instructed us to stay in our rooms, but I had to warn you. Please go now before my mother hears you.”

“Did Frances mention her love for me?” Henry asked.

“Yes. Now make haste. It will be worse for us all if my mother catches us talking of this.”

“I will talk to your mother,” Henry insisted, trying to push past Anna. “I cannot have her at odds with me.” Anna held him at the door and begged him not to confront her mother, but Henry insisted that he would tell her of his love for Frances.

“You must not,” Anna pleaded. “She knows that Frances is apprehensive about your attentions.” Henry stared at her. “Frances was told that you receive considerable attention from the women at Court and she is nervous about this. My mother says that all courtiers have something of the gallant about them and she believes that you have tricked Frances.” Henry was furious. “Please do not be angry with Frances, I beg you. It is natural for women to concern themselves with a man’s constancy.”

Nahum tried to take Henry by the arm and bid him to leave the house, but at that moment Amy Pieters appeared in the hallway. She asked Anna what she was doing there and instructed her to return to her room immediately and stay there until she was called for. Anna threw Henry and Nahum a look of despair.

*CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO*

*WAYWARD SISTERS*

“So, gentlemen, as you have chosen to visit me, I would be grateful if you came in off the street.” These were Amy’s words. Henry and Nahum entered and as Amy closed the door Henry tried to speak.

“No, Mr. Purcell, this is my house and you will do me the courtesy of allowing me to speak first. I am deeply offended. I invited you into this house in good faith to entertain my guests, but you have taken it into your head to entertain my daughter.” Henry tried to interject. “Do you think that we do not know you, Mr. Purcell? Do you imagine that your bawdy songs and drunken behaviour fail to express how it goes with you?” Henry tried again to speak. “Do you expect me to condone your behaviour and celebrate when you attempt to force your attentions upon my daughter? You must reckon that we lack any form of honour or self-respect.”

“Please, let me explain,” Henry pleaded.

“No sir, I do not want to listen to your lies. You would have us believe that only noble thoughts direct your gaze, but your ornamental life is nothing but a poor imitation of the Court you serve. You are all tarred with the same brush and your giddy lives are dedicated to nothing but gallantry and pleasure. Damn you to presume that my daughter deserves your attentions. These afternoons were just an excuse for your idle passion and flirtatious dalliance. How dare you wheedle your way into this house with false promises and blatant lies? We are not fooled by this gilded

artifice that you wear so proudly, you cannot hide the dishonesty and greed that are the stuff of you. You can leave this house now. I do not expect to see you again.”

“Madam, I compose music for the King and I resent being accused of imitating the lives of his courtiers.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” she laughed mockingly. “Resent what you will. I have no interest in the frivolous butterfly that is called King.”

“You are wrong about me. My life is dedicated to the Church and its music. You should not demean me or deny my high regard.”

“I know that this is the way you speak, but it is not the way you act. High regard, ha, ha, ha.” It was a derisive, malicious laugh.

“I love Frances more than I love my life.”

“Then you can go to hell and take your love with you. Love, ha, ha, ha.” Amy’s terrible laugh again reeked of aggressive hatred.

“I want to marry Frances. I want to look after her.”

Amy thrust herself towards him in a threatening manner. “What do you own, Mr. Purcell? What business are you engaged in?”

“I work for the King.”

“You work for the King. Ha, ha, ha. The King pays nothing, even when he has money. Do you own any property? Do you have an inheritance? Is there anything to recommend you?”

“I live with my mother and my family.”

“You live with your mother. And I suppose that my daughter is also to live with your mother is she? You are wasting my time, Mr. Purcell. You have angered me considerably and your foolish proposal makes a mockery of me and my family. Now, I have given you all the time that I intend to give. You will leave this house and you will not return. Is that clear?”

Amy opened the door and Henry and Nahum left the house. Henry walked at a considerable pace. At the end of Cole Harbour he turned east down Thames Street and at the crossroads by London Bridge he turned north up Fish Street. He stopped by the giant pillar

that marked the place where the fire first started and beat against it with his fists. When he was exhausted he slid down its mass and sat with his back against it, his eyes shut, his hands over his ears. Nahum sat down beside him and tried to comfort him.

“Amy Pieters is a dried up old witch,” he exclaimed, “her only response to love is destruction.” Henry did not reply, but put his face in his hands. “She is without a heart, an indulgence of miserable opinion. Her interest is gold, her daughter a means of securing wealth.”

“Oh, shut up,” Henry moaned, “please shut up.” And then he let out a great anguished cry and he repeated it until it lost all meaning and energy. They were silent, but Nahum, in his anger, vowed that the opera’s witches would act as Amy had done.

“Old hags, with horror their pleasure and pain their enjoyment,” he muttered. He put his hand on Henry’s shoulder “I will model our witches on Amy. With destruction their intent, they will only laugh derisively. I am not going to write anything for them to say, their laughter will portray their horror.”

Nahum began to sing ‘ha, ha, ha’, with all the meanness and derision he could muster. His vocalizing distracted Henry and before long he too had taken up the sounds, preferring an intense ‘ho, ho, ho,’ to Nahum’s half craved ‘ha, ha, ha’.

“We must return, Nahum,” Henry told him, standing again and offering his hand. “We must have Amy’s depraved and wretched sounds down on paper before her revulsion ceases to afflict us.”

In the boat upriver they made frightening sounds for each other.

“You’ve bin drinking,” the boatman told them.

“It’s a play we’re writing to scare the audience,” said Henry.

“Well, you’ve scared me right enough and I can’t row if you continue with it, that’s a fact.” Composer and librettist ceased their grating noises then, but Henry already had the music in his head.

Once in the refectory, Henry, violin in hand, played what he

referred to as the prelude for the witches. It was a spontaneous outburst, his rhythm aggressive, his melody vicious. It arrived fully formed and complete with enough anticipation of terror to prepare their audience for the harridans whose sole intent was harm.

“It will be the sorceress who opens the scene,” declared Henry, “and with these sounds she will demand the presence of the witches. Write it for me Nahum,” and Nahum did exactly that.

*Wayward sisters, you that fright,  
The lonely traveller by night.  
Who like dismal ravens crying,  
Beat the windows of the dying.  
Appear, appear at my call, and share in the fame,  
Of a mischief shall make all Carthage to flame.  
Appear, Appear.*

The song, full of power and foreboding, carried the charge of their anger, but when Henry sang - his emotional expression both wicked and amusing - they did not know whether to laugh or cry. Henry, accompanying himself on the violin, discovered another melody underneath the first, and this was equally full of mischief.

“Can you imagine this as a dissolute dance?” he asked. Nahum said he could. “The chorus will sing this. You must give me some words,” and Nahum gave him this famous refrain.

*Harm's our delight and mischief all our skill.*

They conjured these songs out of thin air in little more than an hour. With the exception of the recitative, they had completed the first scene of the second act. They rewarded themselves with a visit to the Sun Tavern, but Henry claimed he was already drunk. They were both drunk on their creativity, but it did not stop them from drinking as much ale as they were capable of consuming.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### *A COUNTRY WIFE*

When Henry and Nahum were completely drunk they lampooned and vilified the frightful Amy and even toasted her wretchedness for the dreadful inspiration it inspired. Oblivion was the only opportunity worth cultivating that night for the two forlorn lovers. Their art might, at times, help them transcend their tragedy, but in their hearts they knew only too well the grave disappointments that continued to beset them and deep inside they bemoaned the dismal fortune that distanced them from their loves. Their drunkenness alleviated their wretched state, it put a temporary stop to their misery, but by morning the harsh light of a new day brought realisation back into view and they remembered their ravaged senses and groaned.

Nahum's head was like a dead weight, not even the coffee would lighten it, but he pushed himself to write out a fair copy of *The Sicilian Usurper*. He was pleased that he did for the look of delighted surprise on Killigrew's face was great reward. The director promised to copy it before sending it to the Lord Chamberlain.

"And now my dear," Killigrew announced, "I invite you to accompany me to a fine new performance. The pretty maid, Eliza and some of my assistants are about to tread the boards."

"And the play?" Nahum asked, despite knowing it already.

"It's Wycherley's, *The Country Wife*," Killigrew declared.

Nahum accepted, but in the auditorium, he sat nervously waiting for it to begin. Killigrew rambled on about his love of Wycherley's

writing, of his innuendo and farce, and then declared that he loved any writer who could make comic action out of flirting and jealousy. Nahum smiled weakly and wished he was anywhere but there.

*The Country Wife* featured Mr. and Mrs. Pinchwife who had come up from the country to visit his sister, Alithea. Alithea was about to be married, but another man had fallen passionately in love with her. Mr. Pinchwife, a silly, jealous man, would not allow his wife out in London, but already Mr. Horner had seen her and had fallen in love with her. Desire was everywhere.

“We are waiting too long,” Killigrew called out. “Mr. Petty, fetch us some brandy before we die of boredom.”

Boredom was not a state Nahum would have admitted to there and then, but the brandy helped to revive him a little. After some time a man presented himself through the curtains and informed his modest audience that they were about to see the first scene of the second act of Wycherley’s play, *The Country Wife*.

The curtain opened and Eliza was standing there as bright as a button. She was dressed as Mrs. Pinchwife and she began the scene by complaining to Alithea that her husband would not allow her go to the theatre for fear that she would either like the actors too much or that the gallants in the audience would like her too much.

Mr. Pinchwife then revealed that he was a fellow who regarded all town women to be notorious and impudent, calling them, ‘errant jilflirts, gadders and magpies,’ and when he heard his wife’s complaints he was distraught by her protestations.

Then, the fellow who was betrothed to Alithea entered with his friend. Mr. Pinchwife, nervous, locked Mrs. Pinchwife in a cupboard. The ‘would-be’ husband of Alithea asked his friend for his opinion of his future bride, but his friend had already fallen for her. When the friend started to make passes at her, Alithea was taken aback, but her future spouse, a foolish man, was intent on proving that he was not jealous. Mr. Pinchwife was outraged by this

liberal display, but Alithea and her two visitors, caring nothing for his anxiety, departed to the theatre, leaving Mr. Pinchwife alone.

Three town women then appeared on stage; Lady Fidget, Mrs. Dainty Fidget and Mrs. Squeamish. Eliza was playing Lady Fidget. Nahum was transfixed by her beauty. The ladies asked if they could escort Mrs. Pinchwife to the theatre, but Mr. Pinchwife informed them that she had smallpox. They insisted on seeing her and he made great show of going to fetch her. In his absence, the ladies complained that their husbands spent all their time and their fortunes keeping little playhouse creatures, while they admitted to dreaming about becoming a mistress to some fine gentlemen about town.

Killigrew clapped noisily at its conclusion and the actors returned to the stage to make their bows and curtsies.

“You have performed excellently well,” the director told them, “as well as any actor. What do you think, Mr. Petty?”

“Most excellent,” John Petty replied. “If we have the opportunity to produce it, we should encourage them to rehearse it in full.”

“Fulsome praise, sir,” Killigrew replied. “What do you think of their efforts, Nahum?”

“I agree,” Nahum responded. “They perform as well as any actors. I also concur with John Petty; they should work on the whole play if you can produce it.”

“I’m inclined to agree,” said Killigrew, “but I cannot fund it. I would love to have the play in reserve, but produce it I cannot.”

There were noises of disappointment from the actors.

“But my dears, it’s a long comedy with a great many parts. I would gladly help dear Wycherley, but not at the expense of ending up by his side in the debtors prison.”

A tall fellow, who Nahum recognised, suggested that someone could simplify the play and Eliza, as quick as a wink, declared that Nahum could edit it. Nahum’s immediate reaction was that Eliza

had rehearsed this and then, realising that all eyes were upon him, he lifted his hands, as though he were protecting himself from a physical onslaught, and started to laugh, slightly hysterically.

“I don’t have time to do this,” he exclaimed, “and besides, once you start to reorganise a play like this, all hell’s let lose. Do an extract by all means, but attempt to rewrite it? Never.”

He glanced up at Eliza. She looked at him in horror.

“This kind of thing’s not unusual for us,” Killigrew told him, “but we’ll not push your reluctance. Perhaps someone familiar with comedy, like Etheridge, would do it. He has the skill of comedy and he’s married to a rich old widow; he could even produce it.”

“Excellent notion, sir,” John Petty told him. “We are often in need of a spare play and if Nahum’s new play doesn’t manage a run we might replace it with *The Country Wife*.”

Killigrew, appalled by his words, shouted at Petty for making such an unlucky comment. Nahum marked him down as a man not to be trusted. Killigrew congratulated the actors and promised to consider the play further. The actors departed backstage and Nahum left the theatre to wander up Drury Lane in a confused state.

He thought that it was mean of him to refuse Eliza her chance as an actor, but he knew that he could not rewrite Wycherley, no matter what ambition drove him to try. He wanted to hug his beautiful muse, to shower compliments on her, to extol her brilliant performance, but he could hardly be more distant from her now.

As Nahum was walking to Thomas’ house, full of foreboding, the sky darkened, the thunder sounded and the heavens, echoing his troubled emotions, opened up and drowned him in a ferocious storm.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### SCORN NOT THE DANCE

Thomas, responding quickly to his wet and miserable friend, handed Nahum a shirt and some breeches and told him to change his clothes. Once settled, Nahum talked of his visit to Ireland and Thomas spoke of his summer in Sussex.

“I have been with Caroline every day,” he exclaimed, “and, though I don’t know how this is possible, my love for her only grows stronger. She is coming with her aunt to visit me today, so you shall have the pleasure of meeting her.”

Thomas read his poems and showed his beautiful miniature paintings, both having Caroline as their subject, and Nahum, though appreciative, was beside himself with envy. When Thomas asked if his love for Eliza was flowering, he shuddered.

“It is a tale so sad and full of woe,” said Nahum, “only baleful planets could have inspired it. My story, born of the raging sea, could melt the rocks and freeze the summer breeze.”

“It is certain you have lost her then,” said Thomas, horrified.

“Aye, lost but not forgotten, and I cannot dictate my heart to forget her. Friendship she wants and assistance she requests, but love she will not accept.”

“I’ll read you this,” said Thomas. *“If a woman inspires you greatly, keep your feelings for her intact. Your heart is resoundingly true, it must not be broken by rejection. Do anything to live without*

*anger and try not to live without love. Attend to the love that you know, it's yours to own, not hers. Generously give yourself back, a jewel should not linger in disappointment.* I wrote it for you it seems. Let me read you something by my favourite Roman poet.

*Youth yet is yours! Scorn not the dance!  
Your daily exercise continue;  
And don't say there is no Romance  
As long as there is breath within you.*

"It's Horace," Thomas declared. "I translated it to read at Horace and Mary's literary evening."

"And I shall read Ovid," Nahum told him. "*The Art Of Love* to hear a man eulogise romance and *Heroides* to hear a woman bemoan its terrible outcome."

Thomas started to question him when his maid entered and announced that Caroline and her Aunt Elizabeth had arrived.

Nahum studied the two women closely, their exceptional beauty and unexpected delicacy enchanted him. Over dinner, they talked in measured tones about their house in the country, a place, it seemed, where grace and charm reigned unchallenged. After supper, Thomas invited them to view his paintings, but Elizabeth declined, saying that she would stay to talk with Nahum. He applauded her consideration for the lovers, who were grateful to be left alone, and at Elizabeth's bidding, Nahum talked of his writing.

"You've a broken heart," Elizabeth announced, suddenly.

"How do you know?" asked Nahum, shocked.

"I know it from your spirit," she said, "not from your words about Dido. There is a rupture in you with the distinct quality of rejection caused by a woman; a woman who must have inspired you."

Nahum gazed at Elizabeth; her frailty evaporated, she now displayed a formidable presence. He invited her to say more and

when she was reluctant he encouraged her vigorously.

“Women have considerable power,” she began, “and this power grows appreciably when they want to attract a man. Your woman inspired your potency, but she wishes this no longer, so she must thwart your desire. Its inadvertent that she breaks your heart.”

“By what overwhelming intelligence do you know this?”

“Because when a woman reduces a man’s potency he becomes intent on controlling her and she won’t allow it. If he can’t check his desire, the woman must continue to exercise control.”

“But how do you know this about me?”

“Only from your spirit, the rest is only a restatement of a common theme that’s repeated endlessly in art as well as life.”

“But if it’s true of me, what can I do?”

“You must stop the flow of images that you conjure around her. If you are stuck in repetition, because you have allowed your woman to become the embodiment of stimulation, then you must break the connection. Only then can you be free of her.”

“But how can I do this?”

“It’s not certain that you can. It takes an extraordinary amount of grace to honour the woman who rejected you. To honour her you must grant her freedom and if you cannot then you will remain in limbo until you have used her up; until she no longer works on you. There is no grace in life if you diminish a relationship this way.”

“I cannot begin to think like this,” Nahum admitted.

“Then don’t think about it, it won’t help. Men define themselves by the attention they receive. Beauty steals their minds and rejection steals their identity. In the great scheme of things it is important that women rule men’s hearts, for they have no other way of distracting them from the affairs of the world that they cling to so faithfully. How else would we establish families and ensure future generations? Your hearts are your strength and they are your weakness. Women must rule the heart, not follow it; they accept

this or they sacrifice the victory.”

“But where is decent government without the heart. Where is poetry, music and art? The affairs of the world must touch heaven as well as earth. Without love we are nowhere. Eliza and I were in love, I truly believed that.”

“Oh yes,” Elizabeth said softly, “it is important that you believe it was love or there would be nothing to play for. Call it love and know that with love there is only giving.”

Thomas and Caroline returned. It was an interruption that affected Nahum deeply. He wanted Elizabeth’s words resonating in his head; it was crucial that he remember the words even if he could not understand how she could perceive so much.

The talk reverted to a discussion about Thomas’ paintings and then it was time for the women to leave. Nahum held Elizabeth’s hands and thanked her ardently, but Elizabeth’s smile gave no indication that anything out of the ordinary had occurred. After their departure, Nahum discussed Elizabeth with Thomas, but his friend had no idea that she possessed such powers of perception.

The rain was still falling in torrents when Nahum changed back into his clothes. As he stood in the doorway, contemplating his journey, Thomas offered him an oilskin umbrella, but Nahum refused it on the grounds that it was an implement for the ladies.

“Take it,” Thomas demanded, thrusting the umbrella at him, “it will keep the scorching world’s opinion from your fair credit.”

Nahum looked at him, perplexed.

“Remember Beaumont and Fletcher? *Now you have got a shadow, an umbrella to keep the scorching world’s opinion from your fair credit.* May it also keep you dry,” Thomas added.

Nahum thanked his friend and with the umbrella up he enjoyed its protection. He knew nothing about his fair credit and even less about how he would stop dreaming of Eliza.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE MAN'S A SAINT

The rain did not stop once during the night and Nahum did not stop dreaming about Eliza. Thomas' umbrella again provided Nahum with protection as he made his way to visit Horace. He was wondering if the King realised what a luxury it is to have a courtier like Horace at his side. In his early days in London, Horace and his library were very important for Nahum and the thought of being with the man in his library again, pleased him greatly. Once the pair had exchanged news, Horace handed Nahum his copy of *Heroides* and asked if he would translate the whole of it, not restrict himself to a passage.

"Are you serious?" Nahum asked. Horace nodded. "Then as soon as I've finished *The Art Of Love*, I will get onto it. If it doesn't displease you, I will have to ask for payment, my income is as precarious as ever."

"Then I will give you an advance," Horace offered.

"A thousand thanks," said Nahum, "and please excuse my abruptness about money. I'll not be paid for the Ovid commission 'til September and payment for the libretto will take 'til Christmas."

"Are you in debt?" Horace asked. Nahum, ashamed that he had to rely on his friend's generosity again, confirmed that he was. "Then I will pay you now for the whole translation," he offered.

"I thank God," declared Nahum, "that he made you my friend and the most generous of men."

Nahum, having talked of his writing, changed the subject to explain the difficulties he was having teaching Harry to read.

“The boy has much talent,” he claimed, “and he’s as entertaining as you could wish, but he can’t understand letters.”

“Are you preparing the boy for school?” Horace asked.

“He’s the son of my housekeeper,” Nahum explained, “and I doubt that school will be a likely possibility for him.”

“At one time,” Horace announced, “I was engaged as a warden of the Stationers’ Company. It was my job was to raise money for the charity that supported the poorer members of the company to attend a school in Bolt Court, just off Fleet Street. I could ask how the boys obtain a place there, if you wish.”

“Would you?” cried Nahum, enthusiastically, and then questions flew from him - Do the boys started at eight? Must they read and write before starting? Does the school take fee-paying boys? Is it only the sons of company members who attend? - he sounded like Harry and the importance of this subject was not lost on Horace.

“I will find out the costs and make other enquiries,” he told Nahum. “I like your concern for the boy. You must be very attached to him, and his mother too no doubt.”

“Yes, Ellen is a great help to me. She’s an excellent woman.”

“Then if my research proves fruitful and there’s room for Harry at the school, I will finance his first year.”

“No Horace,” Nahum gasped, “this is beyond generosity.”

“Nonsense, my mind is made up. Harry will go to the Stationers’ Company School at my expense and you’ll make a man of him.”

Nahum hugged his benefactor, vowed to dedicate his libretto to him and, excusing his eagerness to return home, said goodbye. He flew delighted along the streets, jumping over puddles, his umbrella in one hand, *Heroides* in the other. He found Ellen in the kitchen of the White Horse and he asked her to sit while he related his extraordinary news.

“What is it?” the flustered woman asked, drying her hands and straightening her apron; she was not familiar with such eagerness from Nahum to share his news.

“Do I have to sit down or can I remain standing?” she asked.

“You can remain standing, Ellen, if you wish. Are you ready?”

Ellen nodded cautiously, looking as if she might lose her head if she were any more enthusiastic about it.

“It’s good news, Ellen you don’t have to look so frightened.”

“Then for goodness sake tell me what it is or I shall die of suspense before you get the words out.”

“Harry is going to school.”

Ellen said nothing and did not move.

“Horace Heveningham is going to pay for his first year.”

“What kind of school?” she asked.

“The Stationers Company School; just off Fleet Street.”

Ellen lifted her apron to wipe the tears from her eyes. She shook her head and great sobs, accompanied by the words “The man’s a saint,” came from her repeatedly. Nahum was fearful that she would not stop, so he took her by the hand and directed her to sit down. She sat, stood up and sat down again in quick succession. The intensity of her excitement, mixed with her disbelief was comical.

“Where’s Harry?” she asked herself. “Harry,” she shouted. “Harry. Where is the boy?”

“He’s deliverin’ laundry to Nancy,” the barman informed her.

“Oh yes, I forgot. Oh, I hope he’ll behave himself. Nahum, I hope they’ll not send him home on account of his bad behaviour. He don’t know how to behave at school. He’s sure to misbehave. What shall I do if he’s sent home?”

“Ellen, he hasn’t even started and you’re worrying about him being expelled. You must stop worrying, Harry will be fine. I will wait in the tavern for his return. Do you still provide refreshment? I should like a carafe of wine and something to eat.”

“Oh, yes, goodness me, I’m sorry.” Ellen moved across to the stove. “My little boy, going to school, who could believe it. Will a bowl of vegetable broth suit you?”

They went together into the bar. “Bread,” she exclaimed, “you’ll need bread,” and she ran to the kitchen only to return without it.

“Harry’s in the kitchen. You’ll have to tell him, Nahum. I can’t remember anything you said. Harry,” she shouted.

Harry arrived in the bar expecting to receive a reprimand.

“I have a friend, Harry,” Nahum began, “and he’s going to arrange for you to go to school.” Harry looked down at the floor and nodded thoughtfully. “What do you think?”

“How soon will I go?” Harry enquired.

“Quite soon,” Nahum said. Harry nodded again.

“You wretched child,” Ellen shouted, “is this your only response for the man whose done you this service?”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Tate, thank you.”

“And no more enthusiasm than this?” Ellen complained.

When Nahum asked her to desist, the good woman started to weep. She had no idea what to do with her happiness.

Nahum told Harry what little he knew about the Stationer’s Company school and then, as usual, the boy asked more questions than Nahum could answer. They crossed The Strand in the torrential rain, Harry dancing and Ellen singing.

*CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX*

*THE SOUND OF ANGELS*

There was a tremendous knocking at Nahum's door long after The Strand had become quiet. Nahum had no wish to get up, but he couldn't resist going to the bedroom window to see who might be there. It was impossible to discern anything, so he called down.

"Who's there? Why the disturbance?" but no reply came. He leaned out as far as could, the rain quickly soaking him, and seeing a figure slumped against his steps, he ran down and opened the door very carefully. A hand reached up to him. Nahum knew immediately that it was Henry's. He tried to lift him, but he was a dead weight.

"Henry, what is it?" he asked. "Are you hurt? Are you drunk? Henry speak to me," but all Nahum got from him was a groan.

After each attempt to lift him, Henry laughed hysterically and slumped down again. The laughter annoyed Nahum, Henry's state could only be the consequence of drinking, but he also knew that Henry could hold his drink better than a Lambeth boatman and the concern he felt outweighed his annoyance. He had no idea how Henry, soaking wet and unable to stand, could have made it to The Strand. When Nahum tried pulling Henry, his friend cried out.

"My ankle, my ankle."

At last Nahum dragged him into the hallway and set about removing his wet cloak.

"Talk to me, Henry," he pleaded. "Tell me what happened."

"I love her, Nahum," was Henry's reply. "I tried to steal her away

because I love her and then I fell.”

Nahum called for Ellen and when she saw the injured Henry lying in the hall she ran for a towel and some blankets. Nahum persisted with his questions, but Henry, between further bouts of delirious laughter, could only repeat his love for Frances.

Ellen returned, removed Henry’s coat and dried him as best she could. She and Nahum then carried him into the kitchen and laid him on the table.

“You must tell me what happened, Henry,” Nahum demanded.

“You must tell me what happened,” Henry repeated. “You will not believe what happened, Nahum.”

Nahum learned nothing from his delirious friend. He tried to calm him and repeatedly promised that as soon he was warm and dry he would feel better. Henry understood nothing.

Ellen, having removed his boots and stockings, discovered that his ankle was wildly swollen and an ugly marbled crimson.

“That’ll need something cold,” she told Nahum. “He must have his foot up. Should we take him to your bed?”

Nahum agreed, but the task of getting Henry up the stairs was far from easy. He had a big frame, but the worst of it was Henry’s hysterical bouts of laughter, interspersed with feverish shivering, and his insistence that he whisper into Nahum’s ear.

“I tried to steal her, Nahum, I tried to steal Frances.”

“He’s not going to be moved,” Ellen declared. “We’d best leave him on the kitchen table,” but Nahum insisted that they get him up to his bedroom.

Eventually, Nahum managed to convince Henry that he must hop and with the wounded man’s arm about him, they made it up the stairs. Not one complaint came from Henry and once he had him in bed, covered in blankets, Nahum felt some relief.

“He’s not talking,” Ellen said when she brought more milk, “and it seems to me that he’s shiverin’ too much.”

It was true, Henry could not stop shivering now and, as Nahum wiped the pearls of sweat from his friend's brow, a dreadful fear overcame him. Other than the occasional moan, there was no communication from Henry and Ellen's attempts to get him to drink the warm milk were hopeless.

"There's nothing to say he's conscious," she said.

The two sat patiently at the bedside and after several hours Henry's fever appeared to be lifting. They learned that he had run and dragged himself all the way from The Spaniard, but as quickly as Henry had returned to lucidity, he seemed to slip away again and much of his rambling conversation they did not understand.

"I could hear the world singing this morning," he told them. "The boats were floating in King Street. Did you have rain, Nahum? I had to wade through the park, because it was a lake and I could hear the sound of angels. I tried to see Frances. I knew she was there. I wanted to steal her away. That's very bad of me, isn't it? I was waiting for her, but they found me out. 'It's a burglar. It's a burglar,' they kept shouting."

Henry slipped in and out of consciousness; now and then he laughed hysterically and his carers shared looks of deep alarm. Eventually Nahum and Ellen learned that Henry had climbed a drainpipe, onto one of the sheds, crawled along the ridge to a window and stared at what he had thought was the staircase. Luckily it was locked and sadly he couldn't see in because of the rain. It was a maid who saw him and raised the alarm.

Henry had tried to escape by crawling back along the roof, but it was too slippery and he had fallen off. Fortunately for him he had landed in the alley and not in the yard, where the shouting had come from. Despite his injured ankle Henry ran; he hid for a while before dragging himself to Nahum's door.

While Nahum listened to Henry's tale he imagined his friend desperate in his attempt to survive the ordeal. Occasionally, tears

fell down Henry's cheeks and his shivering punctuated his words. He realised the folly of his foolishness and he knew that his pursuers had recognised him. "What should I do? What should I do? I have no idea what I should do."

Nahum stroked Henry's hand and told him that there was nothing he could do. He and Ellen sat by his side, encouraging him to rest, and Henry continued to moan and mumble much that was incomprehensible to them. At last he seemed to fall into a proper sleep and Nahum bid Ellen to take some rest.

Nahum fell asleep at Henry's bedside, but before long Henry's nightmare shouts woke him. It was dark, Henry was boiling up, Nahum placed a cold towel on his forehead. Henry started to shiver violently and Nahum, not knowing, pulled the bed covers over him. He ran to Ellen for help, she wrenched the covers back, opened the window and instructed Nahum to fetch Dr. Stoller.

It was a fellow almost sick with anxiety who explained to Dr. Stoller what little he knew of Henry's condition and the good doctor, alarmed at his account, instructed Nahum to keep calm or he would be in need of medical services himself.

While Dr. Stoller examined his patient, Nahum and Ellen sat in the kitchen. They were both silent, but Nahum prayed.

"Dear God, what possible reason can you have for putting Henry's life in danger? Only Henry can hear the sound of angels, the golden music of heaven. Who will glorify your name with music if you take him from us now?"

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

*THE LAST INDULGENCE FATE CAN GIVE*

Dr. Stoller stayed with Henry until dawn, at five he went to Nahum's study, woke the sleeping poet and told him that Henry was still in a fevered state.

"Henry's ankle is merely sprained," he affirmed, "but there are swellings in his groin and neck that are far more serious. I have given him a physic, but for the moment there's little more I can do. I will return later in the day."

Nahum looked at him in horror and asked anxiously about the swellings, but all the doctor could tell him was that Henry's ague was probably brought about by extremes of heat and cold.

"No doubt his condition is exacerbated by the collective states of shock and exhaustion, that and the distress that disappointed love has brought him," he added, "but sleep is the best cure for him. Keep the fever down or he will simply boil over."

Nahum took this to mean that this could be the end for Henry and he wept desperately. Dr. Stoller instructed Nahum himself to take some rest and, handing him a note, insisted that he too take some of the physic he had prescribed for Henry.

"Mix these ingredients into a broth," said the doctor, "and make sure that some of it gets into Henry. I also want you to wrap him in pack-thread, as much as will go five times about the neck, wrists and ankles and dip them in oil of amber twice a day. Do that and stop worrying. I doubt Henry is ready to depart this life just yet."

Nahum, making his way to Tothill Street to inform Henry's mother, thought this the most agitated sequence of steps he had ever taken. Elizabeth was already distraught at Henry's absence and she fell to her knees in prayer when she heard Nahum's news. Henry's brother, Daniel and his sister, Katherine gathered up their mother and returned with Nahum to The Strand. In trepidation and silence they watched Henry battle with his raging fever. Elizabeth, sitting by her son's side, held his hand and repeated his name as though it were a litany.

When Ellen came in with the broth she had prepared she was overcome by the unbearable sadness in the room. Nahum had never before seen the capable Ellen in such a disconsolate state over the seemingly impossible task of making Henry swallow the liquid.

After his next visit, Dr. Stoller was considerably more concerned, advising them that it could be days before they knew how much danger Henry was in. His news brought a fearful anxiety to the caring group and later, as Nahum sat alone in his study, he responded by comparing his inadequate literary contribution to the immeasurable value of Henry's music. He blamed himself for not developing real insight, for deluding himself about his perceptions and for not having tried harder to understand life. He regarded his ridiculous ambition as arrogance, and his confidence as pure vanity. He prayed to God to take him in place of his friend.

"I would gladly walk towards death to save Henry," he vowed.

But God did not take Nahum that night, nor even the next day. Elizabeth took over the task of spooning broth into Henry's mouth and Henry remained unconscious. Daniel went to Westminster to inform the Dean of the Abbey and arranged for news to be sent to John Blow at Windsor. Katherine went to Somerset House to inform her Uncle Thomas. Nahum received a letter from Josias Priest asking about progress and requesting a meeting. He paid no heed to it, but later, when Daniel handed him a letter, Nahum

studied this one with such bewildered attention that he wondered how a body could cope with fearful news upon more fearful news.

It was a summons from the Magistrate's Court, instructing Henry to appear at court the next day at ten o'clock to explain his presence on the roof of the Pieters' House. Daniel said he would go to explain Henry's condition and Nahum offered to accompany him, but when Katherine arrived with her Uncle Thomas, he insisted that it was his duty to explain Henry's circumstances and plead his case. Since the death of their father, Thomas had taken on the father's role; he was particularly close to Henry and sang with him often. On this day there was to be no singing, only prayers.

Fortunately, Thomas Purcell's position as Master of the King's Wardrobe had some influence and he managed to have the case against Henry closed. The magistrate recognised the extremity of the composer's condition and accepted that he intended no harm to the house or its inhabitants. Not unexpectedly, Amy Pieters pressed her case with some vigour and the magistrate felt bound to accept her wishes that an injunction be placed on Henry, preventing him from making any further visits to the house. All present were greatly relieved, but Nahum felt the weight of this further tragedy press upon his relief. It was too much to contemplate.

Nahum retired to his study, hoping to divert attention away from his desperate fears. He looked for tales where heroes battled with death. He found stories of rebirth, consolatory tales of descents into winter that still had spring to look forward to, but a fight was what Nahum was after and he ended up with Virgil's Aeneid.

Aeneas the True went through every kind of trial imaginable. The arduous task of reaching Italy was nothing compared to the battles and tortuous journeys the Trojan hero had to undertake there. Without knowledge of the destiny of souls, he would never have succeeded, so he went to his father in the Underworld to receive it. There, the forlorn lover came upon the departed Dido.

*She was roaming in the woods with her wound still fresh upon her. Troy's hero recognised her dimly through the shadows, like one who early in the month sees or thinks that he sees the moon rising through the clouds and his tears fell. He spoke to her in the sweet accents of love:*

*'O Dido, unhappy Dido, was the news, then, true which was brought to me, that you had perished, had taken the sword, and trodden the path to its end? Ah, could I have been the cause of your death? By the stars, by the High Gods I swear, I swear by any truth there may be in the depths of earth, that it was not by my own will, your majesty, that I departed from your shores; but rather was I imperiously forced by the same direction which compels me now to pass through the shadows in this world of crumbling decay under deepest night; and I could not know that my leaving you would have caused you so terrible a grief. Stay your step and withdraw not from my sight. Whom do you seek to escape? My speaking to you now is the last indulgence which fate can give me.'*

*By such words, Aeneas tried to soften her, and invited tears. But in her the anger blazed and grimly she glared, holding her gaze averted and fixed on the ground; she was no more moved by what Aeneas had begun to say than if she had been hard flint or a standing block of Parian marble. At length she flung herself away, and, in hatred still, fled back into the shadows offered by the wood, where Sychaeus, her husband in former days, had sympathy for her distress and matched his love to hers. Aeneas was shocked by her unjust fate; and, as she went, long gazed after her with tearful eyes and pity for her in his heart.<sup>3</sup>*

Even the meeting with his dead father did not bring solace to Aeneas, for he informed the young hero of the terrible burdens that were still his to bare. The return of Aeneas, the son of the Goddess, through the Gate of Ivory was not a victory, it was just another step on his difficult journey.

*CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT*

*WHEN I AM LAID IN EARTH*

“Henry is having a fit.”

Nahum woke to a great deal of shaking by a distraught Elizabeth. He saw the look of horror on her already worn face, and rushed to the bedroom. Henry was thrashing about and shouting as though he were fighting off terrible demons. Neither Elizabeth nor Ellen could calm him, so Nahum went again to fetch Dr. Stoller. The good doctor ran, even though he'd had no sleep that night, and the verdict this time was that Henry's swellings had reduced. His words took everyone by surprise.

“Your son is plagued by nightmares,” the doctor told Elizabeth, “but his condition has greatly improved.”

Elizabeth wept and tried to get Henry to take in what Dr. Stoller had just told them. The doctor took from his case a small bag of herbs and told Ellen to add these to the physic.

“I don't care how much Henry complains,” he demanded, “just ensure that he drinks it. If the swellings reduce further he will be out of the worst danger and you can look forward to his company again. Let me know the progress.” With that he departed.

The company of carers were praying when John Blow arrived and his agitation was clearly visible. He sat at Henry's bedside, weeping, stroking his cheeks, pleading with him to recover and insisting that he was the most important man of his age. To everyone's surprise and delight, on hearing his mentor's voice, Henry half opened his

eyes and seeing John's hand upon his own, he touched it softly, almost as though he were offering him some assurance. Henry was soon adrift again, but they all wept at the significance of this small sign from him and their tears were fountains of relief.

"By now the entire Court will know of Henry's condition," John Blow told them. "The King is distraught and he has asked me to ensure that all possible arrangements are made to affect Henry's recovery. He offers his physicians to attend on him and I am authorized to contact them if needs be."

"Dr. Stoller is quite excellent," Nahum told him.

"Good, then we will leave the task of recovery to him. The King does not know about the circumstances at the Pieters' house, or the subsequent proceedings at the magistrate's court, and we must keep this to ourselves. The King's distress will be nothing compared to his displeasure should he learn of Henry's escapade in the City."

They all understood his message and vowed to keep it a secret.

"The other thing that concerns the King is the arrangements for the Welcome Ode," John told them, looking specifically at Henry's brother, Daniel. "Rehearsals are expected to begin on Monday. It is of the utmost importance that the King's return to London is a great State occasion; he has been planning this event for months and nothing can be allowed to cloud his day. I will now direct the rehearsals, but I need the manuscript to achieve this."

"It is in the Monk's Refectory," Daniel told him and he offered to go with John to retrieve it.

That day Henry gave no other signs that he was improving, but by the following morning some colour was discernible in his cheeks. As the day progressed he seemed to take the physic of herbs and the broth with enough enthusiasm to lead everyone to presume that he was trying his best to recover. Nahum went for a long walk and delivered a letter to Eliza, asking if they could meet again on Sunday. When he returned Henry was talking quietly to his mother

and she smiled through tears of relief as Nahum entered. Henry extended his hand towards his friend and Nahum held it lovingly, shocked by how little strength there was in the composer's touch.

"Where did you find me?" Henry asked and when Nahum told him that he was lying on his doorstep, the musical genius half smiled. To be talking again with Henry filled Nahum with great emotion and, when the patient returned to his sleep, he joined Elizabeth in her prayers of thanks. Nahum could not remember having heard prayers of such wondrous gratefulness as Elizabeth offered.

The morning brought a sea change.

"I have been dreaming in G minor," Henry announced. "G minor is the key of the final scene."

These words delighted Nahum more than the signs of his physical recovery did. It intimated that Henry was on the road to recovery.

"Henry," Nahum declared, "with music in your dreams I know that you are truly with us again," and Nahum kissed him.

Later, Dr. Stoller confirmed that the yellow lumps on Henry's neck and groin had receded and Elizabeth was so thrilled with the news, so filled with confidence, that she went back to Tothill Street to prepare for her son's return.

Nahum, now ready to busy himself with his own affairs, went with the money Horace had given him to his landlord's office and paid the rent on his house. Afterwards he went to the Half Moon tavern for dinner and met Thomas Killigrew, who informed him that he'd had a visit from the Duchess de Mazarin.

"Did you know that she was out and about scrounging costumes for your opera?" he asked. Nahum nodded. "Well, this is all fine and good, but after I had agreed to give her everything she asked for, she declared that I was a miserly old rogue and insisted that I provide scenery and women to dress the performers in addition. She told me that I would be doing this for the honour of England," Killigrew laughed. "I love her well enough," he declared, "and I did

what anyone would do, I agreed to everything.”

At the conclusion of their dinner, Killigrew asked Nahum to visit him soon to discuss his play and Nahum was, for the first time in days, aware that work was an essential part of his life. He returned home with the intent of progressing with his Ovid translation, only to hear Henry calling for him. As Nahum joined him at his bedside he could hear Henry humming. The sound was quiet and slightly broken, but Nahum could make out a tune.

“It’s the saddest melody I ever heard,” he declared.

“It’s Dido’s final lament,” Henry told him. “I need you to give me some words for it.”

As he took in the sounds that emanated from Henry, da dum de dee, da dum de dee, Nahum converted them to ‘remember me, remember me’. He was thinking of Eliza, but then he recalled that these were the words Button had offered as a toast when he left for Ireland. ‘Remember me and forget my fate.’

*When I am laid, am laid in earth,  
May my wrongs create  
No trouble, no trouble in thy breast;  
Remember me, remember me, but ah! forget my fate.*

Nahum wrote these words that night and solemnly reflected that two men, forlorn and rejected by love, had created this most heart rending of laments for a woman to sing. Nahum could never describe the beauty of this aria, but at the time of its creation, he knew that it went to the very heart of him and touched everything.

*CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE*

*A LETTER AND A TALE  
OF WICKEDNESS*

To spend the early hours of the morning making arrangements for Henry's return home when he wanted him to stay, put Nahum in an irascible mood. He had neither time nor space to converse with Henry and, apart from a brief exchange, where they confirmed their delight at having composed Dido's lament, Nahum's only words were a promise to visit him soon. As the Purcell family departed, Nahum was lost, so little idea did he have about where he might now place his attention.

There were two letters for Nahum. The first was from the Stationers' Company School, inviting them to visit the school on Tuesday. When Nahum informed Ellen of this she gave a shiver, rubbed her cheeks to put some colour in them, straightened her cap and smoothed her apron. Nahum hugged her to calm her nerves and promised that the school governors would not be walking into the kitchen that minute. Ellen huffed and called to Harry to give him the news. Surprisingly, he too was apprehensive, complaining that he would never pass the test if he couldn't spell. Nahum assured him that he would not be tested on this day and Harry, grateful, asked if Nahum had written a new ending for Jack's story. Ellen gave him a customary clip about the ear for his cheekiness, but Nahum promised to do it that very day.

The second letter, from Anna, filled Nahum with apprehension.

*Dear Nahum,*

*I wish that I could speak with you about the things I must write, but even the faintest possibility of doing so is impossible. Frances and I were shocked by Henry's visit - he must have been in great distress to attempt access to our house without permission. I felt so sorry for him that day.*

*After insisting that Frances give up her feelings for Henry, and Frances refusing, my mother informed her that she had accepted a suitor on her behalf. Frances was furious and vowed that on the issue of marriage she would follow her heart. My mother demanded that Frances be mindful of her duty, but they fought the day long and at its end, Frances took to her bed. She has remained there ever since. She has no condition that medical prognosis can determine, but she refuses to talk, even to me, and she refuses to eat. Her health is now a serious concern and my mother's belief that Frances is being wilful and controlling only adds to her anger.*

*For you to understand the decision my mother has taken I must tell you a little of what I have learned recently. My mother manages two businesses - 'The Spaniard' and a company that imports merchandise from Spain. My father employed a Spaniard, Alfonso Balbas, to travel to Spain to purchase the goods. He is a resident of London. After my father's death, this man asked for my mother's hand in marriage - I learned this from Lina, my mother's maid. When my mother refused him, he declared that he would only continue in her employment if she made him a partner in the business. My mother accepted his demands and agreed to share the profits with him, but Señor Balbas, displeased with his share of the business, threatened to set up in competition with my mother unless she consented to a marriage between Frances and his son, Diego. There is nothing wrong with Diego, he is a fine, handsome man, but he is completely the wrong kind of husband for Frances. My mother refuses to accept this.*

*Frances refuses my entreaties to set aside her melancholy and I am now so shaken by this business that I can no longer deal with it alone. If Frances will not give up her principles, her death will be the sad conclusion of this unhappy tale.*

*Please do not inform Henry of these events as there is nothing he can do and I would not have him suffer further on our account. There is no possibility now of Frances and I being involved with the opera. I wish I could write how deeply this affects me.*

*Please write and tell me everything. You must send letters to the house of my friend, Emily Perritt, 4 Old Swan Lane.*

*Tell Mr. Purcell to keep a place in his heart for Frances. I felt nothing but pride for his determination and I pray that they will one day enjoy the love they share. Nothing is impossible.*

*Yours truly,*

*Anna Pieters*

Nahum could not imagine worse news. He wrote to Anna, explaining Henry's condition, and then he wrote a new chapter about Jack.

*Once Jack had forgotten about the terrors of his flight down the beanstalk, he listened to the music of the harp and was delighted by the quantity of tunes it could play. One day the boy asked his mother if he could be taught how to play music and she told him that teachers of music could only be found in the city. Jack asked about the nature of cities and when he expressed his eagerness to visit one, his mother started to make the necessary preparations.*

*While she was away, the strange little man who had given Jack the beans appeared in his garden and before Jack could tell him about his adventures, the little man spoke.*

*“Well done, Jack, you have shown yourself to be a brave young man in your dealings with the giant and before you leave for the city I must tell you about your father.*

*“Before you were born, your father worked for a wealthy baron who was greedy beyond words. Always generous in his dealings with people, your father refused when the baron insisted that he carry out cruel deeds to increase his wealth, so the baron, in his fury, had your father killed. Your mother, who was carrying you inside her, had to flee, leaving behind her house and land.*

*“I could do nothing to prevent this, but I searched far and wide for someone who might help. Eventually, I found a wizard who agreed to punish the wicked baron by casting a spell upon him and his wife. The wretched couple were banished, together with their property and their lands, to an isolated place of enchantment.*

*“The baron and his castle were increased in size to giant proportions, while his wife, unchanged in size, was given the task of feeding her husband’s terrible appetite. Once the spell was complete, the wizard gave me the magic beans that would give you access to his magical realm. I was instructed to pass them on when you were ready to benefit from them. I have watched over you for many years and I knew when the time was right.”*

*His story complete, the strange little man vanished as quickly as he had arrived. When Jack’s mother returned, the boy started to tell her who the giant was, but his mother told him that she too had heard the news from the man with the beans. Jack kissed his mother and fell sobbing into her arms. Jack’s mother told her son how brave and generous his father had been and the difficult times they had experienced in the horrid baron’s employment. After she had finished her tale, she instructed Jack to pack his belongings and no sooner had he done this when two magnificent horses pulling a splendid carriage arrived in the garden. Jack and his mother locked the house for the last time and with the hen on his lap and the harp by his side, Jack began a new life as a musician.*

*CHAPTER FORTY*

*GREAT MINDS AGAINST THEMSELVES*

“I can hear the ending of the opera where the chorus respond to Dido’s grief,” said Henry.

Nahum, sitting at Henry’s bedside in Tothill Street, asked how musical themes and tunes could arrive in his head fully formed.

“I have no idea,” Henry claimed, “but at times they come to me in great abundance and I must notate them or burst with the weight of them. You must try to smuggle in a pen and some paper, Nahum, I must write it down. My mother has banned me from working, but I will become ill again if I cannot notate these sounds.”

Nahum promised to attempt this before leaving and asked if the music came to him every day.

“Yes, but there are times when it’s presence overwhelms me,” said Henry, “and times when it’s presence is gentle. That fateful day when I went to The Spaniard, a strange power was upon me. I was outside myself, fighting to gain control. How a mind can conspire against itself in this manner I do not know. Afterwards, as I waded through St. James’s Park, I could hear the sounds of the trees as they soaked up the rain.”

“Were you completely lost to yourself then?”

“Completely; I did not wake from this state until I was lying in your bed and then I was trembling, because I knew that death was invading me. I could feel my spirit separating from my body and I could not stop it. Indeed, I accepted it; I did not want to return to the

misery of my loss; death had become a welcome guest. I imagined that I was at last free of sorrow, but later I realised that music was resonating in me again, that my senses had returned, and death had passed me by. The music of great beauty that was singing me back to life was Dido's Lament. Now there is music in me again and I must write it down." Henry sang the sad refrain.

"God preserve your music forever," Nahum exclaimed. "It is truly the sound of angels."

The two friends talked of Frances then, but Nahum did not reveal the news he had received from Anna. Henry asked Nahum to write a letter of apology to Amy on his behalf and Nahum agreed. Then Henry asked if he would acquire some writing equipment from Daniel, so that he could notate the melody of the final chorus. Nahum did so, but before he departed he spoke a rhyming couplet that had come to him from Henry's words.

*Great minds against themselves conspire  
And shun the cure they most desire.*

It was a day of songs, stories and poetry, the like of which Nahum had not enjoyed for some time. He read his new ending of *Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Beans* to Harry – the boy was completely enchanted by it. He asked endless questions before insisting Nahum read it a second time.

"I'm Jack," he said, "and you," pointing to Nahum, "you are the funny little man with the beans."

"You're a comic," Nahum told the boy.

"Do you think my father was anything like Jack's father?"

Nahum, surprised by the boy's thought, told him that he was certain of it and Harry said that he also imagined him this way.

Touched by Harry's words and feeling inspired, Nahum did not want to write Henry's letter to Amy, so he thought about the poems

he would read at Horace and Mary's literary evening. It never occurred to him that he might not always fill his time with work.

Nahum had informed Thomas that he would read something that expressed a woman's disappointment in love – the lament of Dido from Ovid's *Heroides* – and something that expressed a man's optimism for love – some lines from Ovid's *The Art of Love*. His searches through the latter work proved fruitless – being an entreaty to the men of Rome to seek out affairs, it did not carry the correct meaning – but with Ovid still uppermost in his mind he came upon the *Amores*. In this work Ovid addressed his mysterious and beautiful mistress, Corinna. This suited Nahum perfectly.

*My capricious heart's a cockpit for conflicting emotions,  
Love versus hate – but love, I think, will win.  
I'll hate if I can. If not, I'll play the reluctant lover:  
No ox loves the yoke – he's just stuck with what he hates.  
A fugitive from your vices, I'm lured back by your beauty:  
Your morals turn me off, your body on.  
So I can live neither with nor without you, I don't seem  
To know my own mind. I wish you were  
Either less beautiful or more faithful: such a good figure  
Does not go with your bad ways.  
The facts demand censure, the face begs for love – and gets it,  
Eclipsing (to my cost) its owner's crimes.  
By the bed we shared, by all those gods who so often  
Let you take their names in vain,  
By your face, that image for me of high divinity,  
By those eyes which captivated mine, spare me!  
And mine you'll always remain, whatever your nature;  
Just choose - Would you rather I loved freely or by constraint?  
Let me spread sail, cruise with a following breeze –  
Make me want what I cannot resist!*

As he was translating these words, it was impossible for Nahum not to imagine that he was writing them to Eliza. Upon its completion he travelled to the Pied Bull in the hope of seeing her, but his lovely muse did not appear. He returned to his study and translated Dido's words to Aeneas from Ovid's *Heroides*.

*And so, at fate's call, the white swan lets himself  
Down in the water-soaked grasses by  
The Meander's shoreline to sing his last song;  
But I will not hope to move your heart  
With my prayer because the god opposes me.  
After the loss of all that's mine,  
Good name, chastity of both body and soul,  
A loss of words is not important.  
But I ask again: are you still determined  
To abandon me to misery  
And permit both your ships and your promises  
To sail from this shore on the same wind?  
Aeneas, are you still determined to leave  
Both your mooring and your solemn pledge  
To seek a kingdom in remote Italy,  
A place whose shores you have never seen...?*

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

### TO BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS

Harry interrupted Nahum to ask if he knew what wizards do.

“I am very busy just now,” Nahum told him, “but soon you will be able to ask your teachers all the questions under the sun.” Harry stood and thought on this. “You must save some questions for them,” Nahum advised, “It would be awful to use them all up on me; the teachers will have nothing to do.” Harry nodded wisely and left Nahum to his writing. He was drafting Henry’s letter to Amy.

*Dear Mrs. Pieters*

*I apologize a thousand times for my unacceptable visit to your house; my foolishness fills me with repentance and I doubt that my tears of regret will ever cease their flow. I wish that I could kneel before you to beg your forgiveness, but I shall never intrude uninvited into your presence again - may I perish if I neglect this promise. Please know that my behaviour was an uncharacteristic act brought about by extreme circumstances, but rest assured, I will never allow myself to lapse into such a condition again.*

*I pray that you might one day feel that your reckoning of me was a little unjust and realise that I do not deserve the contempt in which you hold me. I am not poorly endowed with grace, as your comments suggested, and if I imagined that you might forever keep to this opinion it would leave my banished soul with nothing to sustain it. That my love for Frances offends you, leaves me*

*encumbered with despair, but this will be nothing compared to my misery should I suspect that you apportion Frances with some of the blame. I promise that she is guilty of nothing. With all my heart I believe her to be the fairest of women and I would rather die than cause her any distress.*

*I would gladly pay all the riches in the world to have my feelings for Frances meet with your approval, but as you so clearly observe, I have no such riches. I possess love in great store and the hope that one day our difficulties will resolve. If I cannot hope, if I am lost to you and your daughters forever, that will be my greatest sorrow.*

*Yours most sincerely,  
Henry Purcell*

Henry's reaction, when Nahum presented it to him was that it was a plea for justice, not just a letter of apology, and he liked it for that. The two then wrote a letter to Josias, pretending that the meeting he requested was due to take place next Saturday, rather than the previous one, and, having explained that neither of them could attend on this day, they promised to be with him on the Saturday after that. They laughed at their audacious logic and then Henry sang the couplet that Nahum had given him previously.

*Great minds against themselves conspire  
And shun the cure they most desire.*

"I know where it fits," Henry declared, "it's the chorus refrain that precedes the lament. But I imagine that Dido must have some recitative after this. Write something for me. Think of Dido in the palace, sitting on the stairs. Belinda is by her side and she has Aeneas's sword in her hand. Like me she will know that death is about to invade her, but she now regards it as a welcome guest."

"I will write exactly this," Nahum declared.

*Thy hand Belinda, darkness shades me,  
On thy bosom let me rest,  
More I would, but death invades me.  
Death is now a welcome guest.*

Elizabeth came into the room at this point, carrying Henry's dinner. Find them at work, she was upset and she asked Nahum to dissuade Henry from his ambition to work continuously. Nahum agreed, but once they were alone they continued – Nahum quietly repeating his words to Henry and Henry eating and composing his tragedy at the same time. Only Henry could do this.

“When Elizabeth next returned it was to announce the arrival of the Duchess de Mazarin. When Henry joined them in the drawing room, she made an extravagant but brief fuss of him and then launched into her own news about the progress of the opera.

“Killigrew was a darling about lending costumes,” she declared, “but Betterton was entirely reticent - he claims to have precious little for himself. When I railed at him for being miserly he offered to lend us Peter Beardsley, his scene painter. We can have him for the time it takes to paint two scenes and no more. I believe it was Beardsley who painted the sets for *Brutus of Alba*.” Nahum nodded. “Now about the costumes,” the Duchess continued. “Dressing the leading ladies is easy, but what about the remainder of the cast. Are they wearing antique or present day costumes? The present day is by far the easiest for they are all to hand.”

Composer and librettist agreed on this and Henry suggested that she visit his Uncle Thomas at Somerset House.

“Excellent,” said she, “one can never have too many gowns.” Next she asked if she could measure the women who were singing the lead roles and Henry and Nahum's awkward silence soon told her that something was wrong. She insisted that she must know about all developments and Henry explained the sorry tale of his

love for Frances. When he stressed that this should remain a secret, the Duchess claimed that she was the mother of discretion.

“So, what do we do now?” she asked, “Josias is already frantic about finding the dancers; he’ll not welcome this added trial.”

“My cousin Elizabeth will sing Dido,” Henry announced, “and my sister Katherine will sing Belinda.”

Nahum pointed out that Josias would insist on using his pupils, but Henry insisted that rehearsals would be underway before he visited Josias. Nahum winced at the thought of another battle, but the Duchess claimed that the audience would never know the difference. She asked who would be singing Aeneas.

“John Gostling,” Henry informed her. “Just prepare to dress a very big man. You cannot measure him at present for he is in Canterbury and besides, I have not yet asked him.”

“I know the Reverend Gostling,” the Duchess declared, “and I will dress him as a Trojan general. Now how about your sister, can I measure Katherine now? Is she the same size as her cousin?”

Henry introduced Katherine and the Duchess exclaimed that her shape and size were standard and therefore perfect. Katherine, taken aback, asked why she had received these comments and Henry apologised for not mentioning it before.

“I am inviting you to be a lady-in-waiting in my opera,” he said, “and Elizabeth, I hope, will perform the queen.”

Katherine was delighted and when she discovered that she and her cousin would dress in beautiful gowns and visit a court dressmaker who worked for the Duchess, she was ecstatic.

Elizabeth, her house too full of excited animation, instructed Henry to return to his bed, which he did. Katherine ran to give her cousin the news and Nahum, who the Duchess wanted to keep with her for a while, went to her rooms at the Palace.

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

### *THE QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD*

The journey to St. James's Palace by carriage took no time at all and the journey to the Duchess' apartments, along endless corridors and flights of stairs, took an age. Nahum was considerably impressed with the grand ceilings, but the rooms did not have the charm of the Duchess' house in Paradise Row. Her private paintings were much better than the solemn portraits that looked out from these walls and the palace windows gave very little light.

When they were seated the Duchess ordered refreshments and asked Nahum to give her more information about Henry's predicament. He tried briefly to plead his innocence, but it wasn't long before she had enticed him to tell her everything. He talked of Amy's attack upon Henry, the composer's uninvited return, his resulting illness, Amy's insistence that Frances marry a Spaniard and Frances' collapse. The Duchess was eager to learn of the identity of the Spaniard and Nahum explained how Amy's partnership with Alfonso Balbas had developed and his insistence that Frances marry his son, Diego. She wrote out their names and then asked Nahum to tell her about Dido.

"I want her history, her character, her qualities; everything."

The responsibility of explaining the qualities of one powerful woman to another powerful woman, caused Nahum to falter.

"Dido is complex," he began. "In Virgil she is the queen of Carthage, but Dido is also the name the Carthaginians use for

Aphrodite, the Goddess of love and beauty. In Virgil she was a Phoenician princess from Tyre, married to Sychaeus, the richest of all Phoenician landowners. She loved her husband ardently, but her brother, Pygmalion, being a monster of unmatched wickedness and blind with lust for gold, murdered her husband for his wealth. Dido, in fear and horror, fled her homeland and sought refuge in Libya. Here she founded Carthage, making it the most powerful and beautiful city in the known world. She was a formidable woman. Virgil portrays her as a vengeful queen, but we have no theme of revenge in our opera.”

“Excellent, I love her,” the Duchess replied.

They talked briefly about Belinda and then Nahum told her of the sorceress and her two witches. The Duchess found this news delightful, but she was disappointed that Nahum could not give her any detail on them. “We modelled the witches on Amy,” he informed her, and the Duchess roared with laughter, finding their method of inspiration entirely comic. “But we have no model for the sorceress,” he admitted.

“Oh! This will never do,” she told him. “I can’t dress a character who is without qualities. She might be a cave dweller or a Duchess and still be a sorceress. You must know more, Nahum, think.”

“She is neither cave dweller nor Duchess,” Nahum replied and then he asked if she could suggest some themes to give the sorceress some definition.

“Come,” she declared, “we will go to the library. Mr. Somers is the man to ask when one is plagued by such matters.”

They returned down the stairs and along the many corridors until they came to the library and there, lost in the shelves, the Duchess found Mr. Somers.

“My dear Somers,” she addressed him, “we have a Carthaginian sorceress in our opera who we know nothing about and because we must devise a costume for her we are asking for your assistance.”

Mr. Somers, bemused, scratched his head and repeated the word ‘sorceress’ a number of times. He wandered up and down his library shelves picking out books and returning them as quickly.

“Does she have a significant presence in the opera?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” the Duchess replied, “she is very important. We should think of her as the queen of the night.”

“Well, there you have it,” Mr. Somers declared. “You should dress her as Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld.”

“Excellent,” the Duchess cried. “You are always so clever and helpful, Somers. Thank you.” She danced out of the library with Nahum, in disbelief, following after.

“Well, now we have two queens and no cave dwellers,” she exclaimed, adding, “this can only be a good thing.”

As they passed a footman she asked for the time and learning that it was nearly five, told Nahum that she must now busy herself with arrangements for the King’s arrival on Saturday.

“Are you happy with the sorceress as Persephone?” she asked and when Nahum declared that he was, she concurred saying, “one can never have too many queens.” With that she breezed off down the corridor, leaving Nahum to find his way back the street.

Outside, dusk was settling in and a half moon was glimmering in the sky. Nahum walked slowly, thinking only about the sorceress as Persephone, and he delighted in the afternoon’s developments. Dido would be Aphrodite, the queen of life, and the sorceress would be Persephone, the queen of death.

Aphrodite had placed her consort, Adonis in the care of Persephone and the Goddess of the Underworld fell in love with him. When she refused to give him back, the Goddess of Love descended to the realm of Death to beg for his return, but Persephone would have none of her entreaties. She refused to release Adonis and when they could not resolve their dispute, Zeus decreed that the hero should spend half the year with one queen and half of it with the other.

That night the Duchess appeared in Nahum's dream. "One can never have too many queens," she had said again and when he enquired why this was so, Venus and Juno appeared, dancing fancifully about a garden.

In the morning, remembering this dream, Nahum wondered why these two goddesses had presented themselves. He knew that Aeneas was the son of Venus, but so was Cupid. When Virgil and Marlowe wrote of Dido and Aeneas they both had Venus instruct Cupid to touch Dido with his arrow, causing her to fall in love with Aeneas. They also gave to Juno, the wife of Jove, the role of preparing the potion that fired the passions of the royal couple. They were the goddesses who facilitated love.

The dance that Venus and Juno performed in his dream was, according to Nahum, a light-hearted celebration in honour of love, an offering of thanks to the inspiration that love could bring, and he wanted to honour it in the opera.

It occurred to Nahum that the Prologue still needed a theme. Henry had referred to it as a masque and he had composed a series of sprightly dance tunes for it, but it was still lacking a subject. The dream had given Nahum his subject and it was an enchanting counterpoint to the tragedy that must follow. His excitement was euphoric and he slipped into dreaming, but before long he grasped his resolution and started writing, as any good poet should. He was confident that he could make the Prologue as gay as the merry queens of his dream.

*CHAPTER FORTY-THREE*

*FROM AURORA'S SPICY BED*

“You’ve scrubbed my ears off, now you’re cuttin’ my hair off.”

“Why the noise, Harry?” said Nahum, entering the kitchen.

“If the school are going to test him he had better appear neat and tidy,” Ellen declared, and she pulled the boy to her.

“They’re not going to test him,” Nahum informed her. “We are only going to make arrangements for him to attend the school.”

“Whoever heard of a school accepting a boy without testing him,” Ellen demanded and Nahum retreated to his study.

Once Nahum was dressed he returned to the kitchen where Ellen was rearranging its entire contents for no other reason than to placate her agitation. Under her apron she wore a new dress and her hair was neatly tied at the back. Nahum picked at some bread and joined Harry in The Strand. He and Harry chattered excitedly on their way to Bolt Court, but Ellen was silent, her face ashen.

As they entered the school gates, Ellen pulled Harry’s cap off and smoothed his hair. The doorman escorted them to the headmaster’s office. Mr. Percy Summers, a tall, thin man with an unusually bright smile, briefly described the school and then asked Harry what his ambition was. Harry told him he didn’t know what ambition meant, so the headmaster explained it as ‘thoughts about the future’.

“I want to have lots of gold,” Harry declared.

“Well that’s a start,” Mr. Summers laughed. “I will show you the classrooms. Do you think you will like it here?”

“I’ve never been with so many boys before,” said Harry. “Are they allowed to talk to each other?” Mr. Summers laughed again.

“Don’t worry, you’ll have plenty of time to enjoy their company. Now I think its time we determined what you know.” He turned to Ellen and Nahum. “If you would like to wait in my office, I will carry out a short test with Harry in the classroom.”

Ellen shook with fear as she returned to the office.

“Mr. Tate,” she addressed him, “you may be an excellent playwright, but you know nothing about schools. I told you they would test him. What will we do? He knows nothing about tests.”

Nahum tried to calm her, but her agitation did not subside. When Mr. Summers returned there was a broad smile on his face.

“Harry reads as well as any boy his age,” he told them, “but he knows nothing about arithmetic.”

Ellen dug her fingers into Nahum’s leg and he almost cried out.

“When I asked him to subtract twenty-four from fifty-seven,” Mr. Summers continued, “Harry said that he had never had fifty-seven of anything, so he couldn’t possibly know the answer.”

The tone of Mr. Summers’ voice indicated his surprise and Nahum was similarly taken aback, but Harry smiled proudly. Ellen was furious. She stepped towards Harry with punishing intent, but the headmaster halted her, declaring that he would accept Harry.

Ellen could hardly believe her ears and when Mr. Summers asked her to sign the agreement she could not bring herself to hold the pen. She asked Nahum to sign it and even he made an untidy job of writing his signature, so full of pride was he. It was all like a dream to Ellen and she had tears in her eyes the whole day.

The writing of the first scene of the Prologue was Nahum’s second intent that day and he tackled it with great enthusiasm. He imagined Phoebus riding in his chariot over the sea, calling the Nereids and Tritons to rise up and offer him their devotion and from that moment on the words to songs flowed from him.

*From Aurora's Spicy bed,  
Phoebus rears his Sacred Head.*

When Venus arrived on the scene her lustre appeared to eclipse the light that Phoebus gave to the world and he reacted to her beauty with bewilderment and desire.

Phoebus:     *Ten thousand thousand harms,  
From such prevailing charms,  
To gods and men must instantly ensue.*

Chorus:       *And if the deities above,  
Are victims of the power of love,  
What must wretched mortals do?*

Venus:         *Fear not Phoebus, fear not me,  
A harmless Deity.  
These are all my guards ye view.  
What can these blind archers do?*

Phoebus:      *Blind they are, but strike the heart.*

Venus:         *What Phoebus says is always true.  
They wound indeed, but 'tis a pleasant smart.*

It amused Nahum to make Phoebus a hot-headed fellow who could not resist courting the sovereign queen of beauty; his impossible attraction to Eliza had caused him to know its like intimately.

At the day's end Nahum decided to visit his friend, Button. He walked cheerfully through Lincoln's Inn Fields, down Cursitors Alley and into Magpie Yard where his friend lived. Button opened the door to him in his nightshirt.

"Dress yourself and come for some wine," Nahum bid him.

"You'll interrupt a man at his studies and invite him to go drinking?" Button asked.

"But surely the time for work is over," Nahum declared.

“Surely not,” his friend proclaimed, “hardly a minute has passed since I finished my morning prayers.”

Nahum slapped Button for teasing him and his friend dressed himself quicker than it would have taken Nahum to find his stockings. The two of them went to the Red Hart, just off Fetter Lane, and unusually for Nahum, he stole much of the conversation.

“If you go on like this,” Button told him, “I shall have said nothing though I have been with you all night. I pray that you will soon lead a simple life and give me chance to speak.”

“Do you pray, Button?” Nahum asked.

“Only that I might become a better fool,” he replied.

“There are none better than you,” said Nahum and Button sang.

*Every poet is a fool:  
By demonstration Ned can show it.  
Happy, could Ned's inverted rule  
Prove every fool a poet.*

“Then you are witty and wise, my dear,” Nahum declared.

“Not I, these words are from Matthew Prior. As for being wise, there are none who would agree with you. A good deal of wit I may have, but in judgment I'm sorely lacking. I think we must follow Locke's understanding in this.”

“And what does Locke say?” Nahum asked.

“Mr. Locke? Why he would have wisdom a thing that is quite contrary to the quickness and variety of wit. He declares that wisdom does not strike so lively on the fancy and make such pleasant pictures and agreeable visions, but he regards it as a better facility for separating one thing from another. If wisdom is what you're after, Nahum, then you must look further afield than the company of Button.”

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

SO, AT FATE'S CALL

Without intending to satisfy Button's wishes, Nahum's days were filled with little of anything that was worth talking about, for the entirety of them was taken up with translating *The Art of Love*.

*Nothing works on a mood like tactful tolerance:  
Harshness revokes hatred, makes nasty rows.  
We detest the hawk and the wolf, those natural hunters,  
Always preying on timid flocks;  
But the gentle swallow goes safe from man's snares,  
We fashion little turreted houses for doves.*

Nahum didn't visit Eliza, but he reflected upon his muse with much fondness when he received a letter from her. Eliza too had been working day and night. She wrote that Sir George Etheridge could not be found and the players who were trying to rewrite the play had got into a mess because, being only six in number, they had to change roles continuously to perform the twelve characters. She asked Nahum to visit the theatre to help them and he wrote back agreeing to meet her, but at the Pied Bull instead, giving next Sunday as the date.

He went to Tothill Street on one occasion, but Henry, much to his mother's annoyance, was at the Palace rehearsing the King's Welcome Ode with John Blow. Katherine, Henry's sister, introduced

Nahum to her cousin, Elizabeth. Both were excited at the prospect of going to the Palace to meet the Duchess and her dressmaker. Nahum couldn't imagine them as Dido and Belinda.

His only social occasion during this period was Horace and Mary's literary evening. He met Belinda Perryman there, looking the very picture of health and happiness, and discovered that she was expecting her third child. Button arrived late, wearing a startlingly bright coat, and he interrupted Mary's reading of Lecretius.

*But all is vanity, since from the very fountain of enchantment  
Rises a drop of bitterness to torment even the flowers.*

Horace read Catullus.

*None could ever say that she, Lesbia, was not loved by me.  
Never in all the world round was there faith so true as mine.*

Thomas Flatman read Horace.

*Though he be fairer than a star;  
Though lighter than the bark of any tree,  
Rough Adria was angrier, far;  
Yet I wish to love and live and die with thee.*

Thomas Babbington read Virgil.

*Within our orchard's walls I saw thee - for I was there to point  
The way - a little maid gathering dewy apples with my mother!*

Nahum started with Ovid's *Amores*.

*Just choose - would you rather I loved freely or by constraint?  
Let me spread sail, cruise with a following breeze -  
Make me want what I can't resist!*

and finished with his *Heroides*.

*And so, at fate's call, the white swan lets himself  
Down in the water-soaked grasses by  
The meander's shoreline to sing his last song;*

John Potter ended the readings with a poem by Petronius Arbitr.

*But thus, thus, keeping endless Holiday  
Let us together closely lie, and kiss...*

There was great chatter, fine wines and delicious pastries, but tempers frayed a little when Button was heard teasing Robert Frobisher. Robert, a painter of wildlife, grew irritated by Button's banter and announced that he knew nothing of birds. Button declared that he only liked two types of bird; chicken and roast chicken. Nahum nearly died laughing, but others were not amused.

As they were leaving, Horace apologized for not inviting Nahum to the King's Welcome performance.

"I'm happy to avoid courtly gatherings," Nahum confirmed, "but it's a sad thing to miss the Welcome Ode."

"Indeed," Horace declared. "I doubt that future kings will enjoy the luxury of a composer like Henry to welcome them."

"Oh, Henry's music will live forever," Button declared, "just as Roman poetry does. We should bless our good fortune that Aeneas did not remain in Carthage, for we would have had none of this poetry had he not founded Rome."

"With such a talent for colliding fact with fiction, you should write an opera," Horace told him.

The following day, because Nahum was to meet Eliza, she shadowed his thoughts like an accompanying angel. Arriving at the Pied Bull, Eliza gave him a friendly kiss, but it lacked any expression of delight. She talked enthusiastically about her play, but Nahum soon heard about the problems they were experiencing.

"You could not know that a play disintegrates when one attempts to unpick it," he told her.

"But couldn't you make it work for fewer actors?" Eliza asked.

"I could not," Nahum replied, "I'm not a magician. It's better that you perform extracts." Eliza continued to press him for assistance so he had to insist that the task would consume him. "I cannot have *The Country Wife* in my head alongside *Dido and Aeneas*."

"Why is this opera such a demanding thing?" she asked.

"Because it is difficult to establish a narrative when there is only

music and singing to inform it. There's so little room for words and so much for Dido to express."

"Why are you writing about Dido again?" she asked. "She died for love and being dead there's nothing more to be said."

"Dido is not dead," Nahum insisted, "she's a goddess and she lives to teach each new generation that love is a destructive force when thwarted."

"Aeneas should have given her a child," Eliza announced. "He would not have left her if she'd been bearing his offspring."

The words reminded him of his despairing hours on the Liffey Bridge, when he'd imagined her with child. They shocked him.

"Henry has given Dido a voice to express her distress," he said, "and her beautiful lament is the saddest song you will ever hear."

"But I've no desire for laments and sadness, Nahum."

"Henry's music can soothe grief and with it Dido will live forever; she will live by bringing solace to broken hearts."

"And will Aeneas live forever?"

"Not as a result of Henry's music. Aeneas the True, son of Venus, one of antiquities greatest heroes, survives the battle when Troy is lost and takes responsibility for its sacred lore and religious rites. He endures every trial imaginable to found Rome, but the glories of his quest are not the subject of our opera."

"Could Dido not have gone with him to Rome?"

"No, Dido wanted him to remain in Carthage. Aeneas has to weigh the balance between love and responsibility and such decisions leave little room for romance. Aeneas is innocent. He is a fearless fighter in the field, but when the flower of love blooms, its fragrance and abundant beauty overwhelm him. He's a soldier who is lost in the presence of beauty and this makes him an easy target for destructive forces."

*CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE*

*PHOEBUS AND VENUS*

The evening with Eliza ended unexpectedly, or should it be said, given Nahum's condition, that the argument between them was to be expected. Nahum, as usual, was reacting to the feelings Eliza's beauty aroused in him and she, attempting to keep a reign on emotion, shifted the conversation to his work. She asked why he always stayed with the ancient tales, hinting that he might be incapable of writing about present times, and Nahum responded hotly to her unjust criticism. Suddenly his innocent and all pervasive love changed to a harsh, almost cynical, struggle for survival. His only ambition was to have power over her, even though he had no confidence in its possibility.

"Dido's real name is Elissa," he said, the cruelty in his voice already apparent. "It's not unlike your own. Perhaps I'm secretly writing about you. I could of course set the opera in our present times, in London, to eulogize your beauty, talk of your wanton imagination and express the wondrous feelings of love it inspired."

Eliza became silent, satisfying herself with a glare that expressed her disgust. Nahum, sensed that he had the upper hand.

"I could describe every detail of your body," he continued.

"You will do nothing of the sort," Eliza cried out.

"I will," Nahum declared, "and I will reveal how your bounteous love was beyond my wildest dreams."

"Stop it, Nahum," she demanded. "You must not speak so."

But Nahum did not want to stop. “Even your sweet eyebrows will speak eloquently of your enticing charms,” said he.

With this Eliza stood up and wrapped her shawl around her. Nahum rose from his chair and grabbed her arm.

“Eliza, I will never stop loving you.”

“Nahum, you must desist. I cannot have such words now.”

“But the words are part of me. You cannot ban my words. How should I live if you do?”

“You promised not to talk like this,” she exclaimed and seeing her eyes fill with tears, Nahum realised that he had again become a monster. He apologized, but Eliza berated him for his endless apologies. Then, realising that she was now in possession of the upper hand, she stormed from the tavern. Nahum was just re-acquainting himself with the horrible silence and grating remorse that accompanied Eliza’s departures, when she stomped back in, thumped both hands on the table and placed her face close to his.

“You are going to stop this nonsense,” she demanded. “You will be my friend and not upset me. You will never behave like this again. And you will help us make our play a success.”

Nahum nodded after she had delivered each of her demands and he also agreed to meet her on the following Sunday, to help her sort out the complexities of her play. After that Eliza departed.

On the day King Charles was received back in London and the Welcome Ode performed for him, Nahum thought only of Eliza. He could of course do this endlessly, and work at his translation at the same time, so this is what he did. He knew that he only upset Eliza when he made her aware of his insistent desire for her – other than that he did her bidding and in truth he would die for her love, whatever good that would do him.

The following day was much the same, only Ellen interrupted him with a letter from Anna. He opened it nervously.

*Dear Nahum,*

*I write with poor news and I must be brief. Frances has become so unwell that the possibility of her demise has become very real. My mother and I speak to her constantly, but Frances does not reply. We have no reaction from her that leads us to assume she is aware of our presence. She lives on small amounts of liquid that we force upon her, but the doctor, along with everyone else we have spoken to, has no idea what is to be done. I know that my mother's insistence that she marry Diego Balbas is at the bottom of this, but my mother insists that this could not be so. I spend my days telling Frances that she will one day marry Henry, other than that I can only pray. Please pray that my prayers are answered.*

*Yours disconsolately,            Anna Pieters.*

Nahum, in a state of shock, wrote to Anna with Dr. Stoller's address and then made his way to the Abbey. He prayed that Henry would not discover his distraught state, but Henry was completely taken up with the King's pleasure at his Welcome Ode.

"The King was delighted," he declared, "but when he insisted that I regard the Court as my family, stay close by and not wander to the city," I knew he had wind of my escapade." Nahum gasped. "Oh you don't need to fear, nothing at Court remains the same for long. The King has too much on his plate to concern himself with my forays into the uncharted waters of love."

The two of them talked of the opera then and Henry showed Nahum a letter from Josias, reminding them that rehearsals would start at Lindsey House on the following Monday.

"Laurence Webster is coming tomorrow to learn the music for the Prologue," Henry exclaimed, "and Saturday is the day we are expected at the school. There is much to compose today."

Nahum gave Henry a copy of his words for the prologue and Henry was delighted.

“We can rehearse this with the singers on Thursday. Elizabeth will sing Venus, Katherine will sing Spring and the Reverend John Gostling will sing Phoebus.”

“Tell me about John Gostling” Nahum asked.

“He’s a minor Canon at Canterbury Cathedral and a major bass vocalist - his voice is the best in the land. The Gostlings and the Purcells have been family friends for years. Last year, at my Uncle’s request, he received the Royal summons to sing for the Chapel Royal. The King was greatly impressed with John and invited him to sing the Welcome Ode. During rehearsals last week I asked if he would sing the part of Aeneas and he agreed. The King has engaged him to sing for the Private Music during September, so this will give us more time to rehearse. He has to be in Canterbury during the first half of October, but he will sing for the King again when the Court returns from Newmarket.”

With that Henry’s brother, Daniel arrived to help with the notation and they commenced the opening scene of the Prologue. Henry improvised melodies for Phoebus, the Nereids and Venus to sing, allocating the first dance to the Tritons and the final dance to the Nereids. The music came from him like water gushing from a mountain and Daniel notated it as quickly as Henry delivered it.

*To Phoebus and Venus our homage we’ll pay,  
Her charms bless the night, as his beams bless the day.*

That day they also completed Scene Two; Henry transforming his dance melodies to suit Nahum’s narrative. There was a dance for Spring and her nymphs to perform when welcoming Venus to the shore, a delightfully light-hearted tune to mark the entrance of the shepherdesses, a further dance for the Nymphs, a duet for the shepherds and shepherdesses and a final dance for the country maids to celebrate love.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

*SEE THE SPRING IN ALL HER GLORY*

Sitting with a bottle of wine in Marshes after their extraordinary afternoon composing the Prologue, Nahum, downcast, related the events of the previous evening with Eliza in the Pied Bull.

“I’m finished with love,” he vowed, “it brings only misery.”

“You must find another,” said Henry, “someone who will restore your confidence in love. There must be others who could do this.”

Nahum shook his head. “It will never happen,” he insisted.

“Yes it will. Or perhaps a mistress would be better. If that would suit you I will help you find one. With the Court now in London, there’s no better opportunity to meet women.”

But Nahum found himself unwilling. He thanked Henry for his offer in a desultory manner and informed him that his heart was too sensitively arranged for such activity.

“My notions of romance have been overwhelmed by the love that pertains to my literary ambition,” said he. “In words, I have catalogued every type of connection and noted every stage of development, from the brightest beginnings to the darkest conclusions, but I have made a very poor show of love in reality. I never learned how to play games with my affections and I suspect that at life’s beginning, when deceitful knavery was handed out so that we might juggle with sharp practices, I was absent. Being without cunning, I cannot possibly indulge in secret affairs.”

“You present your manhood in a very poor light,” said Henry.

“Be that as it may, I cannot change the truth of it,” Nahum insisted. “If my romantic spirit has taken shelter underground, then I must accept that it is in need of hibernation and it will remain undisturbed in its deep vaulted cell. It may not be forever; winter months do change to spring.”

Henry grabbed Nahum by the scruff of his neck and the pair of them fought and rolled about the tavern floor.

Nahum could only marvel at Henry’s ability to keep tragedy at a distance. His opportunity to make real his love was equally challenged, but Henry seemed to be in possession of a contented core, something that enabled him to veil those cares that threatened his heart. The next day, as Nahum was reflecting upon this, he received another letter from Anna and the value of Henry’s veil was proven beyond a shadow of a doubt.

*Dear Nahum,*

*There is a delightful adage that states it is futile to worry about events before they have occurred. Yesterday I realised its worth. Before my letter to you was in your hands our prayers were answered. Señor Balbas has returned to Spain. We had no forewarning of this. He wrote to my mother as he was preparing to leave. He gave no reason for his decision, but he was clear that he would not return. I sat with Frances repeating the news to her. First she squeezed my hand and then she opened her eyes. When I asked if she understood she gave me a smile. Oh, Nahum, I cannot tell you how lightly my heart sang at this moment.*

*My mother now agrees that I was right about Frances’s condition and she smiles now for the first time in months. She is going to wind up the trading business. We will live on less, but we shall be happy. I wish that you and Henry could be here to celebrate.*

*Yours with delight,*

*Anna*

Nahum wrote a letter congratulating Anna on the miraculous departure of Señor Balbas and received a letter from Killigrew.

*“The Lord Chamberlain has accepted The Sicilian Usurper,”* the director informed him, *“and we can now put your play into production. The King’s Company will need to start rehearsals very soon if it is to be ready for a December opening. Visit me at the theatre this coming Friday to discuss the costumes and the play’s period in history.”*

Nahum, thinking of Eliza, replied with the suggestion that the play be set in present times and then he wrote a song for the arrival of Spring.

*See the Spring in all her glory, Welcomes Venus to the shore.  
Smiling hours now before you, Hours that may return no more.*

He wrote a duet for the shepherd and shepherdess.

Shepherd: *The Sun does guild our bowers.*  
Shepherdess: *The Spring does yield us flowers,  
She sends the vine,*  
Shepherd: *He makes the wine,  
To charm our happy hours.*  
Shepherdess: *She gives our flocks their feeding,*  
Shepherd: *He makes ’em fit for breeding.*  
Shepherdess: *She decks the Plain,*  
Shepherd: *He fills the grain,  
And makes it worth the weeding.*

He finished with a couplet for the entrance of the shepherdesses,

*Jolly Shepherds come away,  
To celebrate this genial day.*

An evening with Button, to celebrate the end of this merry day in a tavern, is what Nahum wished for, but his friend was not at home. He went to look for him at the Red Hart, but he was not there either, so he treated himself to a jug of fine wine and a plate of pigeon stew, cooked in plums. While sitting in the garden, taking in the beautiful September evening, two young maids appeared and sat on a wall nearby. The jolly animation of their friendship fascinated Nahum and he strained to hear their conversation over the noise of the other drinkers.

“What am I to do?” asked one, with a giggle in her voice rather than a question.

“Give his face a slap,” the other replied.

“But he says my lips are like cherries and that he will die if I don’t kiss him. What should I do, spit in his eye?”

“Annie,” the other one laughed, “you knowed what’s right and wrong since you bin ten. Just say no.”

“I ain’t prissy and quaint, Molly. I jist cain’t say no.”

Annie jumped off the wall then, laughing, but when she noticed Nahum gazing at her she sat back next to Molly and whispered something Nahum couldn’t hear. For a while they indulged in squeals and excited laughter; young Annie taking a series of quick daring glances at Nahum, whispering again to Molly and both repeating their fits of the giggles. Eventually they ran down the street, laughing, and Nahum, delighted by the casual encounter, told himself that if Annie were ten years younger he too would be inspired to ask her for a kiss.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

### *LOVE - A SPECIES OF WARFARE*

Nahum walked into the Abbey cloisters to see Daniel, Elizabeth and Katherine waiting outside the Old Monk's Refectory.

"Henry is at the Palace," Daniel informed him, "he's rehearsing a concert for the King, but he's late for all that."

Nahum, joining the young Purcells, expressed the glowing anticipation he felt at the prospect of rehearsing with a full compliment of singers. Elizabeth and Katherine, full of excited animation themselves, talked of the costumes, jewellery and wigs they tried on at Somerset House and of their visit to the Theatre Royal with the Duchess to find costumes for Venus and Spring.

"Ah, there you are my dears," Henry shouted from across the cloister. "My first rehearsal today was a shambles, it has put me in a very poor temper, or worse than that, so I'm relying on you to lighten my spirits."

He quickly introduced John Gostling to the assembled group and, throwing the door to his studio wide, he commenced moving the furniture to the sides of the room. John started to express his pleasure at being asked to sing in the opera, but Henry, in no mood for chatter, clapped his hands to gain their attention.

"I've been plagued by idle clowns all morning," he exclaimed, "so I'm now in need of added vigour. If we are to celebrate the romance of gods we must sing with our hearts; we must invite our availability, expand our generosity and breathe with love."

While Nahum studied the tall, dark stranger, John Gostling, Henry instructed his singers to carry out all manner of movements. He touched Elizabeth's lower back and told her that the voice started from this place. Nahum was bemused. He had never known Henry repeat either an instruction or an exercise, so he could only imagine that Henry devised them for each rehearsal. He had no idea where he found the time for this or where he found the instructions .

“Remember where your breath begins,” Henry instructed. “Feel the energy of alignment.’ Such phrases were a mystery to Nahum.

After singing scales that the singers echoed, Henry gave each of them a note and with delightful ease their sounds became the chords of the Prologue. The composer bid his brother to sit at the harpsichord and Nahum took from his bag the libretto and handed it to the singers. Henry instructed him to take back his sheets, reminding the singers that they were to sing not read words. Henry then sang phrases which the singers in turn repeated back to him.

The delights of their singing enchanted Nahum, John's Phoebus, Elizabeth's Venus and Katherine's Spring were all perfection to him, so when Henry asked if he required any changes he declined, but only then did he realise that he should have been listening with a critical ear. Henry asked Daniel to repeat the themes on the harpsichord while he, at mystifying speed, improvised his own changes on the violin. As soon as he had finished, he repeated these and Daniel notated them.

At the rehearsal's end Henry and John returned to the Palace to rehearse the King's concert again, Daniel remained in the studio completing the notation and Elizabeth and Katherine went to Westminster Hall to look for bargains. Nahum returned home. He had every reason to feel content, but he felt despondent and this mood was still with him the next morning. It was young Harry who once again distracted him from his melancholy. Having borrowed Nahum's article on gardens, he had a series of questions to ask.

“How can flowers and trees mean something?” he asked and Nahum looked at him surprised. “You wrote that flowers have meaning,” said the boy, holding up his magazine article, “but what does meaning have to do with flowers?”

“It’s to do with arrangement,” Nahum explained. “There’s beauty in the way flowers are arranged and if a thing can influence our decisions it generally means something.” Harry was trying his best to concentrate on Nahum’s speech. “Attending to the form of things helps to breathe life into them,” Nahum continued, but Harry shook his head and Nahum tried again. “If people visit a garden and understand the structure of its decisions, they have a sense of the gardener’s invitation so it means something to them.” Harry, none the wiser for the fine words, told Nahum that he would have to take him to a garden and show him. Nahum agreed that he would do this on Sunday.

Whenever he added an appointment to his diary, anxiety about completing *The Art of Love* rose up in Nahum. He had just been counting the pages of his translation and of the three books in this work, Nahum had only reached page six of the twenty-two pages in Book Two. He settled down to proceed with the work, but Ovid’s subject on page seven was not pleasing to him.

*Love is a species of warfare. Slack troopers, go elsewhere!  
It takes more than cowards to guard these standards.  
Night-duty in winter, long route-marches, every hardship,  
All forms of suffering: these await the recruit who  
Expects a soft option. You’ll often be out in Cloudbursts,  
And bivouacked on the bare ground.*

That love should be a hardship, that warfare should be its common ground, these things fuelled Nahum’s despondency, but when Ellen handed him a letter from Thomas Flatman, announcing his marriage

to Catherine Fellows, a wave of finer feelings enveloped him. He wrote back, accepting the invitation to the wedding supper at the Stationers' Company Hall, and, intent on finding further distraction, he made his way to Covent Garden to visit Horace. He was due to discuss the dates and scenery of *The Sicilian Usurper* with Killigrew that afternoon and only Horace would know something of the qualities of Sicily.

When Nahum entered the library that morning, Horace and Thomas were sitting together, a dark mood upon them.

"Bad news," Horace greeted him disconsolately, "we have just returned from Belinda Perryman's funeral."

The words exploded inside Nahum and he stood immobile.

"She died on Wednesday night," Horace continued. Nahum felt the warmth and the blood drain from him. "There were complications with the birth. Both she and the child were lost."

"We have lost Belinda," Nahum said, as though uttering these words would help him make the adjustment he needed to make, but he still couldn't comprehend it. "She was perfect for this world," he said and tears came to all three men then. Nahum's body gave an involuntary jerk and a sob leapt from him.

"She was here last week, full of life," he said. "Belinda was beautiful. Everything about her had beauty connected with it. Where is she buried?"

"In St. Paul's Churchyard, here in Covent Garden," Horace informed him. "She should never lie in the ground. She should be always in this library."

They talked then of making a mausoleum or some suitable monument to honour Belinda's memory. Nahum forgot to congratulate Thomas and he never mentioned Sicily, the reason for his visit.

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

### *TO LOSE YOUR HEART IS OUR REGRET*

For some reason Killigrew knew all about Sicily. “You can’t have a king if it is set in our current times,” he informed Nahum, “Sicily is ruled by a viceroy. Have a viceroy, Nahum, have a Spanish nobleman with a palace in Palermo.”

“I will not exchange my king for a viceroy,” Nahum insisted, and Killigrew tried to tempt him with a prince, but Nahum would not accept that either, so they agreed to invent a king for Sicily and moved on to discuss the costumes.

“I am nervous about setting the play in our own times,” Killigrew told him, “because there is nothing to identify the place as Sicily. The Lord Chamberlain will not hesitate to stop the play if he connects these events with England. I must plead with you to set it in ancient times. I have classical sets and costumes here, ready to use, and I am under strict instruction from the accountants to cease my extravagant spending or there will be no more plays at the Theatre Royal.”

Nahum, instinctively feeling that the words needed a classical setting, agreed to this request. “Providing the jailors continue to fly around the king’s cell and the table of food still floats before the king, I’m happy,” he told Killigrew. His director agreed, offering Nahum a brandy to toast their future success.

Outside the theatre, Nahum’s thoughts returned to Belinda. His impulse to visit her grave in Covent Garden was immense, and

as he approached the churchyard there was a break in the clouds, precisely where the sun was positioned in the sky. Nahum saw it first as a sad red ball floating in the grey, and then he thought of it as an eye that had wept too much.

He entered the churchyard and stood before a new mound of earth. He knew this to be Belinda's tomb, though nothing else indicated it. This simple mound of earth gave eloquent expression to the presence of death and in the knowledge of this Nahum felt that the sorrowful tumulus would itself serve perfectly well as her monument. He wanted only that it be covered each day with fresh earth so that Belinda's departure would never be more than one day old. Once he was again in his study he wrote a poem for Belinda.

*Each day a man will dig the ground,  
To lay fresh soil upon your mound.  
Your death now close, we won't forget,  
To lose your heart is our regret.*

Belinda's death weighed heavily on Nahum and his sadness would have stayed longer had some surprising news not disrupted it. It was the Duchess, purposeful as ever with her direct interventions, who re-invigorated him, encouraging him to realise that he must work at his ambition more intently, forcing him to give worldly demands more foreground in his thinking. How she could do this, he would never know, but in his heart he thanked her for her remarkable commitment and determination.

The morning had started warm and heavy, its milky grey light connecting with his loss. It seemed to Nahum that everything was moving more slowly than usual, a feeling that only lasted until he entered the Old Monks Refectory. Here Henry, singing and moving his arms in an excited fashion, caused more than enough commotion to shake Nahum from his reverie.

After greeting Nahum, Henry took from his pocket a letter from Frances, giving news of her recent illness. He questioned Nahum's knowledge of recent events while Nahum read the letter. In it Frances only mentioned that she had been unwell and Nahum admitted he knew as much. Henry, suspecting that his friend wasn't being entirely truthful, insisted that he be given all news concerning Frances, good or bad. Nahum readily agreed, but he stuck to his charade of innocence and felt the weight of his lying.

As they headed down river, Nahum again felt the loss of Belinda. He imagined there were fewer boats than usual on the river and the large empty houses of Chelsea were standing silent out of respect for her, not on account of their owner's absence.

The school courtyard, noisy with building activity, did nothing to shift Nahum's melancholy and the hall, covered in scaffolding, failed to impress him. While Josias commended its qualities, Nahum saw only that its walls had no plaster, that the building was without doors and that the stage was nothing more than a bare platform. For Josias it was the most impressive performance space in London. Its frontage, extending the full length of the hall, and its depth, increased with a new rear extension, certainly made it the biggest in any school, but it wouldn't bring Belinda back.

After this introduction, the party made their way to the Duchess' house in Paradise Row, where the progress meeting, was to be held. Henry, Josias and Cecelia went to view the hall of Lindsey House, where rehearsals would soon take place, leaving Nahum and the Duchess talking. Nahum would have joined the others, but the Duchess took him by the arm and asked if he had received any news about the health of Frances Pieters.

"Frances is on the road to recovery," he informed her, "and Henry is like a new man. She has written to him confirming her love and more extraordinary still, Anna tells me that Señor Balbas has unexpectedly departed for Spain."

“Has he really,” the Duchess declared. “Did he give any excuses for his hurried action?”

“Not the least,” Nahum replied. “It’s unfathomable that he should give no reason to explain his departure.” The Duchess smiled. “Anna insists that they are not returning. He wrote to Amy, saying as much. What a mystery is this? Why should the man pack up and leave in such a hurry?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t be in the least surprised if Customs and Excise didn’t have something to do with it,” the Duchess declared.

“Do you suspect that he was smuggling goods?” Nahum asked.

“It’s possible. The import and export businesses are infamously bad at paying their taxes. I expect that sooner or later we will learn that Señor Balbas was in trouble such as this.”

Nahum was considering this remark in relation to the smile that had appeared on her face and suddenly he had a strange premonition that she was somehow involved in the Spaniard’s departure.

“Is this issue of taxes a supposition of yours? Nahum asked.

“What else would it be?” she replied, but her smile had broadened considerably and there was a look of triumph about her.

“Your Grace, did you arrange to...?” he began, but the Duchess stopped him.

“Not so loud, my dear,” she whispered. “We must not say too much. Suffice it to say that I have an acquaintance who owed me a favour and he fulfilled his task admirably.”

Nahum was beside himself with glee, he wanted to know more, but the Duchess quietened him again.

“The least said about diplomacy at Court the better,” she concluded and Nahum gave her a joyous hug, his sadness relieved, his excitement and sense of purpose re-enlivened.

## *CHAPTER FORTY-NINE*

### *YOU CUPIDS COME*

The company gathered in the Duchess' dining room with John Campion, the Duchess's secretary, and Roger Summerson, the school secretary. The Duchess thanked the two men for sending out the invitations and informed everyone that the King would not be attending the performance because he was too busy with the French and Dutch Ambassadors who were visiting him that week. Cecelia showed no sign of surprise and Nahum assumed she was already party to the information. Only Henry expressed disappointment.

Cecelia then spread out a large sheet of paper, which she called the calendar, and explained how the pupils would divide their days between lessons and rehearsals, how the dormitories would be inhabited and what times they would take their meals. She presented a list of performer's names against which she had indicated their roles - dancers, singers and musicians - and next to this was described the costumes they would wear. This was also accompanied by notes confirming who had lent the item or who was responsible for making it.

Next on the agenda was detailed information about the school building programme, the set building programme, a list of who was responsible for the stage, its scenery and its lighting. It was noted that on the following Saturday Peter Beardsley would visit to discuss the painted sets and James Billingsley to discuss the design and manufacture of the stage machinery. Cecelia told Henry and

Nahum that they were responsible for briefing the artists on their requirements for stage scenery and special effects and then, feeling that she had played her part, she invited the composer and librettist to give an account of their current position.

Nahum threw Henry a look of concern.

“We have completed everything, including the Prologue,” Henry replied, confidently, “and rehearsals are progressing.”

“I understand that the Pieters’ sisters are no longer performing,” Josias interrupted, “So who are you rehearsing?”

Henry tried to continue in his nonchalant manner, but the instant he mentioned his cousin and his sister Josias exploded.

“You cannot invite your relatives to perform, Henry. We have promoted this opera as a school production. The female roles must be sung by our pupils. How could you imagine otherwise?”

“You have absolutely no idea how difficult it is to...” he began.

“I have a perfectly good idea...” Josias interjected.

“No you do not,” Henry countered. “You cannot imagine how difficult it is to lose your lead singers. You have no idea how demanding it is to sing these parts. If I choose my sister and my cousin it is because they have the ability and the temperament to sing these roles. Other than Frances and Anna, you cannot possibly provide me with a pupil, past or present, to match the talents and experience of Katherine and Elizabeth. I have started rehearsals and time will not permit me to start again with new singers.”

Josias asked why he had not been consulted on this and the Duchess informed him that Henry had needed time to confirm the success of his decision before informing him.

“I assure you,” she promised, “once you have heard these young ladies, you will agree with Henry.”

Josias complained again that he had advertised the opera as a performance by young ladies of the school, but the Duchess insisted that it was usual to make the lead roles an exception. Josias then

asked who would be singing the male role. Henry informed him that John Gostling would.

“He’s the finest tenor in the land,” said Henry and he must return to Canterbury next week, hence my need to progress quickly...”

“We must agree,” was Cecelia’s emphatic interruption, adding that there was no time left for argument. Josias accepted defeat, with the proviso that all other roles would go to his pupils.

“I must choose the Sorceress,” Henry demanded.

“Enough,” cried Josias, “don’t test my patience to the limit.”

“I know of no pupil who could sing this role,” Henry insisted. “If the Sorceress lacks a powerful voice, then everything is lost.”

“I will find someone,” Josias insisted, “and I will not engage further in discussions about it.”

Josias read out the dates and times allocated for the delivery of musical scores and manuscripts and then proceeded to describe the nature of each rehearsal. The realisation that time was passing at an alarming rate was shocking to Nahum.

The Duchess, forever the diplomat, ordered wine and once the Priests and the Secretaries had departed she told Henry that she too had some demands for the Sorceress.

“For Nahum and I, she is Persephone, Queen of the Underworld. I see her as a young and seductive woman, beautiful and grand.”

I’m happy with this,” said Henry, smiling, “providing she has a powerful presence. Her voice must have the kind of richness that no young girl can achieve.”

“Then have your way,” the Duchess told him. “I will, in any event, dress her as a goddess. If she is not young and slender I’ll ask James Billingsley to construct some apparatus to make her so.”

Nahum and Henry, amused by her fantasy, moved on to discuss stage machinery. They agreed that Phoebus and Venus would arrive in chariots, that there would be some apparatus to fly cupids about the stage and the spirit, disguised as Mercury, would arrive hidden

in a cloud. They imagined that the country scene of the Prologue could double with the hunting scene of the opera, but they had no idea how the cave might be depicted or how the final scene could start at a harbour and end in the palace.

“Is that where Dido sings her final lament?” the Duchess asked.

“Yes, she will sing her final lament on a staircase in the palace,” Henry announced. The Duchess and Nahum studied him. “Well, she cannot collapse to the ground can she? She must be on a stair. It’s the only place she can stand and sit and swoon.”

“Excellent,” the Duchess exclaimed, “it will be less obvious that she is dead. Can we fly the cupids on the staircase do you think?”

Henry had his eyes closed and his body was swaying gently. It was obvious that music had possessed him and the Duchess and Nahum waited until he was ready to respond.

“Da de de dum,” were the words they had from Henry. “Da de de dum, you cupids come. Think, Nahum, what’s the line?”

“With drooping wings, you cupids come,” Nahum responded.

“Perfect, we have it. We have the cupids,” Henry cried, elated.

The Duchess declared that it was beautiful and she was most impressed with the speed of their composing. When it was time for composer and librettist to depart she ordered a coach, claiming that it was too dangerous to return by boat. Henry gave the coach driver a beat to measure his speed by and the horse plodded along to the rhythm of the final chorus and Henry and Nahum composed it.

*With drooping wings you Cupids come,  
To scatter roses on her tomb.  
Soft and gentle as her heart,  
Keep here your watch and never part.*

Later, when Nahum wrote it in a fair hand he added the words, ‘My dear Belinda, this for you.’

## CHAPTER FIFTY

### *A POTION TO FIRE THE BREAST*

Nahum's decision to take Harry to a garden, to demonstrate to him how flowers might have meaning, was not the stimulating experience the boy was expecting, but Ellen was delighted. He chose Essex House, it being close by on The Strand. After the morning service at St. Clements Church, the trio walked down Milford Lane to the stable entrance, where Nahum's friend, Mr. Pike, was the gate man.

The garden, extending from The Strand to the river, had taken on the golden sheen of late summer colours and while Ellen expressed her wonderment, Harry stood unmoved. Nahum, beginning his talk quickly to try to capture the boy's attention, explained the importance of views and why a series of rooms had been created using straight avenues and well-disciplined hedges.

"The sundial, the old relics and the antiquities are all carefully placed," Nahum told him, "to locate our walk in a story and it is this that gives a sense that it has meaning."

"Is there an orchard?" Harry asked and Ellen lost her patience.

"Allow Nahum to tell you what he knows," she scolded, "or you will never see the beauty in anything."

"Apples add to the beauty of gardens," he replied cheekily, "and pears, and plums. Nahum told me."

"Harry," Ellen exclaimed, "if your interest extends no further than apples then please remain silent."

Harry did exactly that, but as Nahum was pointing out a blind wall at the back of the coach house, where an arch with an elegant pediment had been constructed to create the illusion that the garden continued beyond, Harry wondered off to collect conkers. Ellen eventually retrieved him in a maze at the bottom of the garden. By then she felt no irritation with her son – the time she had passed with Nahum in the miniature grove-like temple, a constructed ruin covered in mistletoe, had charmed her spirits.

If the garden was a place of magic for Nahum and Ellen, this isn't how Harry would have described it, but later, when they were at the Fleet Street market, his low opinion of it changed. Nahum bought him a birthday present – a book of empty pages, a set of quills and a bottle of ink – and Harry, excited and impressed, thanked his tutor for taking him to the garden.

“I'm gonna write about it,” he promised and Nahum told him that he looked forward to reading it.

Nahum was generous that day; even when he was with Eliza. Perhaps the garden had also charmed his spirits, or perhaps it was the afternoon he spent musing on the opera's Grove scene – the place where Dido and Aeneas supposedly made love. He sat in the tavern with Eliza, listening to her news about the play. It was clear that she was having difficulty capturing the accent of Lady Fidget and Nahum invited her to practice her pronunciation. When her delicious neck and collarbones called out to him, he checked his desires and, when her 'Fidget' exercises were complete, he listened quietly to her frustrations about getting the play into production.

“The group are too few,” she complained. “None have the talent to rewrite Wycherley's play and our squabbles have produced such anger that some have walked out of rehearsals.”

The strain of describing her struggles overwhelmed the 'would-be' actress and tears filled her eyes. Nahum told her that she was trying to do too much, but his words gave her no comfort.

“A writer must write and a director must direct,” he exclaimed. “And an actor must act and a publicist must publicise,” he continued and then, innocently putting himself in the equation, he told her he would try to attract benefactors for her. “We must find you a director and invite new actors to join you. We could also use Wycherley’s unfortunate circumstances to attract donations. If we made a broadsheet, explaining why you are performing the play, we could advertise it outside the Theatre Royal, I’m sure the audience would respond. You could also ask Betterton if he will allow the sheets to be distributed outside the Dukes Theatre. Once you have your army, then you can go to war.”

Hearing this Eliza studied Nahum in amazement. “Are you going to help me?” she asked.

“Yes,” Nahum declared, “I’ll help you. I will write the broadsheet and ask Roger Tonson to print copies for you.”

Eliza, delighted, then asked Nahum how he was progressing with the opera and even when he talked about the scene at Diana’s Grove - the place where Dido and Aeneas made love - she retained her confidence in him. Eliza asked who Diana was and Nahum explained that he wanted to connect Dido with Diana because she was the goddess of the hunt and the goddess of chastity.

“In classical tradition,” he continued, “the grove and the hunt were often the places where love was undone. We have no love scenes in the opera, so a reference to the grove will help to imply one. I had a similar scene in *Brutus of Alba*. In this play two witches conjured a storm, causing the prince and the queen to take shelter in a cave. A sorceress had already given them a magic potion that could fire the chastest breasts with loose desires, so the chances that they would not give way to their passions were few.”

He was proceeding well, but at this point he mistakenly told Eliza that he had taken such a potion the day he had first met her and seeing Eliza’s reaction he quickly returned to his present subject.

“We have no magic potions in the opera,” he told her, “so the audience will have to assume that Dido has lost her chastity.”

“How did Diana lose her chastity at the grove?” Eliza asked.

“She didn’t lose it,” Nahum explained. “Actaeon threatened her chastity by invading the grove, but it was enough for Diana to turn his own hounds upon him and, under her spell, they killed him.”

“Oh no!” Eliza cried. “What happens to Aeneas at the grove?”

“Very little,” Nahum said, “but I could make a connection between him and Adonis, the great hunter. Venus, the goddess of love, fell in love with Adonis. She loved the hunt, but she was concerned that his dangerous prey would injure him, so she pleaded with Adonis to cease his hunting and when he refused they argued. The jealous Persephone, goddess of the Underworld, witnessed this and having a desire to have Adonis with her, she assumed the form of a wild boar, killed him and had him with her in the Underworld.”

“Not again,” Eliza cried, “poor Venus.”

“Poor Adonis,” said Nahum, adding that Venus turned Adonis into a flower in recognition of her loss. Eliza told him that he was mad for connections and asked why he persisted in seeking them - a question that stirred some reflection in him.

“Well, I suspect that understanding enjoys connections,” he said at last and Eliza nodded. “I suspect that your project needs more connections too, but connections of a different kind.”

“So will you help me become a published?” she asked.

“A Publicist,” he corrected her and when she laughed he had no idea how he could refuse her anything. “I will come to the theatre tomorrow with the broadsheet,” he promised, “and if Killigrew allows it you can come with me to visit Roger Tonson.”

They parted then, while the connection between them was a happy one.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

*SO FAIR THE GAME, SO RICH THE SPORT*

Nahum was delighted that Eliza could still inspire his imagination, still provoke thoughts in him that would have remained dormant had he never known her. Back in his study he wrote sketches of the Grove Scene and designed Eliza's broadsheet. The following morning he was early about his writing again.

Chorus:           *So fair the game, so rich the sport,  
Diana's self might to these woods resort.*

Woman:           *Here Actaeon met his fate,  
Pursued by his own hounds,*

Aeneas:           *Behold upon his bending spear,  
A monster's head stands bleeding.  
With tushes far exceeding,  
These did Venus' huntsmen tear.*

Before the ink had dried, Harry jumped on Nahum, 'Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday!' Nahum wished him many happy returns and told him that going to school was his real birthday present. Harry did not receive this quite as Nahum expected and, realising his nervousness, he told the boy that he would be fine once he had settled in. Ellen arrived to collect Harry and, as Nahum had expected, she was more nervous than her son. She handed Nahum a letter and they departed for Harry's first day at school.

*Dear Nahum,*

*Thank you for your letter. We have been busy. First we were to sell the import business, so we packed up the paperwork and made preparations to sell the stock, and now my mother has found another partner so everything is to be as it was previously. The new partner is young and married so we are safe on this count.*

*Frances is improving slowly, but she does not eat enough to keep a bird alive. She hides her food, which fools our mother, but it does not fool me. I have spoken sternly to her and she promises to eat, but she does not. Henry's love is the only thing that will cause her to become strong again.*

*My mother, in a move to get Frances and I to attend more social occasions, is threatening to take us to the ball at Mr. Simpson's Dance Academy. The very thought of it makes me shiver. She will not be happy until we are married. Will I ever be happy?*

*Yours truly,*

*Anna.*

Nahum wrote a hurried reply, informing Anna about the opera and describing the impact of Frances' news on Henry. He ran to the Theatre Royal and learned that Killigrew already knew about the plan to advertise the actor's play; an excited Eliza had informed the entire company. Nahum showed Killigrew the broadsheet and he agreed that Eliza could accompany him to Roger Tonson's office.

The two walked out together for the first time in months and when Eliza placed her hand on Nahum's arm his joy was complete. Roger was also charmed by Eliza, agreeing to publish the broadsheet at his expense. Roger, of course, asked Nahum about his progress on the Ovid translation; he promised that it would be complete in two weeks, knowing perfectly well that it would not. At the print works in Chancery Lane, Eliza also charmed Mr. Percy and he placed the broadsheet into production there and then.

At sun down, when Harry had gone to bed, Ellen reported news of Harry's first day. It had not been easy. The other boys had mocked him for not having a father and he had fought with them.

"It's no way for a boy of nine to spend his birthday," she said, "but he'll just have to learn to turn the other cheek."

Nahum was angry and bewildered. "There's no point expecting a child of his age to practice tolerance and fortitude," he told her.

Ellen was convinced that Harry would not return to school the next day and Nahum, after a night considering the matter, woke at dawn with a plan. He instructed Ellen to get Harry ready and told her he was taking the boy to school. Harry, too sleepy to complain, followed Nahum's instructions without question. Nahum marched him to Mr. Garthway's stable where he hired horses for them both. Harry, shocked and elated tried to ask questions, but Nahum, wearing a stern countenance, did not answer him. They were at the school entrance before any boy had arrived and Nahum told Harry to keep his horse as still as a statue. "Greet no one," he insisted. When the pupils arrived, Nahum brought from his bag a book and proceeded to read from it. *The Tales Of The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote Of La Mancha* was beyond Harry's understanding, but the looks on the faces of the pupils was enough convince him that it was good.

*O perpetual discoverer of the Antipodes! Torch of the world! Eye of Heaven! Sweet stirrer of wine coolers! Here Thymbrius, there Phoebus, now archer, now physician! Father of Poetry, inventor of Music, you who always rise and - though you seem to - never set! On you I call, sun, by whose aid man engenders man. On you I call to favour me and to light the darkness of my mind, that I may be scrupulous in the narration of the great Sancho Panza's government; for without you I feel myself timid, fainthearted and confused.* <sup>4</sup>

When the bell rang, Nahum instructed Harry to dismount and go into school. “Inform any boy who enquires about your mode of arrival that your guardian goes about his business in this manner.”

Later, when Nahum related the tale to Henry his voice started to break and Henry enquired how Harry could inspire such confidence and determination in him. Nahum was taken aback by the question; he had no answer to give his friend.

That day Henry and Nahum argued. They were considering the larger themes and overall plan of the opera and Nahum complained that Aeneas had only three short appearances.

“This is not enough for me to make anything of him.”

“But you will waste too many words making him pious and respectful,” was Henry’s reply.

“The pious words I gave Brutus may have been too plentiful, but there must be more to Aeneas than this.”

“Then you must make your point efficiently in three short appearances and have him display no piety.”

The altercation continued, until finally, Nahum accepted that it was he who had suggested that Dido would be the subject and Aeneas the guest. This victory for Henry increased his competitiveness and when Nahum handed him the libretto for the Grove Scene, Henry gave a twist to the words he used to express his delight.

“Initiating the songs with words is almost as pleasing to me as instigating the songs with music,” he exclaimed, and the banter between them continued in such robust fashion, it was remarkable that the songs of Aeneas were composed that day. The fact that they were can only be attributed to Nahum’s patience with his friend.

In contrast, the mood when Nahum returned home was ecstatic. Harry was joyous that his classmates, as he now referred to them, had reacted to his morning appearance with such amazement and Ellen, happy beyond words, declared it to be Harry’s second birthday.

*CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO*

*JOVE'S COMMANDS SHALL BE OBEYED*

With rehearsals about to begin, it was Nahum's task to introduce the assembled soloists to the opera's defining characters. He knew them by heart, but he had still considered with great care what he would say to them.

"Dido and Aeneas are personages of great destiny," he began. "Dido is reluctant to fall in love with Aeneas, but Belinda takes it upon herself to encourage it. For Aeneas, love is a private intimacy, but for Dido love is a thing of the world. She is first and foremost a queen. Aeneas would forget that they are rulers of empire with duties of state, but Dido has declared her chastity publicly and Aeneas must agree to become her prince or she will lose her reputation and the respect of her people. Aeneas is true to his heart, but he lacks the wisdom that his position demands. He should have realised that a casual love affair would wound Dido and he knows that Carthage does not figure in his destiny."

"Poor fellow," John Gostling remarked. "It would seem then that he must take responsibility for this tragedy."

"Only because he is innocent," Nahum responded. "Innocence, of course, figures highly in our tragedies and while I should like to save Aeneas from a fate that has eluded every other hero in history, I fear that in this instance I cannot."

"So there is nothing to save him, not even the realisation of his innocence?" John asked. "Am I to be as innocent as this?"

“You will know that you have lost love,” Nahum assured him, and he brought from his bag the Prince’s recitative following Mercury’s injunction that he depart for Rome.

Aeneas:            *Jove’s commands shall be obeyed,  
Tonight our anchors will be weighed,  
But Ah! What language can I try,  
My injured Queen to pacify.  
No sooner she resigns her heart,  
But from her arms I’m forced to part.  
How can so hard a fate be took,  
One night enjoyed, the next forsook.  
Yours be the blame, ye gods, for I  
Obey your will – but with more ease could die.*

“Does he express his thoughts to Dido, this terrible sadness he knows because he must leave her?”

“He tries to,” said Nahum, “but Dido is angry and gives him no opportunity. She sees his change of heart as evidence of his faithlessness, as prevarication born of his lack of conviction, and she demands that he go. There is a brief argument between the royal couple, an expression of their misunderstanding and vulnerability, but Aeneas departs with discord still between them.”

“An argument!” exclaimed Henry, excited. “Nahum, you never told me,” and he became so intoxicated by the possibilities of an operatic argument, that he started to sing it.

“Away, away... no, no, I’ll stay... away, away... no, no, I’ll stay... no, no... I’ll stay... no, no... I’ll stay... no, no, away, I’ll stay and love obey... away, away... I’ll stay and love obey... away, away... I’ll stay... to death I’ll fly if longer you delay... I’ll stay and love obey... away... and love obey... away!” Nahum, John, Elizabeth and Katherine, all gazed at him in wonderment.

Following this astounding display they composed the argument.

- Aeneas: By all that's good.  
Dido: By all that's good, no more!  
All that's good you have forswore.  
To your promised empire fly,  
And let forsaken Dido die.  
Aeneas: In spite of Jove's command, I'll stay,  
Offend the gods, and love obey.  
Dido: No faithless man, thy course pursue;  
I'm now resolved as well as you.  
No repentance shall reclaim  
The injured Dido's slighted flame,  
For 'tis enough, what'er you now decree,  
That you had once a thought of leaving me.  
Aeneas: Let Jove say what he please, I'll stay!  
Dido: Away, away.  
Aeneas: No, no, I'll stay.

At the day's end Henry asked Nahum if he would like to join John and he at the Palace where they were performing an accompaniment to the King's supper. Nahum, not knowing what to expect, declined, but Henry's insistence persuaded him. Later, on arriving, Nahum regretted it, for Henry revealed that he must dress as a musician or his presence would be questioned. Palace charades horrified Nahum and it was only the promise of eating and drinking to his heart's content that kept a spark of enthusiasm in him.

The performer's robing room was crowded with musicians and the process of finding a costume was chaotic and boisterous. Nahum stood, self conscious and ungainly in a purple silk suit with orange trimmings and Henry teased him. He should have had the courage to depart while there was still opportunity, but to his regret he did not.

“Where shall I hide while you are performing?” Nahum asked.

“You must stay with me,” Henry replied. “I will lend you a violin and you shall pretend to play.”

“I will do no such thing,” Nahum exclaimed, “my false identity will be unmasked, I must hide.”

”No, no, you must stay.”

“No, no, I’ll go,” and their repetition of the operatic argument re-established laughter between them.

“No one will even look at you,” Henry insisted, “and it will be amusing for you to watch the royal guests at supper. Just follow my moves and copy everything I do.”

So Henry removed the strings of a violin, to prevent Nahum making any accidental screeching noises, and poor Nahum sat next to him in the minstrel’s gallery. When the musicians tuned their instruments, Nahum mimicked them, but when the Royal guests took their seats his nerves were in such a perilous state that he poked Henry in the ribs with his bow.

Nahum, acutely embarrassed when John Blow stood before them, prayed that he wouldn’t be recognised, but a trace of a smile passed John Blow’s lips as he lifted his baton for the orchestra to begin the fanfare that announced the arrival of the King and Queen. Nahum, to his relief, realised that Henry was right; no one showed any interest in the musicians, but when John Gostling started to sing the King looked up to him and all the guests followed suit. Nahum’s eyes were fixed sideways in an attempt to align his bowing actions with Henry’s and despite intense concentration his precision was entirely wayward. After several songs John Blow and John Gostling bowed and left the gallery and Henry indicated that they too could leave.

“Is that it? Are we finished?” he whispered, anxiously, and to his great relief Henry told him that other musicians would serenade the King through supper.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

### *PURSUE THY CONQUEST LOVE*

Once Nahum and Henry had returned their violins to the robing room, they went to the small banqueting hall, next to the kitchens, where the two Johns, Blow and Gostling, were standing before a large table laid out with every dish imaginable: fricassee of rabbits and chicken; legs of boiled mutton; stewed carps; a side of lamb; roasted pigeons; lobsters; dozens of tarts; lamprey pies; anchovies and sweetmeats of every description. <sup>5</sup> Others in the King's employ were already enjoying the great merriment and feasting.

Nahum, dressed as a musician, was regaled with musical talk, but with the confidence of wine inside him he managed to keep his disguise hidden; he even began to enjoy his charlatan performance. He was impressed by the great number of maids waiting on the table and one in particular held his attention. She smiled at Nahum when she was close by and Nahum moved about the room, facilitating contact with her. When he could remain coy no longer he asked her name and, laughing beautifully, she declared that it was Molly.

Nahum gazed after her as she returned to the kitchen. At the door she turned, gave him a coquettish smile and indicated that he should follow her. Before he knew how, Nahum, aflame with desire, was standing in a corridor. Molly came out of the busy pantry without her tray and, taking Nahum by the hand, led him to a large cupboard where linen was stored. She pulled the door to, leaned against the shelves, pulled Nahum towards her and kissed him passionately.

Nahum could hardly believe what was happening to him and Molly, recognising his bewilderment, laughed and kissed him again.

“Do you want me to return to my duties?” she asked and Nahum shook his head. “But I must return sometime.”

“Kiss me before you go,” Nahum requested.

“Alright, just one kiss, but then I must go back to the kitchen. If you remain here I’ll return with kisses every time I pass.”

Nahum stood immobile and tried to take stock of his situation. He was still dressed in purple silk with orange trimmings and he had no idea what excuse he might give if his presence was questioned. Realising that he was twice counterfeited and any explanation he could dream up would be too complex, Nahum decided to return to the banquet. As he was opening the door, Molly returned to him, this time with a tray in her hands. She swung it sideways, showered him with kisses and Nahum, overwhelmed, turned her to face him. The side of lamb fell from the tray, onto the floor, but Molly, without a care, quickly replaced it.

“Molly, I love you,” Nahum sighed, “but I cannot stay. I could spend my life kissing you, but at this moment I must return.”

“Come back when we’ve cleared up,” she bid him, “and we’ll kiss all night,” and with that she flew back to the kitchen.

Nahum, attempting a relaxed presence as he re-entered the banqueting hall, was appalled to discover that all the musicians had returned to play for the King. At this moment he wanted to be himself again, wearing his own clothes and far away from the wretched palace. His problem was that he had no idea where the robing room could be found and when he asked a small group of revellers they presumed he was drunk and started teasing him. First they gave him the wrong information about finding the room and on returning they continued to give him conflicting directions. A maid eventually escorted him to the room. He was never before so grateful to be walking on King Street.

The issue of dress was again with Nahum the following morning, for he had to visit Mr. Peregrine, his tailor, to purchase something to wear at Thomas' wedding. Mr. Peregrine had very few clothes that were ready to wear and those he had were made to display the latest fashions. Nahum asserted that he could not see himself in such foppish attire, but Peregrine scolded him for his opinion and insisted that the ladies would be most attracted to him. He had no opinion of his own and before he knew it he had returned home with stockings, a pair of petticoat breeches, a billowing linen shirt trimmed with point, a waistcoat and a doublet with a rear skirt-like extension. Back in his room, he stared at his new purchases with horror and promptly pushed them to the back of the cupboard.

He was reluctant to return to Westminster, imagining the ribbing he might receive from Henry, but to Westminster he was bound to go. As it happened, his colleagues simply asked if he had enjoyed his evening and Nahum had only to smile sheepishly and nod.

On that day, with Henry on violin, Daniel on harpsichord and Elizabeth and Katherine singing, the group rehearsed all the opening songs of the opera. *Shake the cloud from off your brow... Banish sorrow, banish care... Ah! Belinda I am pressed... Grief increasing, by concealing... When monarchs unite how happy their state... Whence could so much virtue spring... Fear no danger to ensue...* Listening to them, Nahum was in a rapture of delight and he asserted that as sure as God was in his heaven there was nothing more beautiful than this sequence of songs.

Anything new that they attempted came to nothing and the entrance of Aeneas in Scene Two had to wait for another day. That evening John and Henry were required to return to the Palace to perform at the King's supper again. Henry extended another invitation to Nahum, but, despite his yearning to be with Molly in the linen store, he was not going to try his luck a second time. He returned home to work on the entrance of Aeneas.

Belinda:        *See your royal guest appears,  
How god-like is the form he bears.*

Aeneas:        *When royal fan shall I be blest,  
With cares of love, and state distress.*

Dido:            *Fate forbids what you pursue,  
Aeneas has no fate but you.  
Let Dido smile, and I'll defie,  
The feeble stroke of destiny.*

Chorus:         *Cupid only throws the dart.  
That's dreadful for a warrior's heart.  
And she that wounds can only cure the smart.*

Aeneas:        *If not for mine, for empire's sake,  
Some pity on your lover take.*

Belinda:        *Pursue your conquest love – her eyes  
Confess the flame her tongue denies.*

The following day, this was rehearsed to the satisfaction of all and Henry, despite his hectic schedule, played a new chorus melody he'd composed. It was an invitation to the guests to gather at the Grove and Nahum instantly heard words in the music.

*To the hills and the vales, to the rocks and the mountains,  
To the musical groves and the cool shady fountains.  
Let the triumphs of love and of beauty be shown,  
Go revel ye Cupids, the day is your own.*

That evening, in need of serious revelling, John, Henry and Nahum went to the Sun Tavern. After three jugs of ale John, in a particularly buoyant mood, took to the stage and sang. His powerful voice reverberated like thunder through the very structure of the place and the tavern's customers gazed at him as though he had arrived from another world.

**PART THREE**  
*OUT FROM BELOW*  
(ALLEGRO)



## CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

### *STAGE SETS AND SCENERY*

Nahum, standing in the clothes he had purchased for Thomas and Caroline's wedding celebrations at the Stationers' Company Hall, felt conspicuous and ill at ease. When Ellen saw him she pronounced that he would probably be married himself before the day was out and this only made him feel worse.

As he was walking up Ludgate Hill, Nahum, intrigued by the activity around the site of the new St. Paul's, walked to its perimeter and watched as an army of builders transported materials into a great hole in the ground. It was said that Mr. Wren would make this Cathedral the finest building of the age, but there was much competition. As Nahum walked back down Ludgate Hill and turned into Ave Maria Lane, the location of the Stationers' Company Hall, it struck him that this splendid edifice would take some beating.

Nahum entered the great livery hall, stood amazed by its impressive stained-glass window, and passed through a small anteroom to the Courtroom. Many guests had already gathered. He was marvelling at the fine plaster work and gilding when Horace and Mary greeted him. They talked of their sorrow at losing Belinda and asked how the opera was progressing. Nahum invited them to attend rehearsals, but once again the King had demanded Horace's presence, this time in Newmarket.

"It's a place I loathe," Horace told him. "There's nothing to occupy anyone, other than horse-racing."

Suddenly a hand was placed on Nahum's shoulder and the ringing tones of Button's voice peeled out.

"How now, jolly crowd," he addressed them, "have you come to mourn the loss of another fine bachelor?" Horace and Nahum greeted him cheerily, but Mary huffed at his words.

"Mr. Boteler," she proclaimed, "must you practice so assiduously your delight in saying the wrong things at the wrong time?"

"But my sentiment is entirely apt," he complained. "It is generally held to be true that men are incomplete before they're married and finished once they are."

"Oh, such poor sentiments," Mary asserted. "You will be happy enough to marry when you meet the right woman."

"Who would marry a man who thinks as I do?" said Button.

"What you think is of no consequence," Mary told him. "Your ways and your opinions will soon echo those of your spouse."

"Exactly," Button affirmed, "A more dangerous thing I cannot imagine; years of rage can be the only outcome."

"Mr. Boteler, if I didn't know you better, I'd say you have a warped frame of mind."

"Warped," Button cried, shocked, "the claim hardly touches it, madam. You would have to make a greater bend in the description of me to get anywhere close to it; it's more like something that goes round and about like a series of hapless circles - only that kind of thing will capture the nub of it."

Horace intervened. He suggested that a drink to honour the union would be a fitting way to proceed and all agreed. As it turned out the wedding party was a rather sober affair, for Thomas' father-in-law, having a dislike of revelry, purchased precious little wine.

After the reception Thomas and Caroline invited their guests to the Mother Red Cap in Playhouse Yard. Caroline's Aunt Elizabeth sat next to Nahum and here they drank good ale and enjoyed some fine dramatic scenes from a group of French actors and clowns.

When an attractive female performer, displayed her delightful skills in buffoonery, Nahum received his second lesson from Elizabeth.

“To have the chance of seeing a beautiful and confident woman on the stage is one of the finest achievements of our age,” she claimed. “It might change the way we are more than any other thing.”

“But do you imagine that she is aware of this?” Nahum asked.

“Yes,” Elizabeth replied, “I would say that she knows exactly what she’s doing, the pleasure it brings and why it’s successful.”

Nahum fell silent and thought of Eliza. He had no doubt that she would similarly delight her audiences.

That night the rain never stopped and Nahum’s dreams poured down on him in wretched accompaniment. He was full of fear and his shortness of breath caused him to imagine that he had contracted some dreadful illness. On his way to Westminster the rain continued to fall in sheets and he was soaking wet before he had even boarded the boat to Chelsea. During the journey upriver the horizontal, driving rain made the boat’s canopy of little use and he could not have been less water logged had he swam the entire distance.

James Billingsley was talking with Josias as Nahum and Henry entered the school hall. Josias introduced him as ‘the genius of mechanical devices’. He announced that Peter Beardsley was expected, that the Duchess and Cecelia would not be joining them and promptly returned to his description of the workings of the proscenium screens and shutters.

“These two rows of grooves in the floor allow them to be moved on and off the stage,” he declared proudly.

“But the potential for apparatus is limited,” James asserted. “There’s nothing to fix anything to, not even the possibility of hanging something from the ceiling.” Josias was agitated by the news and James told him not to worry. “The machinery can also

work from the floor and sometimes this makes the job easier.”

Josias, his confidence restored, asked Nahum to describe the scenes and explain exactly where machinery was needed. As he talked, James made sketches. Afterwards he ran through the list.

“Chariots in the prologue I can do,” he confirmed. “The staircase in the final palace scene is no problem. I can increase the stature of the Sorceress and I can create something for the witches’ cave, but I have no idea how to fly Mercury and the cupids about the stage.”

When Peter Beardsley arrived they discussed the final scene and the problem of featuring both the palace and the harbour. Peter suggested that a terrace be included as part of the palace.

“When the harbour scene is over,” said he, “we’ll pull a balustrade across the lower section of the harbour backdrop and it will appear to the audience that the harbour is now in the distance.”

Josias continued to doubt that a single screen of the harbour could support sailors making ready to depart and the palace scene, so Peter drew sketches to clarify it for him. James drew the props for the palace. There was a regal looking staircase to one side of it, a terrace balustrade to the other and a single column supporting a pediment in the centre. It looked perfect. Josias, placated once again, turned his attention to the opening scene of the Prologue.

“Betterton insists that Peter can paint no more than two backdrops,” he declared, “and if these are the harbour and the country scenes, how are we to achieve a sky and the sea for Phoebus’ entrance?”

“Paint the rear wall blue,” Peter Beardsley asserted, and for this simple suggestion Josias showered him with abundant praise.

The slightly embarrassed artist then declared that he must return to London and James expressed his need to do the same. James agreed to show them maquettes of the machinery at Mr. Wren’s office the following week and as they made their way to the Beaufort Steps, choreographer, composer and librettist went to Lindsey House to have a first viewing of the Prologue dances.

*CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE*

*THE LAMBETH BOAT BOYS*

Nahum, having passed through the grand entrance of Lindsey House and into the great hall, was much taken by a group of young dancers conversing together.

“They look like a host of angels in their white shifts,” he said.

“I hope their lightness accords with their looks,” said Henry.

“Fear not,” Josias declared, “they will float like clouds.”

Laurence Webster, the accompanist, was sitting at the harpsichord and Henry talked with him while Josias gathered up his dancers and arranged them on either side of the hall. Henry was too excited to sit down, so he stood, in eager anticipation, next to Nahum. Josias gave Laurence the signal to begin.

As the dancers weaved in and around each other in long snaking lines that covered the full length of the hall, Nahum understood why Josias was so keen to create a wide stage. His choreography was gay, the dancers were sprightly, and every repetition in the music was clearly reflected in their movements. Henry, affected by the marriage of dance and music, swayed to the rhythms as though his body was conducting their movements. The dancers, finding it impossible to hide their surprise and enjoyment at his enthusiasm, exchanged smiles between them. Josias was also extravagant in displaying the considerable love he had for his graceful art and his own heartfelt and beautiful movements confirmed dance to be his place of his genius. Nahum felt real affection for him.

In response to Nahum and Henry's generous applause, Josias glowed, he was a picture of happiness, a radiant colour having blossomed beneath his skin, lighting up his emotions. He congratulated his dancers and told Henry that he couldn't wait to begin work on the other dances. He asked when he could receive the remainder of the music and Henry promised to deliver it by the following week. As he and Nahum were walking to the Beaufort Steps, Henry expressed his doubts about fulfilling this promise. He had a concert to perform for the King, two private engagements at the Palace and rehearsals were due to start for *Theodosius* on Monday.

That evening they waited a considerable time for a craft to take them down river. Henry hailed almost every boat, but the waters, swollen with the rain, were carrying the little boats too swiftly to make stopping an easy matter. They remembered the Duchess' advice to take a carriage back to town after nightfall and resolved to go and arrange it, when a large hooded skiff pulled over and took them on board. Henry fell asleep immediately and would have slept all the way to Westminster had a great commotion on the river not disturbed him.

A large number of boats had gathered together near Westminster and in some places skirmishes and fights were taking place. The oarsmen of their skiff reacted to this with horror, informing Nahum that this was the Lambeth boat boys controlling their territory. Nahum asked where they were from.

"Wapping, mate," came the reply, "and we're turning round."

Nahum realised that all wasn't well as the oarsmen struggled to turn the boat against the flow of the swollen river. They shouted to Nahum to assist, waking Henry. As Nahum explained their plight to his friend, Henry frantically started to paddle with his hands, but the Lambeth boats, having established a rhythm, were getting closer. The Wapping oarsmen changed tactic and tried to make

for the bank, but this only caused the boat to move towards their assailants. As they were struggling to gain the bank, three boats drew up to them and the Lambeth boat boys thrashed them with their oars. They attacked with unbelievable animosity and Nahum understood that complete destruction was their sole intent. When a giant of a man grabbed hold of the canopy support and boarded their boat, Henry turned on him, but the ruffian struck at Henry with his stick and Henry, in his attempt to avoid the blow, slipped and fell into the water.

Nahum felt an almighty crack - his entire body seemed to shudder and leap at the same time - he didn't know whether it was heat he felt or pain. He was filled with water, his arms were flaying, and amid the turmoil of his choking he could hear much shouting. The heat, mixed with foul tasting, muddy water and blood, confused him and he felt himself drop. As consciousness returned, Henry was dragging him through the mud and reeds of the river bank. He laid Nahum on some waterlogged roots at the side of the river.

Henry, spluttering and crying, used his hand to wipe the blood streaming down Nahum's face. Then, having lifted him so that he was leaning against a gnarled, old tree trunk, Henry pulled off his shirt and wrapped it over the gash on Nahum's head. Henry, keeping his arm about him, told him to stay awake. Nahum, however, was tired and he could not think why he should; for all the world he just wanted to sleep. Henry rocked him gently, his only relief being the sight of the departing Lambeth boats. When the Wapping boatmen had pulled their boat to safety, they enquired after Nahum.

"I can't tell, there's too much blood," Henry told them, continuing his gentle instructions to his friend not to sleep.

"I'm cold," were the only words Nahum managed to utter and the boatmen were right to inform Henry that his wounded friend would catch a chill if he was not taken to his bed.

"We'll help you carry 'im to Westminster," offered one.

“Can’t return home ‘til the Lambeth boys do,” said the other.

Henry was greatly relieved and the broken quartet of shuffling water-logged mariners stumbled along the Embankment. It was an odd assortment of limping characters who shambled into Westminster, looking for help, but when Henry enquired of the whereabouts of a Hackney Carriage or a Sedan Chair, no-one could help. Westminster folk knew well enough the cause of their sorry state, talk of the Lambeth boat boys was everywhere, but with all the good will in the world they could not magic transportation for Henry. Carriages and chairs rarely ventured this far down King Street and even though the Palace would have a queue of them outside, they weren’t likely to accept wet, blood-spattered passengers. Henry and the Wapping boatmen completed their slow journey to The Strand on foot and a very ailing Nahum collapsed when he reached his doorway.

Henry battered at the door and Ellen, horrified, practically swooned on the spot when she saw them. She recovered enough to help Henry carry Nahum to the kitchen. Ellen put a pan of water on the stove and yelled at Harry to fetch blankets, while Henry went out to pay the boatmen, but they had already set off back to the river. Ellen removed Nahum’s outer clothes, helped him onto the table, washed him, covered him in blankets and applied a bandage to his wounded head. Harry found clothes in Nahum’s wardrobe for Henry and commenced an endless stream of questions about the events on the river. Ellen, constantly scolding her son for his inquisitiveness, warmed some broth. She gave one bowl to Henry and assisted Nahum to drink the other. He was too weak to take much, but he did have the strength to ascend the stairs to his bed.

*CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX*

*THE IRISH WOLFHOUND*

Having spent the day fussing over him, Ellen came to Nahum to inform him that there was more vegetable broth on the stove should he feel hungry. She and Harry would not have visited their friends that evening had Nahum not insisted on it; he claimed that he had recovered. Ellen insisted that he stay in bed, but she was no sooner out the door when Nahum put on his clothes and made his way to Smithfield. His thoughts had been with Eliza all day. Despite a very slow walk he was sat in the Pied Bull for some considerable time before Eliza appeared and when she did, she startled him, so lost was he in dreaming. On seeing Nahum's condition, Eliza cried out and enquired about his bruises. Nahum explained the events by the riverbank and pretended that his injuries were not serious. Eliza, relieved, showed Nahum a copy of the printed broadsheet and explained with pride her efforts to communicate the Wycherley play to the public.

"I was very nervous about going to see Betterton," she told him, "but John Petty agreed to accompany me and obtain a letter of introduction for us from Killigrew. He's very kind to me."

Nahum, feeling horribly jealous of John Petty, asked Eliza if she was intent on teaching him not to care for her too much. Eliza gave him a surprised look.

"Do you even remember the affection we shared?" he asked.

"Nahum, please don't talk of this now," she pleaded.

“You are mine Eliza. We were made for each other.” Eliza, not wishing to upset him, tried a smile to cover her unhappiness, but Nahum wasn’t convinced by it. “We are identical instruments,” he continued, “our strings resonate at the same pitch.”

“Stop it, Nahum,” she cried, “stop this nonsense at once.”

“I will not stop,” cried Nahum, adamantly. “I remember how you reacted when I kissed you.” Eliza’s expression was like a storm, but still it didn’t cause Nahum to desist. “I know your desires Eliza, your desires and your deepest pleasures. I want you to remember that. What right have you to deny what has passed between us?”

Eliza told him that she didn’t wish to deny anything. She asked why he was bent on hurting her and Nahum asserted that this was the only way he could get her to remember he existed.

“What happened between us was true,” he insisted. “You cannot pretend it never happened.”

“I am not trying to pretend anything,” she moaned. “Everything you say is true, but why are you throwing it at me?”

“Because everything else is a lie,” he demanded. “Why should I deny my experience and hide our connection? Why should I be a fool for your love forever? Why do you ...” and with this he crumpled to the floor as though another stout stick had crashed down on his head.

Eliza cried out for assistance. She gently lifted his head in her arms and spoke sweetly to him, but she received no response. He was as white as a sheet, his eyes rolling in their sockets. A crowd quickly gathered and Eliza offered her surmise that he had fainted. There were many opinions expressed and all were shocked by the blood that was flowing once more from his bandage. Someone ran for a hackney carriage and Nahum did not stir, not even when he was lifted into the carriage.

On the journey to The Strand, Eliza tried to stem the flow of blood from Nahum’s head. Her panic was now intense. As she stood

knocking on his door, Nahum propped against her, and no reply coming from the house, she felt herself on the verge of collapse. Ellen, returning from her friends, sensed the commotion, and seeing Nahum once more like death on his own doorstep, she cried out. She sent Harry across to the White Horse for help and attended to Nahum's immediate needs. With the help of her friends she carried him inside. She sent one off to fetch Dr. Stoller, instructed another to stay with Nahum and stepped outside to confront Eliza.

"How did he come to be in your company?" she demanded, and when Eliza explained her chance meeting with him in the Pied Bull, Ellen railed at her. "He's too sick to be out of bed. Why is he always looking after you? Why can't you leave him in peace?"

Eliza, bewildered, stood helpless. She had no answers to Ellen's questions. Ellen slammed the front door shut and returned to the kitchen, where Nahum, for the second time in twenty-four hours, lay on the table.

In the middle of the night Nahum was struggling to write when giddiness overwhelmed him. With pressing pains in his chest, he made the hazardous journey back to bed. The next time he resurfaced into consciousness, Ellen was with him. He was breathless and panting. Lucidity was his for only brief moments, before he slipped back into his rambling childhood dreams. He was a black Irish wolfhound. Jake had been his dog as a child, bounding across the marshes, barking, constantly barking. "Don't keep a dog and do the barking," he chided himself in his dream. He never considered that he might be coughing. He knew he was in desperate need of a drink, yet the strong-tasting herbs and black treacle that he was constantly offered made him sick. He coughed on, slept fitfully and occasionally he heard Ellen's voice.

"Nahum, Nahum, try to wake up, try to drink something," but he knew that the only offering was the wretched herbs and treacle.

“His chest still hurts him,” he heard Ellen explaining to Dr. Stoller and he imagined that he nodded in agreement

“It could well be tuberculosis,” the doctor responded.

“And it could be the pneumonic plague,” Ellen insisted. “He did after all fall in the river.”

“If he had pneumonic plague he would be dead by now,” the good doctor declared and Nahum, opening his eyes, half smiled. Dr. Stoller asked if he was awake and Nahum nodded silently. “Promise me that you will drink my physic,” the doctor demanded and Nahum wanted to show his willingness, but he fell asleep.

“...he had taken no more than a mouthful of bread when the Giant could be heard in the hallway. The woman told Jack to hide in the wardrobe. She shut the door on him, but the keyhole was large enough for Jack to see through. A voice like thunder cried out. ‘Fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I’ll grind his bones to make his bread’.”

Nahum opened his eyes. “Harry,” he whispered.

“Mr. Tate,” Harry cried, surprised, “they say you might die.”

“No, Harry. I’m not going to die. I will be better soon.”

“Shall I tell my mother?”

“Yes, Harry. Tell Ellen that I am better.”

“I thought that reading would make you feel better.”

“It did Harry. Thank you. I liked it very much.”

Ellen arrived with broth and talked to Nahum while easing the liquid into his mouth. He learned that both Button and Henry had been to visit him and between each item of information she gave him Ellen asked how he was feeling, as though each new minute needed further confirmation. When Nahum asked what day it was he learned that it was Sunday, and when he asked if Harry could go to the Pied Bull in Smithfield to inform Eliza that he was too sick to visit her, Ellen nodded, but she never sent the boy.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

*THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PERSEPHONE*

Nahum dreamt that he was holding Eliza's hand. For him, there was no human contact that could match the intensity of her touch. He imagined that it had the power to revive him and this was indeed true. Henry visited him again that day and Nahum felt strong enough to talk.

"When you lay sick in this bed," he whispered, "I promised God that if he would save you I would gladly offer myself in your place. Do you think that it is possible that God has come now to collect his debt?"

"No, my dear," Henry asserted, "God will have neither of us yet, not until we have properly sung his praises, and this opera of ours is only the beginning." He told Nahum that he had finished composing all the dance melodies for Josias. "There are thirteen," he said, proudly. "Six are improvised pantomimes, which use tunes I have already written, and the rest are formal dances that I completed last week." Henry began to sing the dance tunes.

"I have no idea how you can store so much music in your head," Nahum told his friend and Henry laughed his boyish laugh.

The following night Nahum dreamt he was dancing with Eliza in a sacred grove, but his wretched coughing interrupted this sojourn with his fecund goddess and he woke, disturbed and aching.

When Henry next came to visit he arrived with the Duchess de Mazarin, Josias and Cecelia.

“We have just come from our meeting with James Billingsley and Peter Beardsley,” the Duchess informed him. “Are you well enough to hear about it?”

Nahum nodded. He wanted to tell her how he was feeling, but very few words were out of him before the Duchess was explaining how impressive the drawings and the models of the machinery were.

“James has invented a platform to move characters on and off stage. It’s about two feet square and five feet high.” Nahum nodded to show that he was paying attention. “It’s not unlike a small, high table,” the Duchess continued, “but it has runners on its base. A man with a long rod can push it on and pull it off the stage. When Phoebus arrives, the side of the platform that faces the audience will be covered with a flat ‘cut out’ of a chariot set on clouds. Some steps will be fixed to the front of the platform and Phoebus will walk down from his chariot onto the stage. The platform will then be pulled back and turned around to reveal Venus’s chariot on the opposite side; such a clever man, James Billingsley.”

“Nahum may need to rest now,” Cecelia asserted, in a tone that insinuated she might be wearing him out.

“Are you up to this?” the Duchess asked. “I must tell you about the Sorceress.” Nahum nodded and smiled. “Well, once the chariot’s sides have been removed, the Sorceress will arrive, standing on the same platform, her long flowing gown covering the platform down to the ground. You will love it. She’ll be more than ten feet tall, covered in red silk; the most beautiful Persephone you will ever see. Mercury will also stand on the platform. It will be covered in clouds when he appears to Aeneas and when the cupids use it, they will scatter roses over Dido from the tower.”

“Marvellous,” Nahum proclaimed, and the single word provoked a coughing fit. Again he tried to speak, but the Duchess was too preoccupied with her concerns about the cave to listen.

“Peter says that he will paint a cave on a large freestanding screen for the witches to hide behind,” she said. “He wants them to arrive on stage through a cut in the fabric. I’m not so certain about this.”

“It will be fine,” Josias told her. “I wish you could visit us soon, Nahum. You will not believe how splendid the hall is and the stage now has its proscenium arch. Once the screens and shutters are in place we will start rehearsing.”

When Ellen arrived to inform the visitors that they should not overtax her patient, Nahum tried to complain, but his words were mixed with such a bout of coughing that she did not have to insist a great deal further. As his guests were taking their leave, Cecelia handed him an envelope, containing ten invitations to the opera, and asked if he’d yet had the opportunity to write the epilogue.

“I can always invite someone else to write it,” she offered, but Nahum insisted that he would do it as soon as he was well enough. All of them departed then, apart from Henry.

“I have finally found my Sorceress,” he told his librettist. “Mrs. Amanda Lockhart. Her voice is so resonant you would think that Vulcan himself had forged it. The Duchess says that she will make her the greatest beauty of the age. I have invited Frances and Anna to the performance, but I cannot see how they can attend, there is no sign that her mother will allow us to meet. They are to attend Mr. Simpson’s Dance Academy ball on Saturday. Will you be better by then, Nahum?” The invalid shook his head. “I must go, just to catch a glimpse of her, but I will not dance. Perhaps I will ask Mr. Simpson if I can join the orchestra. You could join me on the violin again if you wish.” Henry laughed.

“I would rather take my chances with dancing,” said Nahum. He remembered that Anna had told him of the ball at Mr. Simpson’s Dance Academy; it was Amy’s strategy to find husbands for her daughters. Nahum didn’t share his memory with Henry. He wondered how long he would struggle against this woman.

On the following day Nahum had a letter from Anna, expressing her hope that they might attend the opera without her mother's knowledge, for it was possible that Amy would be visiting Anna's sister in Richmond at this time. Nahum replied to her, giving a full account of his horrid dousing in the river and expressing his hope that they might meet again soon. He also wrote to Roger Tonson explaining his plight and promising to have the translation to him by the end of October. Harry delivered the letters to the Penny Post office, together with Nahum's invitations to Horace and Mary, Button, Thomas and Caroline, Dr. Stoller, Killigrew and of course, Eliza. The two remaining tickets he gave to Ellen and Harry. Harry was delighted when Nahum told him about the performance, but Ellen insisted that it was not their place to attend such functions. Nahum, cross with her for thinking this, pressed his point, declaring that it was important for Harry's education that he attend an opera, but Ellen was not convinced.

A few days later it occurred to Nahum that his housekeeper might need a dress to wear at the performance, so he gave her three guineas, claiming that it was his way of thanking her for looking after him. Ellen scolded him, insisting that she would not accept it, but eventually he persuaded her that it was nothing out of the ordinary for a woman to buy a new dress when attending an opera. She didn't declare her acceptance outright, but Nahum knew that she and Harry would be at the performance.

It was hard for Nahum, spending so much time in bed, and it was also a difficult time for Henry. He could not bring himself to attend the ball and on that evening he sat with Nicholas Staggin in Marshes, discussing why the pursuit of love was so completely impossible.

*CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT*

*VULNERABILITY WAS ALL I HAD*

Nahum's days were spent at home, writing the opera or translating Ovid, but his nights were spent coughing; an affliction that both exhausted and annoyed him. When the autumn chill suddenly turned warm he felt a strong urge to walk in Lincoln Inn Fields and on one such occasion, as he was returning through the New Inn garden, he met Eliza. She expressed her pleasure at seeing him and claimed she was on her way to pay him a visit. Nahum was delighted and, in reply to Eliza's question concerning his health, he asserted that he had completely recovered. They sat together on a bench, and, for all Nahum knew, he could have been dreaming.

Nahum learned that Killigrew had agreed to direct Wycherley's play and had also recruited a full cast of actors. Eliza told him that she was enjoying the role of Mrs. Pinchwife and was extremely grateful that someone else was struggling with Lady Fidget. When she comically imitated her eccentric pronunciation, Nahum laughed and imagined that comedy was now an integral part of her.

"How is the writing progressing?" Eliza asked.

"I still have much to do on the translation," Nahum confirmed, "but the opera is almost complete."

"Did you manage to make something of Aeneas?"

"No," he replied, surprised by the question and thoughtful about his answer. "There was no room in the opera for such an ambition. Poor Aeneas, maybe he'll always be seen as the careless deserter."

“Why was Dido so utterly devastated by his departure?” Eliza asked, further enhancing Nahum’s suspicion that she had changed.

“Well, Aeneas and Dido had different needs and responsibilities,” he began. “She had struggled to create Carthage and, having proved herself to be a responsible queen, she needed a king, not a lover. She had lost her husband and she had promised to honour his name forever, but then Aeneas arrived; it must have been difficult to make another decision about love again.”

“Then Dido’s situation and mine were similar,” Eliza declared. Nahum studied her. “My husband had died just before you and I met. I did not promise him so much, but love still surprised me.”

“Was it love then?” Nahum asked, taking her hand. Anyone seeing them would have assumed they were lovers. Nahum was still convinced that there was great love between them.

“At the time it’s impossible to describe what it is,” said Eliza, “but I had no uncertainty about the horrors of losing my husband. I didn’t know how to live my life. I hardly knew who I was.”

“Then I came along,” said Nahum.

“Yes, then you came along,” she said, and they fell silent.

Eliza shook her head, as if to throw off her feelings, and she patted Nahum’s leg. She had a tear in her eye.

“You,” she declared in an adamant tone, “with all your talk of love. When you said that you loved me, you forced me to make a decision and I couldn’t make it. I had no idea how to make promises. I didn’t know if I could trust anyone again. I needed time.”

“Maybe love needs a simple, quick decision,” Nahum replied.

“But how can we learn to trust quickly? Dido trusted Aeneas and it would have been better had she not done so.”

“No, she should not have trusted him and it’s easy to see why. Aeneas, a god-like prince whose destiny was to found Rome, did not have the ability to alter his fate for the sake of love, and Dido could not alter Aeneas’ fate either. It was Belinda and the court who

persuaded Dido that love had the power to change events.”

“And as soon as she loves, Aeneas announced his departure.”

“That is the tragedy, Eliza, but this does not make your position and Dido’s similar. Was it so difficult to decide to trust me? I certainly had no thoughts of leaving you.”

“It worried me that you always talked of love. It was difficult enough trying to understand what it meant to be your mistress; I had never been anyone’s mistress before and I had no idea how to act or what was expected of me.”

“But I loved you. I didn’t have a destiny that threatened this love. I had no promised land beckoning me on as Aeneas did.”

“Oh, Nahum, you have no idea how I thought about you. Your character was fully formed. You were complete. I was only half baked and then I was broken by my husband’s death. I could see how dedicated you were to your writing. How could I possibly imagine that I would count in your world?”

“But you were the centre of my life.”

“In one respect I may have been, but I could not imagine that I would remain so. If my feelings told me this, then how could I go against them and decide to fall in love with you?”

“Not even if I loved you?”

“I was never certain of it. You have no idea how vulnerable I was. Vulnerability was all I had. You had no idea about my vulnerability. How could I have imagined you would see other things in me that were equally important?”

Nahum lifted her hand and kissed it. “But I would have looked after you, Eliza. How could you have had these feelings and not wanted to talk to me about them?”

“In those days, I couldn’t talk. I had no idea how I felt.”

“I would have done anything to ensure our love.”

“You found me attractive and that was important, because it gave me confidence again, but our worlds were so different.”

“You imagine that I was confident, but I was also vulnerable. It was you who inspired my passion and my poetry. The joy you brought me was real. There is nothing more real than desire. You gave me hope and a reason to celebrate life.”

Eliza squeezed his hand. “Oh, Nahum, you can’t possibly tell me that you lacked reasons to celebrate life. Your optimism and enthusiasm were your most distinctive features - they still are.”

“But without love they are worthless. Without love I only have work. I need more to show at my journey’s end than an odd collection of words that have gathered dust around me.”

“Please don’t say this, Nahum. I don’t believe you mean it.”

“I do. The works I have completed lie around me like the remnants that lie in the street when the market is over.”

“Oh Nahum, I liked you because you were not like this. I never wanted to be consumed by swirling emotions, but I did want the confidence to progress. You were always willing to explore.”

“How can you explore and ignore emotions. It’s the emotions that create life, that give it meaning.”

“Maybe you’re right,” Eliza said, lifting Nahum’s hand and placing a kiss upon it, “but I must return to the theatre now.”

Before she stood, Nahum wiped a tear from her eye. After she had gone he felt desolate. He only ever wanted the best for her, only ever wanted to give her what she wanted. If this wasn’t love, then love didn’t exist. When he returned to his study and continued with his translation of *The Art Of Love*, he felt a complete stranger to the entreaties that Ovid directed at the men of Rome.

*So with the heart. It grows torpid from lack of worry,  
Needs a sharp stimulus to elicit love.  
Get her anxious about you, reheat her tepid passions,  
Tell her your guilty secrets, watch her blanch.*

*CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE*

*WITH THEIR SPIRITS ENLIVENED*

The weather turned cold, Nahum's cough returned and Ellen insisted that he stay at home. Harry provided a daily account of school, his tales of friendship and his dislike of lessons, and Nahum tried to steady his resolve.

"Not everything you do concerns magical fortune," he told him.

"But without magic I'll never be rich," Harry insisted.

Nahum hoped his clarity of purpose would bring him success.

Henry, violin in hand, visited regularly, eager to check every aspect of the opera. Once, while they were working, Button also visited. After warm greetings, Button asked after Nahum's health.

"Still barking day and night," was his reply.

"I always thought you a hound for refusing to write doggerel," Button quipped.

"My writing keeps me alive, at any rate," Nahum declared.

"It's your heroic spirit that keeps you alive," Button exclaimed.

"There's not much about me that's heroic," said Nahum.

"There certainly is," Button asserted. "I hear you're to be given a knighthood for your valour at the Lambeth Armada."

No further work on the opera took place that evening.

Other than short interludes such as this, Nahum worked tirelessly on the translation, delivering Part Two to Roger Tonson just as he was beginning to despair at seeing any of it. The publisher gave Nahum a cup of rum to keep his spirit's up.

In Book Three of *The Art of Love*, Ovid addressed his advice on love to the women of Rome and Nahum discovered, to his surprise, that outrageous pursuit was still the subject and jealousy was still the principle weaponry of the open warfare.

.....*When a new-captured lover  
Is stumbling into the toils, then let him believe  
He alone has rights to your bed – but later,  
Make him conscious of rivals, of shared delights.  
Neglect these devices – his ardour will wane.*

Only once did Nahum go to the Abbey, it was when they were preparing their move to Chelsea. The orchestra – two violinists, a viola player, a bass player and Henry on harpsichord – were gathered in the Old Monk’s Refectory and Nahum, delighted by the fullness of their sound, wished only that he could travel with them to the school, but Part Three of *The Art Of Love* was all that he could live for until it was complete. As it happened, his resolve being great, Nahum delivered the completed translation to Roger Tonson two days before the end of October, the date they had agreed upon.

Nahum left Tonson’s office and, having no appetite for river transport, took a hackney carriage to Chelsea. When he entered the school hall, it was populated by scene painters, prop makers and an army of young ladies; mending, making and altering costumes. The Duchess was everywhere, issuing instructions like a general preparing for battle. When she saw Nahum she led him by the arm to show him the costumes. Phoebus had a suit of gold, Venus had a blue silk dress with a sparkling tiara and Spring had an extravagant costume of bright flowers, the great profusion of stems being sewn onto a green robe. For Dido there were four beautiful gowns from the royal wardrobe and for Aeneas, Prince of Troy, a military costume with black boots and a great plumed helmet.

“Look at this,” the Duchess directed him, displaying a deep wine-red gown made of silk. “This is for the Sorceress. It’s nearly eleven feet long,” and she proudly pulled it across the floor. “It’s the star of the show and when Amanda Lockhart, our powerful Persephone, floats onto the stage everyone will fall silent before her.”

Nahum went next to Lindsey House to see how the rehearsals were progressing. Elizabeth and Katherine welcomed him when he entered the hall and he sat with them to watch Henry and Josias rehearse the chorus and dance scenes. It was not going well on this afternoon, for the continual interruptions and repetitions were causing some considerable conflict between composer and choreographer. When one of them stopped the action it made the other exasperated and there seemed to be no way out of this until Henry suddenly put a stop to it. He stormed into the centre, clapped his hands wildly, and thanked the assembled players, singers and dancers for their outstanding work. They all looked at him aghast.

“I apologize for the difficulties, but your hard work has paid off. We are now ready to perform the entire work. We will start at the beginning and take no breaks until the end.”

Nahum had no idea how much they had rehearsed, but he could see that they were perplexed - they were looking around, eagerly attempting to judge if their own surprise was shared by others.

“Trust yourselves to get it right,” Henry entreated them. “Relax. It’s in your memory and if you invite it nicely, your part will flow from you as though you’d performed it all your life.” There was not a sound or a movement to indicate disbelief. “Breath through your whole body,” Henry continued, “and find an openness of spirit that you can offer to everyone. If you forget anything remain silent and still ‘til you can regain your place. We will stop for nothing.”

A great thrill filled the hall and Josias gathered up his dancers and directed them to their starting positions. Once in place, their attention fixed upon Henry, he lifted his baton.

“Consider the place where your heart beats,” he bid them, “share your love and, with your spirits enlivened, perform as though you have lost all sense of doubt and know only how to play.”

They made mistakes, but these were insignificant and the marriage between dance and song had a magical unity. Henry expressed his pleasure by dancing to the fast movements and swaying to the slow ones. The only time he was static was when Amanda Lockhart, the great Sorceress, sang. Her voice was as deep as the earth and it startled Nahum; it was in complete contrast to the image he’d had of her as the seductive queen of the night. It wasn’t that Amanda lacked beauty, it was simply beyond him how the Duchess was going to style her to achieve the effect she promised.

At the rehearsal’s end, the cast applauded each other. Great peals of laughter accompanied deep sighs of relief and everyone was indulgent with their praises. Their pleasure was as full as their concentration had been intense and Henry asked Nahum six times what he thought of various aspects of the work before he gave Nahum a chance of replying.

George Lawson, a highly accomplished and intelligent man who played lead violin, re-acquainted himself with Nahum and decided that it was his duty to look after him.

“The rooms here are pleasing enough,” George told him, “but unless you like pastry the food has little to recommend it.”

As it happened, the two men never ate pastry, for most of their spare time was spent in the Royal Oak where Dover sole was the speciality. They were often quite drunk when they returned and if George hummed tunes the whole night through, Nahum never expressed any concern about it.

## *CHAPTER SIXTY*

### *COMPOSING THE ECHO*

The day rehearsals started in the School Hall, John Gostling arrived from Canterbury. James Billingsley also arrived to inspect the props and direct the stage hands in their operation. Henry went through the recent changes in the libretto with John, while Nahum worked with James to determine the layout of the final scene.

First, the scene movers pulled the harbour screen into position and once they had filled the stage with crates and barrels to create the dock side scene, Josias adjusted the props and tested the space with his dancers. His pleasure was intense and his enthusiasm was infectious. The scene movers then took away the props belonging to the harbour scene and replaced them with the scenery palace scenery. A staircase was pulled into position on the left-hand side of the stage and a single large column was moved into the centre. When they placed a stone-like balustrade to the right of the column, the view to the harbour was so realistic Nahum couldn't resist standing where Dido would stand. From here she would see the anchored Trojan boats making ready for their departure. Fate had given her a tragic hand to play and the scene reminded Nahum of his own fate, a tragedy in his mind, that wasn't so dissimilar.

Henry called to everyone to prepare for the first scene of Act One. The scene movers prepared the stage again and once the Duchess, Josias and Nahum were in their directing chairs, Henry addressed them in a voice that all the performers could hear.

“I want intense concentration at this rehearsal,” he instructed them. “Consider the placement of the performers, the quality of their stage presence and, most importantly, how they contribute to the graceful flow of events. I don’t want to stop the action unless it falls apart, but if you feel the need to make a comment, speak it out for everyone to hear and the performers will respond.”

Nahum was amazed at Henry’s decisiveness, how he took control of events and orchestrated every aspect of the action. While Henry was holding the cast’s attention he whispered to the Duchess.

“No one has ever taught him how to do this,” he exclaimed and her reply, an instinct, was that he knew it in his bones. Henry turned to address the assembled players.

“You are to listen to the comments of our directors. Anyone hearing advice directed at them will immediately act upon it without stopping the rehearsal. Is that clear?”

There was a general nodding of heads and Henry invited them to take up their positions for the beginning of the rehearsals.

Tying together the many strands - the orchestra, the singing, the dancers and the props - and making it work as a single unit did indeed require intense concentration. The smallest of gestures either contributed to or distracted from the action and Josias was particularly attentive and eager with his instructions to the dancers. The Duchess, who had a splendid eye for detail and a natural talent for directing, enjoyed her role immensely and everyone responded to her instructions quickly and decisively. Nahum told her that she too was born to this role and she smiled, knowing it to be true.

Henry gave surprisingly few instructions, but he listened intently - an expression of pain appearing on his face whenever a sound did not meet with his approval. For the most part, all the performers kept their eyes on him and if he said anything it was a whispered phrase directed to a particular person. “Stand still,” he would tell them, or “face the audience.”

After three days of studying how the dances and choruses knitted together into a seamless flow of action and music, the directors shifted their concerns to concentrate on the detail. They listened to the way in which the recitatives interweaved with the arias and were often heard discussing the change of a single word or note so that it might improve the whole.

The skills of the performers increased, both visibly and audibly, and Elizabeth in particular became a striking presence both on and off the stage. She appeared to have grown into her role so completely that everything about her had the air of a royal personage.

“Even when she’s not performing,” the Duchess was heard to comment, “she acts in a measured, graceful manner, her voice echoing the elegant and well-phrased accents of Dido.”

The Sorceress on her platform was in every way a resounding success. She floated, very slowly, for a yard or two, high above the stage, with her long gown flowing to the ground, every bit as the Duchess had promised; “the most beautiful Persephone we would ever see.” Her presence was so demanding that when she beckoned her witches to her side the world seemed a different place. Everyone shuddered at the sound of her voice and Nahum imagined that the entire spirit world would feel bound to respond to her call.

*Wayward Sisters, you that fright  
The lonely traveller by night, appear, appear...*

As the days passed it became obvious that the cave scene lacked the necessary magic and the ‘walk on’ cave, referred to by the Duchess as ‘the rude rocks’, began to irritate rather than entertain. The awesome presence of the Sorceress on her platform dominated the action at the beginning of the scene, but there was nothing to celebrate the close of the scene. Josias insisted that they could not change the cave, so Henry proposed that the music would have

to strengthen the ending. He asked Nahum to write two lines that would create the impression that spells were being cast in the cave and for Nahum this proved to be a simple, but perplexing request. He spent the entire morning walking about the courtyard, muttering to himself, before he was satisfied with his attempt.

*In our deep vaulted cell the charm we'll prepare,  
Too dreadful a practice for this open air.*

Henry was delighted with it and with the words in his head he wandered off to the fields and did not return until late afternoon. Upon his return he called Daniel and the musicians to him and together they set about notating the score for the musicians and singers. Within the hour they were distributing copies of the score and Henry was addressing the chorus.

“I want half of you to go backstage and half of you to remain on the stage.” the group looked surprised. “This chorus refrain takes place in a cave where singing creates an echo. Those who are behind the wings will repeat the endings of the phrases that are sung by those who are on the stage. The echo singers must imagine that their voices have travelled a great distance. Only then can we conjure the presence of this cave.”

All were amazed by Henry’s invention and when the chorus performed the echo, they were more amazed still. The repetition of the resounding words was completely credible as an echo and they laughed for the sheer joy of its audacity.

“I find it difficult to measure the level of genius that can musically conjure a cave,” the Duchess declared and Nahum shook his head in disbelief at his remarkable friend and smiled.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

*A MAGICAL VIGIL OF LIGHT*

On the day of the final dress rehearsal, Henry received a letter from Frances who wrote excitedly about her mother's news.

"Amy is staying in Richmond," Henry called to Nahum from across the courtyard. "She has a new granddaughter to attend to and Frances and Anna will be coming to the performance."

Henry was dancing and putting his arms about Nahum. There were tears in his eyes and Nahum thanked God that he had never learned how close Frances had been to death.

Henry danced about the gardens while Nahum returned to the hall. On the stage stood Cecelia and Lady Dorothy Burke, a pupil of the school. Cecelia was unaware that Nahum was listening. She spoke a few lines and then asked Lady Dorothy Burke to continue. The young woman read from the page she was holding.

*The vocal part we have tonight perform'd  
And if by Love our hearts not yet are warm'd  
Great Providence has still more bounteous been  
To save us from those grand deceivers, men.*

When he heard these lines, Nahum knew immediately what the reading was for and he demanded that Cecelia tell him who had written them. Cecelia was taken aback and she mumbled slightly when announcing that Thomas D'Ufrey had written them.

“And please inform me about their function?” Nahum asked.

“Why,” Cecelia began nervously, “they are the epilogue. I asked D’Ufrey to write them. I thought you had completely forgotten to do so and I thought it best not to trouble you about them.”

“Well this certainly troubles me,” Nahum proclaimed. “I do not care for D’Ufrey and I care even less for his ridiculous words.”

“Well I think they serve to...” she began and when Nahum leaped onto the stage, she stopped.

“I’ll tell you what they serve, Cecelia. They serve to undermine all the eloquent speech and poetic thought that has preceded them and I will not allow them to be read. Do you understand me? You simply cannot end the performance with these offensive lines.”

Cecelia looked at Nahum as though he were deranged. Patently this was untrue, but no one had ever seen Nahum so heated. Cecelia asked Dorothy to return to her class and when she was out of sight Nahum gave further vent to his anger.

It was the Duchess who arrived on stage first, followed quickly by Josias, but the two combatants did not cease their furious argument or even respond to the Duchess’ attempts to calm their battle.

“I’ve no idea why he’s so distressed,” Cecelia declared.

“Then I’ll tell you,” Nahum exclaimed. “I have spent the last four months sounding out every one of my syllables, gaining a sense of their resonance and confirming their meaning, and if you think I’m going to allow some casual collection of words by D’Ufrey to have the final say, you’re further from reality than I thought you were.”

“Oh, really,” Cecelia retorted. “How can you regard D’Ufrey’s words as being offensive?”

“Well, they are and I am adamant,” Nahum shouted. “I will not have these lines follow my libretto and what is more I will not write another epilogue to replace them.”

“Well that’s really helpful!” Cecelia cried. “All you’ve proved is how impossible you’ve become. So what’s to be done now?”

“I’m sure we can resolve this,” the Duchess declared. “Maybe if Josias ended the performance with a speech, something extemporized, it would better suit everyone.”

Josias, slightly bewildered, asked Cecelia if this would do, but he got nothing from his wife, only a furious look.

“If you ask me,” the Duchess announced, “it’s rather too much to add a rhyming epilogue to an opera’s libretto. By the end of it our guests will have had a surfeit of formal words. This, I think, is the point Nahum is trying to make.”

Nahum nodded. He loved the Duchess in diplomatic mode.

“Make a relaxed speech, Josias,” the Duchess bid him, “this is entirely your sort of thing and it would be so ungracious to apologize for something that has not caused offence.”

Josias looked up as if he had just come to his senses and he told Cecelia that the Duchess had a reasonable point. “To us the opera is beautiful, we have worked at it assiduously and we should not preempt our audience’s response before we have seen it.”

“There’s no point looking at me for approval,” Cecelia replied, still in a huff, “ask Mr. Tate, he’s the one who’s going to have a tantrum about it one-way or another.”

Josias turned to Nahum.

“If you promise not to use D’Ufrey’s rhymes, I agree,” Nahum declared, “but you must avoid any philosophising on the subject of love and if you say anything to suggest that we need saving from ‘those grand deceivers, men’, I’ll run you through with a sword.”

Josias promised to make reference only to the qualities and reputation of the pupils and all was agreed. Nahum offered an apology to Cecelia, admitting that his temper and strong words were unacceptable and after a brief bow she left the stage.

Whether this furore had an impact on the final dress rehearsal was hard to say, but it was a shaky affair and, having previously interrogated the action so extensively, they were all cautious about

being too critical at this juncture. At its conclusion, the general consensus was that all final dress rehearsals were like this and all attested to the fact that no one ever expected the actual performance to proceed as the dress rehearsal had done. This opinion forgave all the performers, but everyone agreed that the lighting arrangements were ragged and distracting, so something had to be done about it.

There were about twenty young ladies engaged in keeping the great number of candles alight and it was their disorganised coming and going that distracted the audience's attention. To add to the complexity, James had directed that candles should be moved about the stage to create different lighting effects. During the cave scene with the witches, a great number of candles were to be placed in front of the cave to give the illusion of a fire. When the sailors were preparing their departure, the candles were to be positioned on the crates by the dock side and during the finale the chorus were to carry these candles up the stairs beside Dido. The latter was the most effective device, for the young women, looking every bit like a procession of angels, added an elegant and extraordinary solemnity to the final minutes.

It was the Duchess and Josias who argued most vehemently that the promenade of the candle movers should be more graceful and it was they who worked late into the evening to achieve it. When supper was over the directors and performers returned to the hall and the Duchess invited them to watch the candle holders enact their sequences in silence. The young ladies travelled with all the grace expected of dancers and their performance was a play where candles were the protagonists. It was a magical vigil of light and it was the finest way of marking the eve of England's first opera that anyone could have wished for.

*CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO*

*THE FINAL HOURS*

The noise and frantic activity on the final morning was considerable and Henry and Nahum, being under-occupied and too nervous to sit still, decided to exchange the noise for a quiet walk across the fields. Neither revealed their thoughts or broke their silent contemplation, but they had walked so often with great purpose that this hushed sojourn had no lack of intimacy. After some time, they returned to the village of Chelsea and stopped for ale at the Royal Oak. John Gostling, George Lawson and Laurence Webster were in the bar and John, seeing them first, asked where they had been.

“Out walking,” was Henry’s simple reply.

“So that’s how two maestros master their nerves,” said John.

“I’m more nervous about meeting Frances,” Henry exclaimed.

“Quite right,” John agreed, “there’s no comparison between performing a new opera and meeting a new love. At any rate, there is no mastery over love.”

“True,” Laurence added. “We fall in love before we have mastered anything. We jump at the chance and then pray for the best.”

“Not I,” said George in a sprightly manner. “I pray for the best and then jump at the chance.”

They continued with love as their subject, but George, who tended to tire quickly of any conversation that lacked an appropriate amount of gaiety, went to the kitchen and ordered bread and herring for his assembled friends.

When they returned to the hall, Nahum was impressed by the intense air of focussed engagement that was upon everyone he saw. They all invented some task or other to distract their attention away from the coming event and Nahum, who could think of nothing to keep busy, satisfied himself with watching. Henry was checking the sheets of notation before placing them on the musician's stands and Nahum, intrigued, picked up George Lawson's copy to gaze at the complexity of notes he had to play. He was lost in this activity until he was distracted by Henry, who started playing a brooding melody on the harpsichord. Henry developed his theme into a complex dance of sounds reminiscent of his fantasias, but Nahum, an expert now in Henry's improvisations, suspected that his heart was not in it. Suddenly Henry stopped and addressed him.

"Walk with me to the Beaufort Steps," he requested. "I can do nothing until I have seen Frances."

Nahum, slightly perturbed by his friend's statement, agreed, but there was no sign of Henry's loved one at the Steps. They continued along the river as far as the Apothecary's Garden and, by the time they had returned to the School, a number of carriages had already parked on Lovers Walk and guests were gathering in the courtyard.

Nahum left Henry, who had decided to walk up the lane, and went into the hall. From there he visited the back stage area, the changing rooms, then out through the hall into the refectory and back again. He was too nervous to stand still, so he made adjustments to the chairs until the guests started to enter and then he retreated backstage again. From there he peered out from around the screens and watched the guests taking their seats. The sight of Dr. Stoller helped to ease his agitation and as John Blow and Nicholas Staggins arrived, followed by James Billingsley and Peter Beardsley, he felt his internal tumult decline. In the front row sat Henry's mother, Elizabeth and Thomas, his uncle. They waved.

Nahum's guests were seated half a dozen rows back and the next inhabitant here was Thomas Killigrew. He continually looked about him as though he were expecting someone to be sitting next to him. Thomas Flatman arrived then, but not with his wife, Caroline; it was her aunt Elizabeth who accompanied him. He was pleased; he felt a profound connection with Elizabeth. When Nahum next glanced in that direction, Mary Heveningham was sitting next to Elizabeth, Horace was next to his wife and Harry was next to Horace. Ellen, on the other side of her son, looked about nervously, but Harry was beaming with delight, as was his neighbour Horace, who was busy answering Harry's questions. Nahum contemplated the possible answers Horace was required to find to placate the inquisitive boy and a smile replaced the strained lines that had been the dominant feature on his face more recently.

There were two spare seats in Nahum's row, one for Button and the other for Eliza, but the next time his eye wandered to that side of the hall, he caught sight of his beautiful muse and his heart jumped. He thought his heart would always jump when catching sight of Eliza. He watched as she searched for her seat and when Killigrew recognised his young costume maker, he waved to her in a wild fashion. Eliza spotted him, shuffled along the aisle and sat next to the director.

The hall was so full that the several doors leading to the refectory had to be opened so that some of the guests could take their seat there. The two seats near the front that Henry had reserved for Frances and Anna remained empty. The time to start was approaching and the Duchess, speaking in an uncharacteristic whisper, was busy backstage lining up the performers. Josias tapped Nahum on the shoulder and asked if he knew where Henry was and, admitting that he did not, he offered to go to the courtyard in search of him. Once there he asked Mr. Singleton if he had seen Henry. When the doorman shook his head, Nahum asked if Frances and Anna Pieters

had arrived, but the poor man was so overwhelmed with his task of checking invites that he could not be certain of anything.

Nahum walked out into the courtyard and from there to Lovers Walk. He looked up towards Little Chelsea and then down to the river. In his estimation the opera should have started, but Henry was nowhere to be seen. He had just returned to the courtyard when he heard Henry calling to him. Nahum ran back to the lane and there, walking down Lovers' Walk, with Frances on one arm and Anna on the other, was Henry. It would have been easy to imagine that they were out taking a quiet Sunday stroll. Nahum ran to them, hugged them and insisted that they hurry to take their places.

"Nothing will begin without me," said Henry, drunk with the pleasure of being with Frances.

"Of this I am certain," Nahum confirmed, but he hurried them along to the lobby where Josias was waiting for them. He too expressed his agitation at their lateness and he repeatedly bid them to hurry to their places.

"Is everything ready?" Henry asked, casually.

"Of course, of course," cried the choreographer. "Come along, come along." He herded them through the doors, asking Mr. Singleton to escort Frances and Anna to their seats. Henry watched them and stood waiting by the doors until the musicians had finished tuning their instruments.

"Would you like to join me," Josias asked Nahum. "Cecelia had intended to sit with me on the balcony at the rear of the hall, but she now wishes to remain backstage with the Duchess."

Once Josias was in his seat, he signalled to a group of young ladies at the sides of the hall and when they had moved the candles from their position around the hall to the front of the stage the audience's excited chatter ceased. Cecelia stepped onto the stage.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

### THE PERFORMANCE BEGINS

“My Lords, ladies and gentlemen,” Cecelia began, “We present an entertainment to mark the opening of our new school. It is our very great pleasure to give you the opera, *Dido and Aeneas*.”

Henry took up his position at the harpsichord, bowed in response to the enthusiastic applause, and lifted his baton. Nahum fought for his breath as he gazed fixedly at the silent, empty stage.

When the first bars of music rose up, the candle bearers moved to the back of the stage by the great blue wall. The sky was receiving the first rays of light from Phoebus. The heavenly host entered on his chariot and, passing over the sea, he called to the Nereids to pay their respects to him. Once the Nereids had sung to him of the beautiful Venus, the goddess entered on her chariot surrounded by Tritons who danced in her honour. The chorus sang, the Nereids danced and Spring entered in all her glory to welcome Venus to the shore. The beauty of Venus struck Phoebus forcibly and he declared his undying love for her. Venus indicated that she was charmed by this and the heavenly couple joined together and left the stage. Spring and her nymphs danced and sang in praise of the courting couple and dancing shepherds and shepherdesses joined them in the celebrations. The chorus sang, *Let us love and happy live*, while the nymphs danced around them. When a shepherd asked a shepherdess why this morning was so full of joy, she replied, *The sun has been to court our queen, and tired the Spring with*

*wooing*, and there was such infectious laughter on the stage that the audience caught it and responded. The country maids danced round and round and gradually, one by one, they disappeared into the wings.

The applause was jubilant. Josias slapped Nahum on the leg.

“We have them, Nahum, they love it.”

Nahum, grateful that he had not yet swooned, managed a nod.

The great screens, positioned along the front of the stage, were pulled back, revealing Dido’s palace in Carthage. Henry’s overture filled the hall, inviting the audience to another world. No one had any doubt that something of great import was about to occur. Dido, Belinda and their courtiers entered and Belinda, in beautiful voice, entreated Dido to *shake the cloud from off your brow*.

Nahum had no idea how she could sing, he couldn’t produce a note if his life depended on it. The chorus called to Dido, bidding her to *banish sorrow, banish care*, exclaiming that *grief should ne’er approach the fair*. Dido replied to Belinda. *Ah! Belinda, I am pressed with torment not to be confessed*. Belinda and the court ladies tried to dissuade her with, *Fear no danger to ensue, the hero loves as well as you* and to these refrains the court ladies danced playfully around the central column.

Aeneas entered then and Belinda addressed Dido. *See your Royal guest appears; how god-like is the form he bears* and Aeneas asked Dido, *When Royal fan shall I be blessed, with cares of love, and state distressed*. Dido told him, *Fate forbids what you pursue* and he replied, *Aeneas has no fate but you*. The chorus sang to the audience, telling them that *Cupid only throws the dart* and Aeneas pleaded with the queen, *if not for mine for Empire’s, sake, some pity on your lover take*. Belinda addressed Dido again. *Pursue thy conquest love* she pleaded and to the audience she exclaimed that *Dido’s eyes confess the flame her tongue denies*. The court ladies then began to dance and the chorus sang, *To the hills and the vales*,

*to the rocks and the mountains, to the musical groves and the cool shady fountains, let the triumphs of love and of beauty be shown, go revel ye cupids, the day is your own.*

The sound of the audience's appreciation was unanimous and Josias, without taking his eyes off the stage, declared in amazement what Nahum also knew. The audience loved it.

When the props of the palace scene were pulled back, the countryside screen was pulled into place and two young men carried the cave into the centre of the stage. A group of young women then surrounded the cave and began a dance with extravagant and theatrical gestures. The sound of thunder and lighting filled the hall. The candle bearers moved to the front of the cave. Henry's prelude for the witches began. It was the most ominous sound anyone had ever heard from an orchestra. It conjured fear.

The giant Sorceress glided onto the stage and everyone gasped. Her voice was like tremendous thunder. *Wayward sisters, you that fright the lonely traveller by night, Appear, Appear,* she called and two witches came from the cave at her bidding. *Say, Beldam, say, what's thy will, harms our delight and mischief all our skill.* The Sorceress, pleased with her entreaty, sang. *The Queen of Carthage, whom we hate, as we do all in prosperous state, 'ere sunset, shall most wretched prove, deprived of fame, of life and love.*

The chorus laughed horribly, *ho, ho, ho, ho, ho* and the Sorceress revealed her wicked plan to fool Aeneas into believing that he must depart for Italy. First we'll perform a trick, she told them. The royal couple must spend time alone, and the witches danced in terrifying fashion at this wickedness. They repeated their dreadful song. *Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, but 'ere we this perform, we'll conjure for a storm to mar their hunting sport and drive 'em back to Court.*

The sorceress then glided back behind a screen and when the witches returned to their cave there came the slow and beautiful echo sung by the two chorus groups. *In our deep vaulted cell,*

*vaulted cell, the charm we'll prepare, prepare, too dreadful a practice, too dreadful a practice, for this open air, for this open air.* It was magical and, after the furies had danced to the echoing tones of the music, the cave was carried offstage to the clamour of thunder and lighting.

The scene became Diana's sacred grove and the musicians played a delightful ritornello to welcome the entire Court. The chorus sang, *thanks to these lonesome vales, these desert hills and dales, so fair the game, so rich the sport, Diana's self might to these woods resort.* Dido's women then danced to entertain Aeneas and he showed them the prize of his hunting, a boar's head, which had tushes to rival those of Venus' huntsmen. Then, suddenly, Henry's musical conjuring trick of a storm filled the hall and great claps of thunder echoed across the stage. The Court hastened back to town and the wretched and vulnerable Aeneas stood alone in the dark.

On to the stage came the cloud that carried the false 'Mercury' aloft and this spirit, with compelling voice, addressed Aeneas. *Stay Prince and hear great Jove's command. He summons thee, this night, away. Tonight thou must forsake this land. The angry god will brook no longer stay. Jove commands thee, waste no more in love's delights those precious hours allowed by the almighty powers to gain the Latin shore and ruined Troy restore.*

Aeneas, shocked to have forgotten about his divine task, cried out. *Jove's commands shall be obeyed. Tonight our anchors shall be weighed.* False Mercury, his mission successful, disappeared behind his cloud and departed. Poor Aeneas. *But ah! What language can I try, my injured Queen to pacify? No sooner she resigns her heart, but from her arms I'm forced to part. How can so hard a fate be took? One night enjoyed, the next forsook. Yours be the blame, ye gods for I obey your will, but with more ease could die.*

Aeneas left the stage. Act Two was complete. The audience, in a highly charged and emotional state, sat motionless.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

### *THE PERFORMANCE ENDS*

The screens of the country scene were replaced with the screens depicting the docks. The prop movers laid out the barrels and when Henry's hornpipe struck up, the sailors began to dance and sing. *Come away, fellow sailors, your anchors be weighing, time and tide will admit no delaying, take a boozy short leave of your nymphs on the shore, and silence their mourning, with vows of returning, but never intending to visit them more.*

With the sailors still dancing, the great Sorceress returned with her witches. See, she bid them, *see, the flags and streamers curling, anchors weighing, sails unfurling, our plot has took, the Queen's forsook, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho. Elissa's ruined, ho, ho, ho.* The horrible group laughed long and hard, plotting another storm for Aeneas to contend with on the ocean, and the dancers danced to Henry's sounds of tragic destruction. *Destruction's our delight; delight our greatest sorrow, Elissa bleeds tonight and Carthage flames tomorrow. Ho, ho, ho. Ho, ho, ho.*

When the dockyard barrels had been removed and the props of the palace scene were in place, Nahum, gazing at the fateful staircase, felt only the foreboding that Dido must have felt. The Queen and Belinda entered slowly, forlorn. Henry's harpsichord conjured up the sadness and pain of Dido as she walked up the stairs. Half way up, she stopped, turned slowly around and sat on a step facing the audience.

Aeneas entered then and Belinda sang. *See madam, where the Prince appears, such sorrow in his looks he bears, as would convince you still he's true.* Aeneas approached them. *What shall lost Aeneas do?* He asked. *How royal fair shall I impart the god's decree and tell you that we must part.* Dido rose abruptly to her feet and walked down the stairs to face Aeneas. *Thus on the fatal banks of the Nile weeps the deceitful crocodile,* she exclaimed and on hearing this Aeneas cried out, *by all that's good,* but Dido silenced him. *By all that's good no more. All that's good you have forsworn. To your promised Empire fly and let forsaken Dido die.* Aeneas pleaded with her. *In spite of Jove's command I'll stay, offend the gods and love obey,* but Dido rejected him and her anger sang out. *No faithless man, thy course pursue, I'm now resolved as well as you. No repentance shall reclaim, the injured Dido's slighted flame. For 'tis enough what e'er you now decree, that you had once a thought of leaving me.*

When the royal couple sang their bitter argument, Nahum would have given anything to retrieve for them their time of innocent love. *Let Jove say what he will, I'll stay,* Aeneas offered, but Dido told him to go away. *I'll stay,* Aeneas insisted, but Dido cried, *away, to death I'll fly if longer you delay* and Aeneas, utterly distraught, turned from Dido and walked away.

Dido walked back up the stairs, turned around and sat on a step, her body weighed down, her face full of sorrow and her voice full of a sadness that was impossible to bare. *But death, alas, I cannot shun. Death must come when he is gone.* Her body fell backwards, resounding heavily against the stairs, and the chorus addressed the stunned audience. *Great minds against themselves conspire and shun the cure they most desire.* Dido recovered, raised herself slowly, tragically, and stretched out her hand to Belinda.

The music, like arrows, struck at the listening hearts. *Thy hand Belinda; Darkness shades me. On thy bosom let me rest. More I*

would but death invades me. Death is now a welcome guest. Belinda joined Dido on the staircase as the bass and the harpsichord notes gave the audience some forewarning of the tragedy to follow.

With not a sound in the hall, it was impossible to measure the power of those moments. Dido rose up again and, looking towards the harbour where her lost Aeneas was now departing, she sang. *When I am laid, am laid in earth, may my wrongs create no trouble, no trouble in thy breast; remember me, remember me, but, ah, forget my fate, remember me, but, ah, forget my fate.*

Dido fell back onto the stair and this time she did not stir. Belinda, sitting beside Dido, lifted her head in her arms. The moving platform, this time with cupids in the clouds, returned to the stage. When it was next to the staircase, the cupids scattered roses over Dido and Belinda and the candle bearers, holding lighted candles, entered. With great melancholy in their steps, they walked up the stairs, turned to face the audience and stood on either side of Dido's fallen body. The chorus, who had gathered at the base of the stairs, began their final song. *With drooping wings you cupids come, to scatter roses on her tomb. Soft and gentle as her heart, keep here your watch and never part.*

Belinda laid Dido to rest on the stair and with a simple drop of her own head she signalled the end. All was still and silent.

It was some considerable time before anyone in the audience moved and just as they were beginning to wonder how long this shared tribute of silence would last, Betterton rose to his feet and shouted 'bravo'. Then everyone stood and a great clapping filled the hall. Heads were shaking in disbelief and handkerchiefs were dabbing at tears. Josias clapped and shouted for all he was worth and then, suddenly, he told Nahum that they must return backstage.

By the time they reached the backstage area, Dido and Belinda were still receiving applause. Two pupils presented them with flowers and the Duchess shouted her 'bravo' full volume.

“Come to me,” the Duchess bid Elizabeth, when she returned backstage, “your beautiful presence was perfect for this tragedy.” She hugged the young performer and then returned to her clapping as John Gostling took to the stage. John was greeted with the tumultuous applause deserving of a hero and when the extraordinary Sorceress glided on to the stage, her long gown flowing, voluminous cheers rose up from the audience. Amanda Lockhart bowed gracefully to the hall from her platform and then a stage hand placed a ladder next to her platform. A young pupil climbed the ladder, presented her with flowers and returned to the stage. The sorceress glided back behind the screens, the applause still filling the hall.

After the assembly of performers had returned many times to receive their applause, there were cries for Henry. The young composer jumped onto the stage and gestured for others to join him. The Duchess pushed Josias and Nahum out to join him and the applause was rapturous. Josias motioned for Cecelia and the Duchess to come on stage and once there, two little cupids presented them with huge bunches of flowers. Josias waved at James Billingsley and Peter Beardsley, bidding them to come up to the stage, and loud shouts of ‘bravo’ greeted their arrival.

On and on, in great waves, came the sound of appreciation from the audience. The company of dancers returned, the company of singers returned and the musicians stood to receive the audiences enthusiasm. If anything the clapping got louder.

When all agreed that the audience should take a rest from their strenuous applause, Josias stepped onto the stage to make his speech. He motioned for the audience to become quiet, but the tide of excitement showed no sign of ebbing and when he tried to speak, he was too filled with emotion to make his voice heard. He thanked the audience briefly and returned backstage.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

### *THE HEAVENLY COUPLE*

Nahum tried to make for the courtyard to stretch his limbs and relax those muscles that had stiffened during the intensity of the drama, but he was stopped and congratulated at every step. Suddenly, Ellen was at his side and he had never seen her display such animated elation before. After each sentence she took out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes. After a string of such actions she declared that it was clear that he would now be famous. Nahum laughed.

“I’m delighted that the opera acted upon you so positively,” he exclaimed. “How about you, Harry did you enjoy it?”

“I think so,” Harry replied, “but when all this took place, did people sing to each other or did you make this up?”

“No, Harry,” said Nahum, smiling, “they spoke as we do, but an opera is an entertainment where words are converted into songs.”

“It’s a funny thing to do,” he said. “It makes people act strange, but I wouldn’t mind if we sung to each other sometimes.”

“And nor would I,” Nahum told him and he was still laughing when Button came to him, placed a kiss upon his cheek and bowed to him in a slow, graceful gesture.

“I had no idea that crying could give so much pleasure,” he declared. “It was the most moving hour of my life.” Nahum scolded him for teasing, but Button promised that he was not. “The opera is exactly how I like to be entertained,” he said, “but you are wrong about Dido.” Nahum regarded him closely. “What you said

about Dido was incorrect. She is angry. Hers is not a withering, broken heart; it's a heart that is passionately angry, if it were not, the Prince's departure would never have killed her." Nahum stood, thoughtfully, and Button, wishing to return to light heartedness told him that he would like to see more operas soon. "Do you have plans for another?" he asked and Nahum chuckled.

"I have never been in your company without laughing," Nahum told him, "and before today I have never received so many pats on the back or kisses on the cheek."

For most of the guests, *Dido and Aeneas* was their first taste of an opera and without exception they displayed great enthusiasm for it. John Blow was certain that opera would soon become the preferred form of musical drama and with uncontained excitement he declared that they were on the threshold of a new era.

Nahum could not imagine how this great tumult of euphoric excitement would ever die down and for the moment he didn't want it to. Anna told him that she loved it more than anything and when Henry and Frances joined them she told Henry that the songs were so uplifting they changed her relationship to the tragedy.

"I imagined that this opera would invite only sadness," she affirmed, "but this beautiful marriage of music, libretto and dance could only lift the spirits."

Henry placed his great arm about her and expressed his pleasure in hearing her words. "I could dance and sing all night," he enthused and, putting his arm about Frances, he asked if she would dance with him if the musicians agreed to play dance tunes.

"I cannot dance dressed like this," Frances laughed.

"Well, I know where costumes for all occasions can be found," said Henry, with a hint of mischief, and he pulled her up onto the stage where they disappeared behind the screens. Anna expressed her joy at their happiness and then a group of her old school friends greeted her and offered to show her the school.

Nahum made his way through the crowds, listening to excited chatter and sipping wine. John Blow and Nicholas Staggins congratulated him heartily, John claiming that the libretto was splendid. Nahum felt embarrassed and told the master of the King's Music that he was being kind to him, but John insisted that his libretto deserved more than polite kindness.

"You are the first librettist to be generous," he declared. "Most writers lay too much literature on the music, but you, dear Tate, you were perfect for Henry. You supported him and gave him a partnership. Without you he could never have done it."

Nahum felt tears in his eyes, he could never have expected such high opinion, and Nicholas, seeing his startlement, confirmed that his opinion was the same. Nahum thanked them and, when the crowd around the two engaged them in discussion, he moved on.

Seeing Eliza standing with Killigrew, Nahum moved quickly to join them in the little vestibule next to the library. He greeted Killigrew with a handshake and Eliza with a kiss.

"The opera is a most enchanting form," the director told him. "From now on there will be some enthusiasm for it at the Theatre Royal. Has our friend Betterton enquired about producing *Dido and Aeneas*?" Nahum said he wasn't aware of it. "Good," the director boomed. "Perhaps I should have a drink with the man and learn his intentions," and with that he departed.

Nahum, delighted to be alone with Eliza, asked if she had enjoyed her first contact with the opera.

"I was overwhelmed by it," said she. "You were right about the music, it's beautiful, and it expresses this beauty even when times are sad. I have never heard such sadness in music as Dido's Lament. You told me once that this was true and now I believe it."

Suddenly the sound of violins filled the hall and Eliza moved closer to see what was happening. Nahum followed her and there he saw Henry and Frances dancing together in the middle of the

floor. Henry was wearing the golden suit of Phoebus and Frances was wearing the blue robes of Venus. They were an extraordinary sight and a great circle gathered around them, clapping to encourage their dance. Nahum stole a quick glance at Eliza. His love for her had in no measure diminished and he doubted that it ever would.

The dance over, Henry and Frances moved across the hall to be with Nahum and, seeing his beautiful seamstress at his side, Henry told Eliza that he was honoured to meet her. When Henry introduced Frances as his inspiration in everything and the love of his life, Eliza threw Nahum a nervous glance. Nahum wanted his introduction to match Henry's, but he could not subject Eliza to this; it was too intimate. The seconds passed, he was losing time.

"This is Eliza Ashton," he declared and the austerity of the introduction was too much for him to bare. "In keeping with my profession," he continued, "I should like to honour Eliza with an introduction that communicates the place she has in my heart" - Eliza was shaking her head at him - "but as she is more beautiful to me than words and she will not allow me to praise her, I can only give you her name and hope that it will suffice as introduction."

Henry applauded Nahum's speech and asked Eliza if she enjoyed the entertainment. She said that she had been deeply moved and Henry declared that he felt this way about it also. He laughed and asked Eliza if he could ask a favour of her. Eliza bowed to him.

"I am in need of Nahum," said Henry. "If I can have him for a short while, I will return him to you in good spirits." Eliza consented.

Suddenly, Nahum had lost her. He wanted nothing in the whole world but to remain with Eliza. He took her hand, squeezed it briefly and asked if she would wait for him. Henry, who was already walking briskly off, pulling Frances behind him, called to Nahum who turned and followed the heavenly couple. He gave one glance back to see if Eliza was watching, she was, but she made no gesture and gave no sign.

*CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX*

*FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE*

Nahum followed the couple to the Lobby where Henry was asking Anna if she would assist him in an important matter. Anna directed a questioning gaze at Frances, but neither she nor Henry offered any hint of the reason behind their request. Henry apologized to Anna's school friends for disrupting their reunion, promised to return her to them shortly and, still holding onto Frances, walked off in search of John Gostling. Anna and Nahum followed behind, she enquiring if he knew anything about Henry's important matter. "Nothing," he replied, but when John Gostling enquired, Henry told him that it was a 'private celebration'. The honoured trio were led first to the north wing of the school and then into the chapel. Here, with the altar at their backs, the enchanted couple stood facing their invited guests - Henry in his shimmering gold suit as bright as the sun and Frances in the heavenly blue gown of the Goddess of Love.

"I solemnly declare," Henry began, "before you and this altar, that Frances and I have consummated our marriage."

"I knew it," Anna gasped and put a hand to her mouth. The three stood transfixed. Henry turned to John.

"My esteemed friend and Reverend," he addressed him, "Frances and I beseech you to perform a ceremony that will make our marriage official in the eyes of the Church."

Seconds passed like minutes, silent and frozen.

"I do not know what to say," John proclaimed, eventually. "My

intuition tells me that it would be prudent to take more time to consider such an important decision.”

“It would be a waste of time,” Henry told him. “Frances and I were certain of our marriage long ago.”

John glanced first at Nahum, then at Anna. He asked if it was likely that her family would consent to this marriage. Anna, considering the question carefully, told John that her mother was aware that neither Henry nor Frances would find happiness unless they were together. Nahum thought it the perfect answer and he beamed with appreciation. The Reverend Gostling turned to Henry.

“You do not need parental consent, Henry,” he confirmed, “but, if I do your bidding, it will not please my superiors. They will fine me for undertaking this ceremony without a license and without the necessary marriage bans being published.”

“I will gladly pay the fine,” Henry declared and he gazed insistently at his friend who remained in silent reflection. John, knowing that he would never dissuade Henry of a thing once he had set his mind on it, nodded his head and walked to the altar. Henry and Frances turned to face him and John, in every aspect the Reverend Gostling, stood before them. He directed Nahum and Anna to stand next to the bride and groom and he asked Henry and Frances to take off their rings and hand them to each other.

“Repeat after me,” he told Henry. “I, Henry Purcell...”

“I, Henry Purcell,” Henry repeated,

“take Frances Pieters...”

“take Frances Pieters...”

“to be my lawful wedded wife.”

“to be my lawful wedded wife.”

“To have and to hold... from this day forward... for better or for worse... for richer, for poorer... in sickness and in health... to love and to cherish... from this day forward... ’til death do us part.”

Henry’s eyes never left Frances throughout the entirety of his

vows and Frances did likewise, but her body trembled and her words crackled into silence at their edges. Anna was moved to tears and Nahum, his heart pounding, was overwhelmed by the power of this affirmation that is so public and yet so intimate.

“I now pronounce you man and wife,” John declared and as these words from the man of the church rang out they seemed to permeate everything and change, forever, the way things were. Henry and Frances kissed to confirm their marriage. Never was a kiss so full of meaning.

The Reverend John Gostling embraced the newlyweds, wishing them a long and happy marriage. Anna hugged and kissed them while jumping up and down. Their exuberance and laughter struck a profound chord in Nahum and, after congratulating them, he declared he would always remember their happiness on this day.

Henry, beaming like Phoebus himself, took his beautiful Venus by the hand, walked her back down the aisle and together they left the chapel as Mr. and Mrs. Purcell. John followed after, as did Nahum, but at the door he realised that Anna was not with them. She had remained at the front of the chapel and when Nahum returned to sit with her she uttered a long and plaintive sigh.

“Do you know, Nahum,” she announced, “my longing to be in love is more than I can bare. I am completely happy for Frances, but her marriage will consign me to the family forever. My life has no possibilities now, for I must assist my mother in everything.”

“Oh, Anna,” Nahum exclaimed, “this is not inevitable. Many things happen in life that cause it to change direction.”

“But you do not know my mother,” Anna sighed. Nahum tried desperately to find words of response, but it was Anna who spoke next. “Henry’s action was entirely heroic, wasn’t it,” she declared.

Nahum gave her a startled look and admitted that Henry’s determination was truly impressive.

“Could you have stolen me away?” Anna asked.

Nahum was uncertain about the intention of her question. “Oh! Anna I could not,” he stammered. “That is, I doubt that we would...” and Anna laughed heartily at his stumbling manner.

“Only if we had fallen in love, you silly thing,” said she.

“I would go to the ends of the earth for the woman I loved.”

“Good,” she declared, “I knew you would. So if I found someone like you I could be happy. It’s important that my husband loves literature for I must dedicate my life to study and writing.” Nahum nodded. “Will I ever find someone?” Anna asked, plaintively.

“Oh Anna,” Nahum exclaimed again, “your life has only just begun. Don’t be impatient. Love will find you. There’s nothing you can do to arrange it. Stay close to writers if you will, wait patiently if you can, but be certain that love will surprise you someday.”

Anna asked if he would henceforth regard her as a friend rather than a pupil and Nahum, insisting that she was already this, promised to meet with her regularly. Then, feeling that it was his turn to surprise Anna, he told her that he regarded Henry as his brother. Anna looked at him, startled.

“Well,” he exclaimed, “if my brother is married to your sister then we too are, in some manner, brother and sister.”

Anna beamed with appreciation, gave Nahum a kiss and the two walked hand in hand out of the chapel.

In the lobby, the Duchess was offering a toast to the married couple. Henry’s mother, Elizabeth, was crying, happiness the cause of her tears. She held Frances in one arm and Henry in the other. Henry’s uncle, Thomas, downed his cup at the toast, refilled it generously and drank from it again with great enthusiasm.

*CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN*

*WITH LOVE THERE IS ONLY GIVING*

The noise of chatter increased steadily as the news of the wedding spread throughout the school. Anna rejoined Frances, but shortly afterwards she returned to Nahum. He was talking with Thomas Flatman and he introduced Anna as his sister-in-law. The two laughed heartily and Anna added that she was also a fellow writer. Thomas got the gist of their game, but he learned that Anna's passion for literature was real. When he promised to send her his latest poems and to invite her to his future literary evenings, Anna was delighted and when he invited her to dance she had a sense, for the first time, that she might soon be able to describe her life with less of the sorrowful description she had given it recently.

Button and the Duchess were among the many partners dancing in the hall and the Duchess, despite finding it hard to remain on her feet, laughed uproariously as Button whirled her about wildly. When the music stopped the Duchess joined her friends and Button flew to Nahum, Anna and Thomas. Nahum introduced Button to Anna and she expressed some surprise at his name.

"Button? Button?" she repeated, thinking she had misheard.

"Yes, it's quite common," he replied, "it's a small disk or knob used as a fastener or an ornament." Anna laughed.

"Which of the two are you? She asked.

"I," Button announced proudly, "am an ornamental knob," and Anna, thinking of a possible interpretation of his words, put her

hand to her mouth and told him he shouldn't say so. "Indeed!" Button exclaimed, "but I have no talent for buttoning my lip."

"Then you had better tell me what your talents are," Anna said.

"I have a talent for being forward," he proclaimed, "not unlike your own. Do you have other talents you would admit to?"

Anna looked surprised. "Writing," she offered, timidly. "Nahum was my teacher. I should like to emulate him."

"Emulate Nahum, now there's an ambition," Button cried. "But a little advice if I may offer it. Don't write as much as he and try not to be over serious. Oh, and most importantly, move heaven and earth to avoid the heroic couplet."

Nahum gave his friend a slap. "He has little time for rules," he told Anna, "and even less for formal restraints."

"I will have you know," Button exclaimed, "that I adhere to Newton's law of gravity as well as any man."

Anna loved every minute of this repartee, but Button was in no mood to continue it and he bowed graciously to the startled girl before skipping onto the dance floor to find another unsuspecting soul to sweep and whirl about the hall. In response to Anna's questions, Nahum described Button's love of reversing habits of thinking and Anna did not take her eyes from him.

Horace and Mary came up to Nahum to announce their departure, and they too were introduced to Anna. Nahum told Mary that Anna had a keen interest in literature and Mary asked what had inspired it. Anna said she didn't know, unless it was her urgent need to express her feelings in words.

"That's an excellent place to start," Mary declared, "but what is it that interests you? What do you read?"

Anna was taken by surprise. "I read everything," she said, "but when an author takes me by surprise, then this is what I love."

Mary smiled and offered her card. "I may be in need of you," she said. "I would like it if we could arrange to meet. I'm involved

with a lot of things that might benefit from your assistance. Send me your address and we'll arrange a date to talk."

"How the world turns quickly around," Anna said to Nahum after she had thanked Mary.

"Indeed it does," Horace declared, "and before the night is out I must again be with the King. By the way," he added, turning to Nahum, "it's been a long time since I enjoyed the company of a boy like Harry. His inquisitive mind is delightful."

"I hope Harry will be a credit to your generosity," said Nahum.

"Nahum, you have entertained us extremely well. Thank you. You're a credit to us all. We will remember your opera forever."

Nahum embraced his friends and, as soon as they were away, Anna gave Nahum another kiss and ran off to give Frances her news. Nahum searched around for sight of Eliza and when he spied Killigrew putting on his coat he hurried over to him.

"Are you leaving?" he asked.

"Indeed I am," Killigrew affirmed and, giving Nahum a hug, he congratulated him again on the marvellous entertainment. "Here stands a man who will henceforth delight in his enthusiasm for the opera," he proclaimed. "Now, my dear, you must visit me soon for we have already started rehearsals for King Richard."

"I will certainly do this," Nahum replied. "Is Eliza accompanying you to London?" he added innocently.

"Oh no, my dear, she has returned with John Petty." Nahum felt his legs buckle under him. "I have no idea how my secretary came to be here," Killigrew added.

Nahum didn't speak. He stood transfixed by the red of the sky. He was thinking that as the light in the sky dimmed, so the light in Eliza's eyes would also diminish. Hearing nothing, as if lost to the world, Nahum accompanied Killigrew to his coach. He stood gazing up the lane long after he had finished waving to him. Then he heard the voice of Caroline's aunt, Elizabeth, behind him.

“And is all lost now?” she asked. Nahum turned to her.

“There’s nothing so final in love than the presence of another,” he said. “No good can come of my obsession now.”

“With love there is only giving,” she told him and Nahum, repeating her words, confessed his suspicion that Eliza would always be in his dreams.

“You must stop your repetition now,” she instructed him. “The time has come and you must let her move on.”

“Must I give up all hope?” Nahum asked.

“No,” said she, “but live without this particular hope.”

Nahum sat with Elizabeth in the courtyard, listening to her wise words. She told him that he must not imagine all of Eliza’s words to be hollow just because she returned to London with John Petty.

“There could be reasons to better inform your comprehension,” she told him and before the sound of her words was lost on the air Thomas and Button appeared. The two men, travelling to London together, had come to collect Elizabeth and they invited Nahum to accompany them. Anna also appeared then and Nahum saw no reason to leave. Button took Anna’s hand.

“Should Nahum visit you soon,” he declared, “I would like to be included in the invitation.”

Anna beamed at him and when Button lifted her hand to his lips, bowed to her in an exaggerated gesture of courtly chivalry and told her of his pleasure at meeting her, she burst into laughter and insisted that she did not believe one word he said.

“You should my dear,” Elizabeth whispered, and turning to Nahum she added, “this had to happen one day,”

## CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

### FAREWELL

Nahum and Anna were still sitting together when Ellen arrived.

“Nahum,” said she, “I’ve been looking for you everywhere.”

Harry, walking along in a daze, joined them and Ellen asked Nahum if they were to return to The Strand with him.

“Harry is so tired he could just about drop,” she told him and when the boy came to him and sat curled up on his lap, Nahum, felt a warmth that lifted the cloud from his brow. He asked Ellen to wait while he said his goodbyes and discovered what arrangements Henry had made for their return to London. Anna and he returned the lobby. Henry and Frances were there, in their own clothes, making ready to depart.

“I’m taking Frances and Anna to the City by coach,” Henry informed him, “would you join us?”

“Do you have room for three more?” Nahum asked.

“No, my mother, uncle, cousin, brother and sister are already enough to fill the coach.”

“Then I will not,” said Nahum. “I will take the boat with Ellen and Harry.”

“Is that wise?” Henry asked and Nahum, laughing, claimed that he would ensure that a Lambeth man had the oars. He had no idea how emotional or costly his goodbyes would be. First Cecelia hugged him passionately and asked if he had forgiven her.

“Oh, Cecelia,” he cried, “I could ask you the same question. We

will not talk of forgiveness for we have shared the making of a great performance. I will always cherish our time together.”

Then Nahum took Josias by the hand. There was still something self-consciousness that characterised their relationship, but when he told Josias how spectacular his dances had been, the choreographer beamed with happiness and declared his poetry fit for a King.

“How will we return to our mundane lives after this?” the dancer asked. “Maybe we should continue to make performances.”

The Duchess kissed Nahum squarely on the lips, embraced him heartily and, with tears in her eyes, took both his hands in hers.

“You must come to visit me regularly,” she told him. “Our being together has been extraordinary and I should like to think of this time as the beginning of something that does not have an end.”

Nahum promised to be with her as often as she wished and when the Duchess expressed her delight she added the news that she was about to retire from Court and would now be in need of his company more than ever. Nahum could not imagine how the Duchess could ever retire. He kissed her and blew several more kisses before entering the courtyard to join the crowd of Purcells and Anna standing by the coach.

Anna hugged him, thanking him for all his kindnesses.

“We will meet again soon, won’t we,” she asked.

Nahum promised they would and embraced Henry and Frances.

“I cannot express how much pleasure your marriage has given me,” he declared. “Your courage deserves a lifetime filled with love. I pray that Amy will soon learn that a love like yours cannot be held by the boundaries she thought to impose upon it.”

All but Henry then stepped into the coach and he, putting his arm about the poet, declared that on the subject of Amy he would like Nahum to visit them at The Spaniard tomorrow.

“We need your help to write her a letter,” he claimed.

“Such a task will require the finest literary skills,” Nahum told

him, “so I too will need some assistance. Do you happen to know of anyone who might have empathy for such matters?”

Henry laughed and, calling Anna to the coach window, he asked if she was ready for her first commission. Anna pretended at first that she was without confidence, but then announced that an elegiac poem in honour of the Great Mother would be appropriate.

“And we’ll write a sonnet in praise of love,” Nahum declared.

“Indeed we will,” Anna replied, “and we will stress the beauty of our theme with open vowels and rhyming couplets.”

Laughter filled the coach and Henry’s mother, Elizabeth came to the window to tell Nahum that he was a very special man.

“I’m very proud of you,” she said and Nahum was truly touched. Ellen, who was standing beside him, added her opinion.

“The whole world should be proud of him,” she declared and the crowded coach cheered her sentiments. There was much laughter in the coach long after they had travelled the length of Lover’s Lane.

The trio bound for The Strand made their way to the Beaufort Steps, where a number of school guests were waiting for a vessel to take them down river. Harry, suddenly awake, ran for the boats and threw himself into the first skiff. Nahum explained that he must wait his turn, but a generous guest at the front of the queue insisted that they should take the boat. Nahum thanked him.

Harry sat at the front, facing forwards, and Nahum and Ellen at the rear. The boatman handed them a blanket which they wrapped over their shoulders and, as the boat moved out into the river, a shiver of loneliness rippled through Nahum. He realised that he was leaving his previous life behind on that riverbank. *Dido and Aeneas* was over, it had defined his life and given him the greatest occupation. There is nothing so lonesome in the entire world as the end of a performance. He could not imagine how he would start something new or begin life afresh, but as surely as the boat was leaving land behind, with every stroke of the boatman’s oar, his ties

to Eliza were being severed. Any hope that she would one day be his must be left behind.

“You’re white, Nahum,” said Ellen. “Are you feeling unwell?”

He smiled hesitantly and told her that he was lost in thought. “You should not concern yourself,” he exclaimed.

“Your opera filled me with a wonder that will stay with me forever,” Ellen declared and Nahum, turning to her, said that it pleased him greatly that she said so. “I cannot compare the delight of this occasion to anything in my life and nor can I have any idea how anyone could begin to compose anything as beautiful as an opera. How is it that you know about these things, Nahum?”

Nahum smiled. “My dear Ellen, until recently, I knew nothing about opera.”

“Well, you must be the happiest man alive.”

“Yes,” said Nahum, “I’m so happy I could cry.” He turned his head to the water in case his tears should flow.

Ellen placed her hand gently in the centre of his back and its presence further affected his composure. Nahum’s sense of her touch was acute and he imagined that his heart lived somewhere there; Ellen’s hand was melting something frozen in him. He asked himself if it was possible that such a simple gesture could achieve so much. He turned to Ellen.

“I will live to play another day,” he affirmed.

Ellen nodded and moved so that Nahum could sit closer. They heard Harry shout to the boatman in the skiff ahead of them.

“Move over,” he demanded, waving his arms. “We have urgent business, you must let us pass.”

Ellen and Nahum laughed.

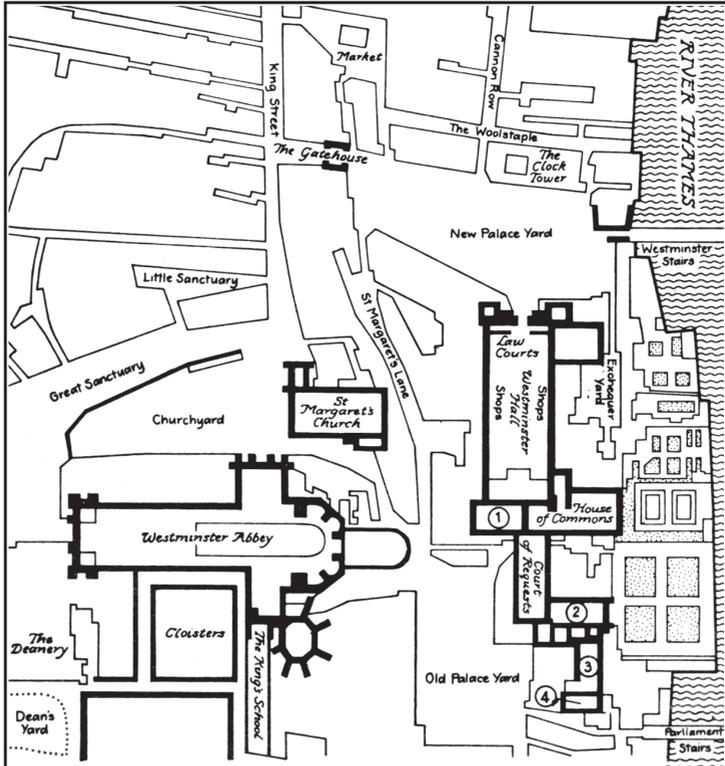




# APPENDICES

# MAPS OF RESTORATION LONDON

The maps on pages 297 – 303 are based on maps prepared by Professor T. F. Reddaway and published by Penguin Classics in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.



*Westminster*  
*The Abbey and the Houses of Parliament*

- 1 Court of Wards
- 2 Painted Chamber
- 3 House of Lords
- 4 Prince's Chamber



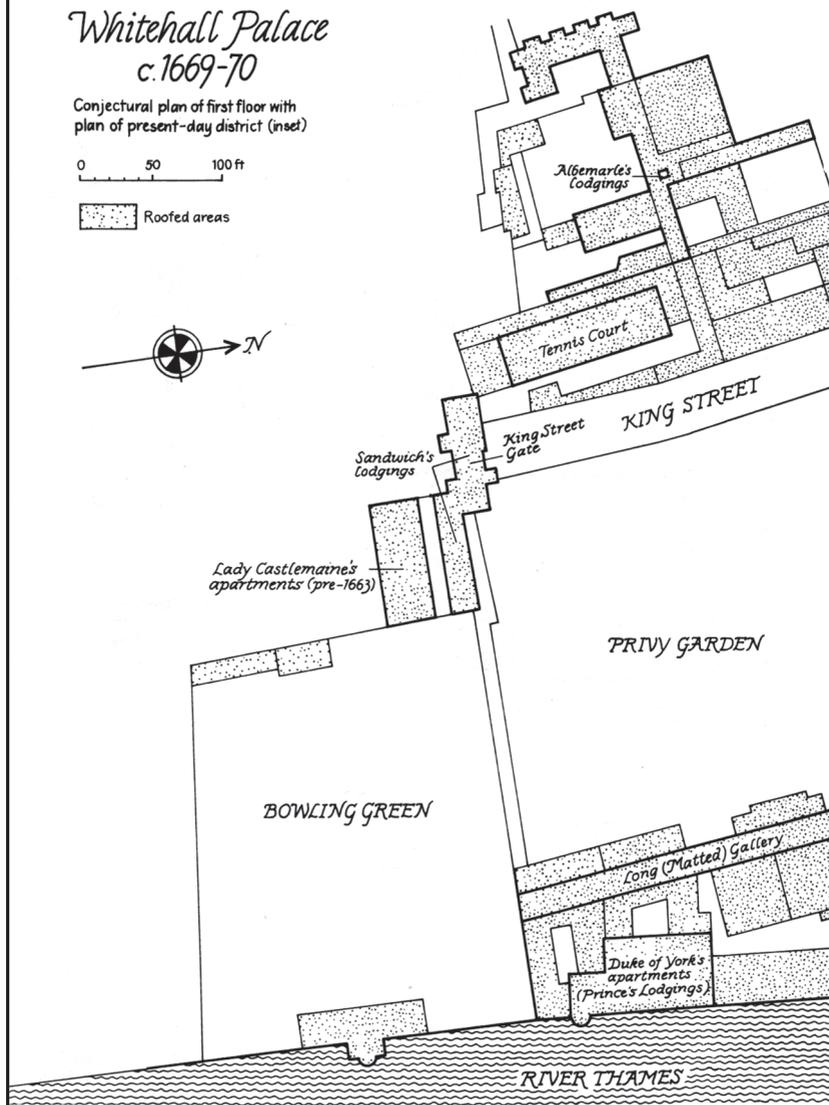
*Based on a map prepared by the late Professor T. F. Reddaway*

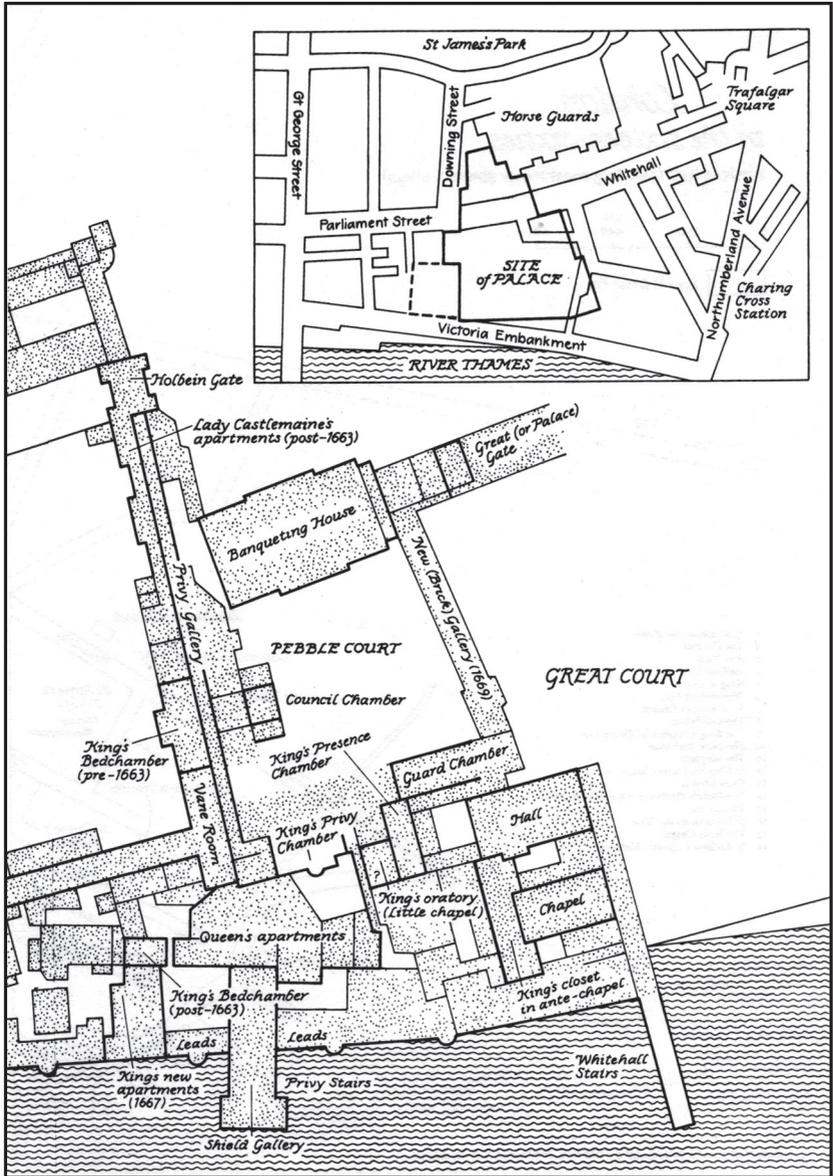
# Whitehall Palace c.1669-70

Conjectural plan of first floor with  
plan of present-day district (inset)

0 50 100 ft

 Roofed areas



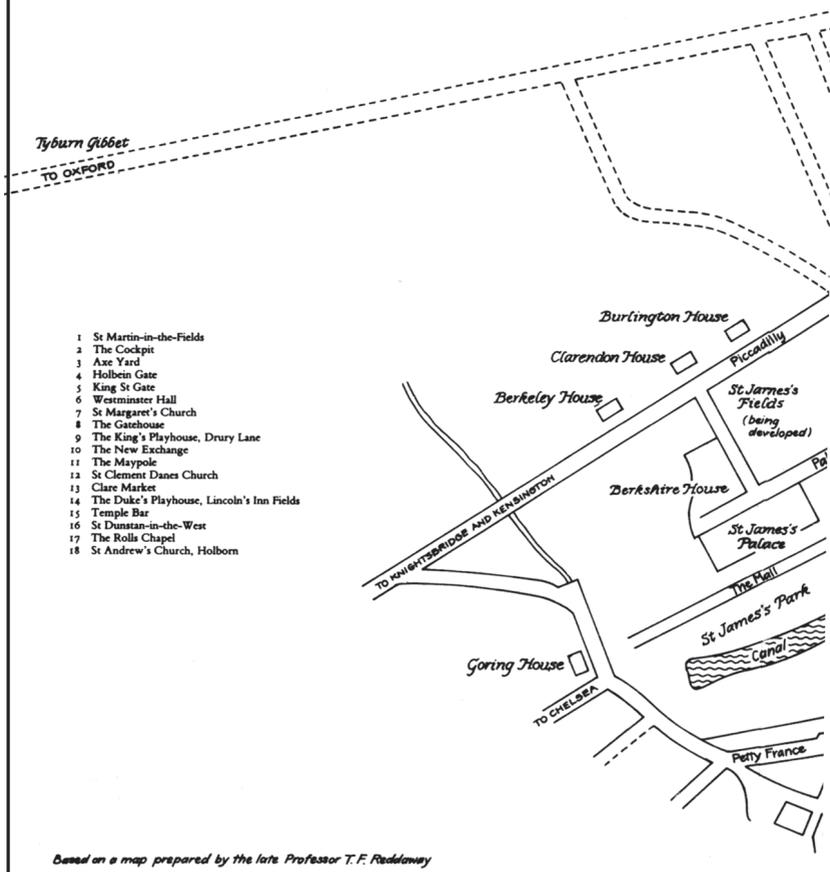


# London in the sixteen-sixties

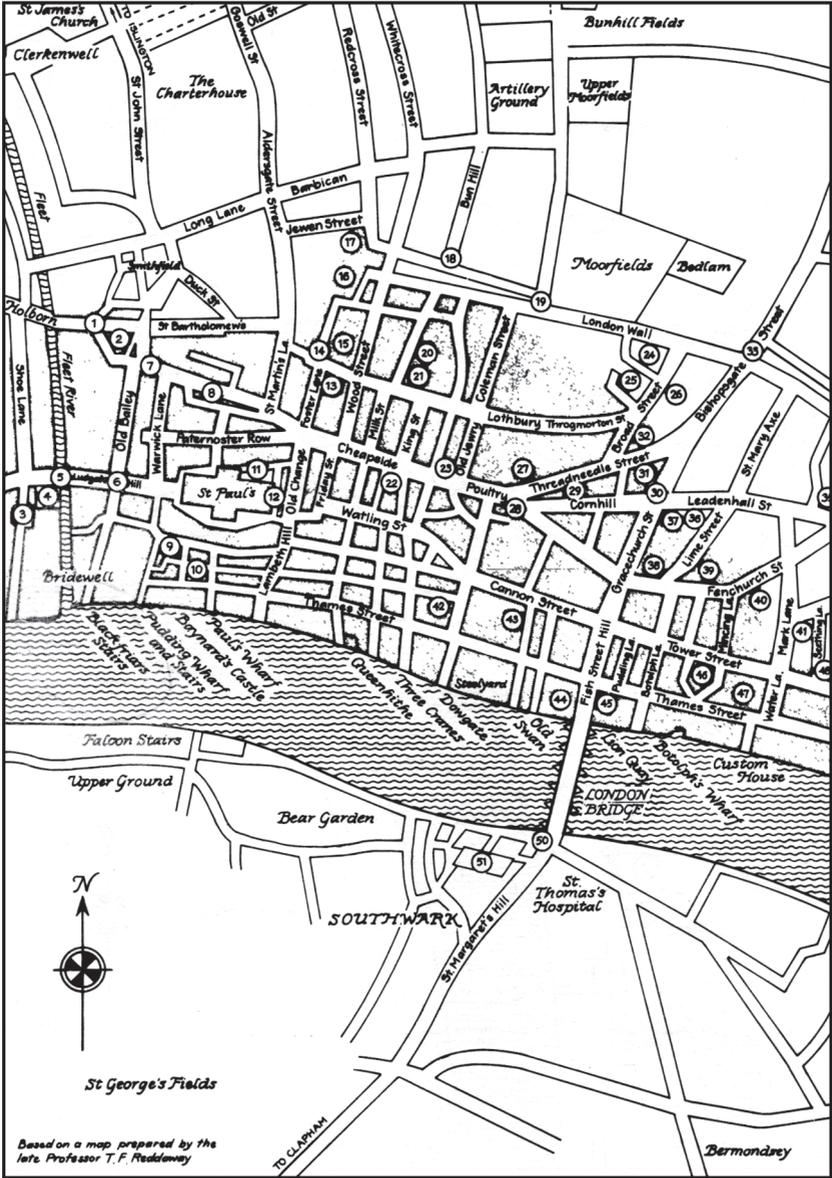
Western half (omitting most minor streets & alleys)

0 220 440 660 yds

 Area of Great Fire





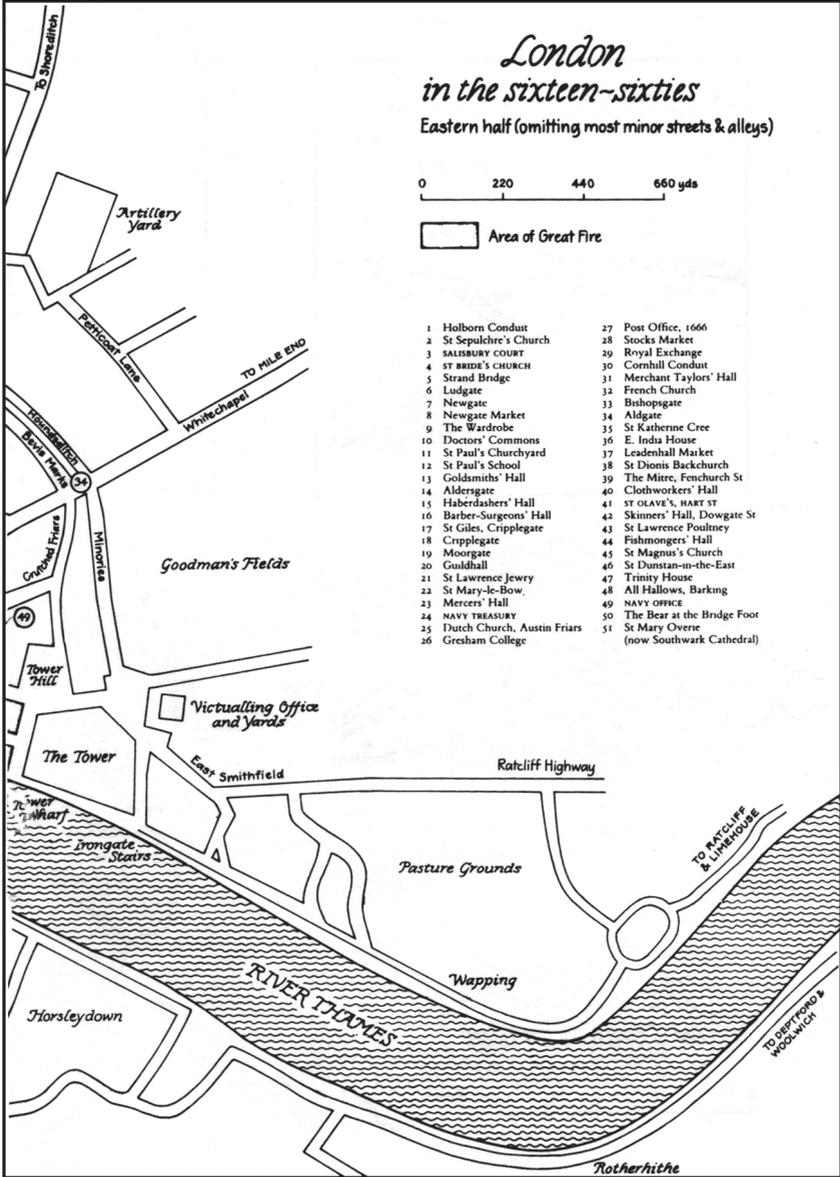


# London in the sixteen-sixties

Eastern half (omitting most minor streets & alleys)

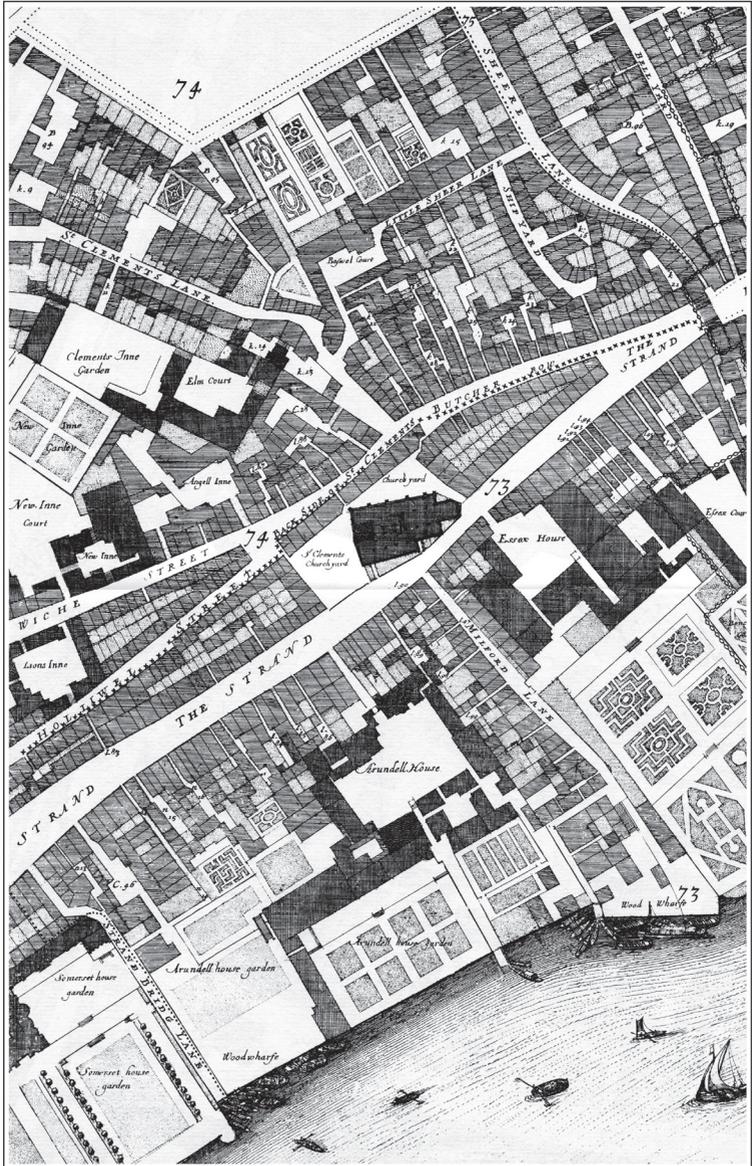
0 220 440 660 yds

 Area of Great Fire



- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Holborn Conduit              | 27 Post Office, 1666           |
| 2 St Sepulchre's Church        | 28 Stocks Market               |
| 3 SALISBURY COURT              | 29 Royal Exchange              |
| 4 ST BRIDE'S CHURCH            | 30 Cornhill Conduit            |
| 5 Strand Bridge                | 31 Merchant Taylors' Hall      |
| 6 Ludgate                      | 32 French Church               |
| 7 Newgate                      | 33 Bishopsgate                 |
| 8 Newgate Market               | 34 Aldgate                     |
| 9 The Wardrobe                 | 35 St Katherine Cree           |
| 10 Doctors' Commons            | 36 E. India House              |
| 11 St Paul's Churchyard        | 37 Leadenhall Market           |
| 12 St Paul's School            | 38 St Dionis Backchurch        |
| 13 Goldsmiths' Hall            | 39 The Mitre, Fenchurch St     |
| 14 Aldersgate                  | 40 Clothworkers' Hall          |
| 15 Haberdashers' Hall          | 41 ST OLAVE'S, HART ST         |
| 16 Barber-Surgeons' Hall       | 42 Skinners' Hall, Dowgate St  |
| 17 St Giles, Cripplegate       | 43 St Lawrence Poulney         |
| 18 Cripplegate                 | 44 Fishmongers' Hall           |
| 19 Moorgate                    | 45 St Magnus's Church          |
| 20 Guildhall                   | 46 St Dunstan-in-the-East      |
| 21 St Lawrence Jewry           | 47 Trinity House               |
| 22 St Mary-le-Bow              | 48 All Hallows, Barking        |
| 23 Mercers' Hall               | 49 NAVY OFFICE                 |
| 24 NAVY TREASURY               | 50 The Bear at the Bridge Foot |
| 25 Dutch Church, Austin Friars | 51 St Mary Overie              |
| 26 Gresham College             | (now Southwark Cathedral)      |

The maps on pages 305 – 307 are from *The A – Z Of Restoration London*, Introductory notes by Ralph Hyde, index compiled by John Fisher and Roger Cline. Published by Harry Margery in association with the Guildhall Library, London, 1992.



Nahum's walk from The Strand to Wood Wharf.



The Pieters' house, south of Little All Hallows Church



The maps on pages 309 – 311 are copies of originals in the collection of maps at the Kensington and Chelsea Library.







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