

NELL. *glows a little.*

And what else did Mr Hart say? 'Let's meet again tomorrow'?

NELL. Yep.

ROSE. What? Nell!

NELL. He's teaching me acting.

ROSE. But you're a woman.

NELL. He liked my positions. Said I'm natural.

ROSE. He's an actor!

NELL. So?

ROSE. They're bad types, actors. You can't trust anyone at the playhouse.

NELL. You make your coins here.

ROSE. Doesn't mean I like it. We need your orange money. If you come home without coins. Mother'll have you.

NELL. He thinks I might be good.

ROSE. You think he gives a sot about your acting? He wants you, Nell.

NELL. You don't know that.

ROSE. He's a man with desires. I know men.

NELL. So do I.

ROSE. Not like I do. You've never had - *(Beat. Can't bring herself to say it.)* You've just been lucky.

NELL. Hey, it's hardly likely to come to anything, but ... I want to try. Just in case.

START

Scene Three

An Actor-ess

A month later. THOMAS KILLIGREW, the theatre manager, has called a company meeting. So far only DRYDEN, the nervy playwright, NANCY, the dresser, and NED are assembled. KILLIGREW is evidently worried.

KILLIGREW. I suppose you've heard the news.

DRYDEN. What news?

EDWARD KYNASTON, *who takes the female roles, arrives in a fury.*

KYNASTON. 'What news?!'

NANCY. Wait for it...

KYNASTON. The crooks! The swindlers! The flaccid bottom-dwelling pig farts!

DRYDEN. What's the matter, Mr Kynaston?

KYNASTON. What's the matter? I'll tell you what's the matter. They've disgraced our trade. Ruined our art.

NED. Who has?

KYNASTON. Those muckweeds at the Duke's Company have... they have...

He can't bring himself to say it.

KILLIGREW. They've put a woman on the stage.

NED. A woman?

KYNASTON *(darkly)*. A whore.

KILLIGREW. Miss Davies is not a whore. She is an actress.

KYNASTON. A what?

KILLIGREW. An actor-ess.

NANCY. It's a lady actor.

KYNASTON. It's ridiculous, that's what it is. It'll be the death of theatre, I tell you!

DRYDEN. I don't know. We've got women in the company.

KILLIGREW. Nancy washes the stockings and sets the props. She doesn't take the lead.

NANCY. Miss Davies played Desdemona.

KYNASTON. That's my role!

KILLIGREW. And apparently she was rather convincing.

DRYDEN. Did it sell?

KILLIGREW. To the rafters. And now they're queuing all the way to Cheapside.

NANCY. Can you imagine?! We'll be writing plays next.

KYNASTON. Haven't you got laundry to do?

DRYDEN. Perhaps it was just a one-off.

KILLIGREW. Sadly not. They've commissioned a new season, with Moll in the lead. Etheredge is writing it for her.

DRYDEN. Dratting hell, I can't write for a woman!

KYNASTON. You won't need to, darling. Have faith. Audiences have taste.

KILLIGREW. Audiences want entertainment.

KYNASTON. I am entertaining.

KILLIGREW. But you're not Moll Davies.

KYNASTON. And what, pray, does she have that I don't?

NANCY. Tits.

KILLIGREW. Thank you, Nancy.

KYNASTON. Tits! What have tits got to do with it?

KILLIGREW. Unfortunately I think they have rather a lot to do with it.

KYNASTON. That's ridiculous. I have a perfectly rounded, pert pair of linen tits that I am very fond of, thank you. What's the fuss, anyway? It's not like anyone sees them.

There is an awkward pause. KYNASTON looks to KILLIGREW who looks pained.

(Quiet, slow.) Oh. She doesn't?! Barbarous! **END**

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KILLIGREW. She does.

KYNASTON. And people pay to see that?!

KILLIGREW. Some folk, Mr Kynaston, are rather partial to the female accoutrements.

KYNASTON. Then they should go to the bawdy house. Theatre is sophisticated, sublime, not a cheap tattle show where any old Nancy gets her knockers out.

NANCY. Hey!

KILLIGREW. He didn't mean you, Nancy.

KYNASTON. Desdemona?! It's sacrilege. At what point does Desdemona get her tits out?

'Good my lord, if I have any power to move you, prithee come apace and I'll show you my tits'?

KILLIGREW. They've done a rewrite, the bit with the pillow – it's all rather revealing.

DRYDEN. Are there any tickets left?

KILLIGREW. Dryden!

DRYDEN. Sorry.

KILLIGREW. If they start selling out, they'll run us into the ground. We may have to make... unpopular decisions.

KYNASTON. Is that aimed at anyone in particular?

KILLIGREW. The King has decreed that women should be on the stage. And he is our patron, don't forget. And who knows, it might be rather jolly to play a love scene with a real woman. Imagine. Juliet, a real lady with hopes and aspirations –

NED. And tits.