



THE
*King's
Bed*

Sex and Power in the Court of Charles II

"Narrating a libertine's life with gusto, a book that is as pleasantly addictive as might be suggested by its racy title. Wonderfully lively."

— *THE SUNDAY TIMES* (LONDON)

DON JORDAN & MICHAEL WALSH

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An excellent prince doubtless had he been less addicted to women.

John Evelyn

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

The sexual revolution began in the sixties – the 1660s. When Charles II of England, Scotland and Ireland ascended to the throne in 1660 he became pivotal to a sexual upheaval at the top of English society. The newly reconstituted royal Court of St James blossomed into a seraglio of pleasure. The Puritans' emphasis on chastity was cast aside and the court threw itself into a vortex of giddy sensuality. At the heart of the revolution were Charles and his many lovers.

While writing our previous book on Charles II, *The King's Revenge*, we became aware of just how important the King's mistresses were in the life of both court and monarch. When the people of London came out in the autumn of 1660 to watch the executions of some of those responsible for beheading the King's father Charles I, Charles II was cavorting with his current mistress, Barbara Palmer, the irresistibly sexy wife of one of his close supporters. From this contrasting tableau of torture and pleasure we began to consider to what extent Charles's mistresses had held power over his life. For example, had previous writers underplayed their importance? Contemporaries who wrote about their king certainly thought he spent too little time on affairs of state and too much time purely on affairs. This being so, we wondered if it might be possible to unravel something of Charles's character through these relationships. The result of these ruminations is the present book.

Charles not only loved the physical allure of women, he also adored their company – their society and gossip, the games, the rivalry, the coquetry. He surrounded himself with women, keeping former mistresses on his payroll in the royal seraglio at Westminster long after passion had abated. Some of his mistresses held such sway over him that they were in control of the relationship. This influence went beyond the bedroom to affect foreign and domestic policy. Barbara Palmer, who dominated the first decade of his reign, worked as a spy for France and connived successfully to persuade Charles to sack the most important statesman of the Restoration. His last great paramour, the Breton noblewoman Louise de K rouaille, was a French agent who helped pave the way for England to become a puppet of the Sun King, Louis XIV.

We felt that if a king could allow his mistresses such power, then the way to the core of the man would surely be via his relationships. *The King's Bed* traces the impact of women on Charles in an attempt to understand his personality. So many contrasting views have been provided as to his character – ranging from 'essentially loveable', according to Antonia Frazer, to 'cold', according to Professor Ronald Hutton – that we felt there was a case to reconsider this intriguing character in the light of the evidence provided by his private life.

Whitehall became a palace of fun, frequented by men and women who delighted in kicking over the sexual constraints of previous times. The libidinous king and his licentious court were the most potent symptoms of sudden and profound social change within the higher sections of English society. The years of the Restoration constituted an era of sexual liberation for women as well as men. For those who wished, and who had sufficient social standing, it was a time of increasing freedom and experimentation.

The King's Bed also tells the story of the role of Charles II and his many women within what has only just begun to be recognised – most notably by Professor Faramarz Dabhoiwala of Oxford University in his groundbreaking work *The Origins of Sex* – as a revolution which began during Charles's reign and grew apace during the following century. Charles did not drive the revolution but he was its figurehead. In an age when adultery and fornication were frowned upon, and in which the law and the church wielded severe sanctions against such behaviour, the fact that it became public

knowledge that the King had a series of mistresses heralded a turning point. The new licentiousness even had its cheerleaders in the playwrights of the day. In Restoration comedies, what mattered was not that adultery was committed but that it was committed with style. Suddenly, the sin was not the sex but a lack of panache.

Of course, up to this point, sexually promiscuous men like Samuel Pepys could, if they so wished, seek out and buy literary pornography, but they kept quiet about it. In the reign of Charles II, however, cracks in sexual discipline began to appear at the highest levels of society. Ultimately this led to the question being publicly posed – might not consenting adults do what they pleased, within reason? Put together with then-current ideas about sexuality, including the belief that women had to have an orgasm to conceive, the new freedoms Charles's reign brought in provided a sexual playground, albeit one in which men continued to hold most of the advantages. And no one had more advantages – and more sexual partners – than the King.

It became clear to us that Charles was not simply the randy king portrayed so often. It was more than that: women were an obsession with him. Among those he lusted after were some who became famous historical figures, such as Lucy Walter, Nell Gwyn and Barbara Palmer. There were many, many more we don't know about, one-nighters smuggled up from the river under darkness, then up a stairwell from a private jetty, for a quick fling in an anteroom kept specially for the purpose. The women varied from the rumbustious to the mild-mannered, from the brazen to the calculating, from common prostitutes to actresses and aristocrats. They all played their part in the King's sensuous dream world.

So this is not a book simply about Charles; it is also about his women. We cannot hope to tell the stories of all of them – the identity of many is simply not known. But we do know a good deal about many of them. The most important were the subject of constant gossip, appearing in bawdy ballads sold for sixpence a pop, in memoirs, diaries, letters and even – such was their prominence – official diplomatic reports. And all these and more were the sources for this work.

We decided we must recount what finally became of Charles's major mistresses and his numerous children. Without them, British life would be less varied and certainly less interesting. Together, the women and their offspring have created a surprising legacy that has come down to us today. Thanks to them, Charles's personal life is now more relevant than ever.

Britain is on the threshold of having its first monarch descended from Charles II's illegitimate line. At the time of writing, we have yet to experience the ascent of Charles III, yet it seems the nation can hardly wait for the coronation of King William V, descended from Charles II through his mother via two illegitimate blood lines.

In the meantime, the memory of Charles, the man, stays with us to amuse, infuriate or be venerated. We hope that this examination of his personal life will add something to the understanding of this most enigmatic of public men, while at the same time entertaining the reader. It is hard not to envisage him still, with his dark, knowing eyes evaluating how he might seduce a lady or escape a tedious meeting of council, his long legs anxious to be off, tearing out of the palace on his long legs as if the devil was at his tail, loping towards St James's Park or leaping onto a horse or into a coach to take him to Newmarket or his latest mistress. Whatever one thinks of him, Charles was never dull. In an age when there was much to fear, including the pox and the plague, what Charles feared more than anything was to be bored.

THE LAST SOIRÉE

It all unravelled so quickly. As on most evenings, he strolled through the palace after supper to visit his mistress.¹ Leaving his private apartments beside the river, he walked north through the maze of the old Tudor buildings and came to the entrance to another suite of rooms directly ahead of him. Behind this door lay the Queen's personal apartments.² There had been a time when he would have gone straight in, but a dozen or more years had passed since then. Their marriage had soured early on when it became clear that the Queen, though she could conceive, could not bear children that survived to full term. The Queen now spent an increasing amount of time at her other apartments in Somerset House, half a mile downstream. He turned away from her door and headed west towards the Privy Garden. As always, his spaniels ran ahead, knowing their way. They considered the palace to be theirs as much as the King's, even breeding in the King's apartments and permeating the palace with the sour perfume of their milk.³

It was the evening of Sunday, 31 January 1685. King Charles II of England, Scotland and Ireland was four months off his fifty-fifth birthday. He was a little the wrong side of his prime but still generally jovial and relaxed. For the last twenty-four years he had enjoyed life in the old palace of Whitehall. The palace had grown in spontaneous fashion, his father and grandfather, and before them Elizabeth I and Henry VIII, all adding to it until it became a sprawling collection of buildings of evolving styles along the banks of the Thames. It was home to a vast array of residents: royal relatives, both near and distant, mistresses current and passed-over, court favourites, amusing confidants, tedious advisors, well-fed Beefeaters, bawdy laundresses, gentle seamstresses and household and kitchen staff of all varieties, along with the King's personal herbalist, his chemist, pimpmaster and pox doctor. All these and more lived cheek by jowl, a whole city crammed into a palace.

Zigzagging through the maze of interconnecting rooms, the King passed through an ornate doorway and into the Long Gallery – a grand sweep of two hundred and ten feet of faded grandeur. The once-lovely Holbein ceiling was pockmarked with ad hoc repairs, but the vista ahead of him was still one of graceful, even regal beauty.⁴ The gallery ran along the east side of the Privy Garden, where the austere Tudor formality Charles had enlivened with statuary and ornaments, including one of his most prized objects, a fabulous French sundial embellished with glass orbs and painted portraits of himself, the Queen, several of his mistresses and all of his twelve recognised illegitimate children.* It had been a monument to his love of science and women, and to his pride in his progeny. The sundial was missing now, destroyed by that mischief-maker, the Earl of Rochester. Returning from a drunken night on the town, Rochester had taken exception to the dial's unfortunate phallic shape, or perhaps to the portrait it bore of the King. Shouting, 'What, doest thou stand here to fuck time?' he laid into the offending dial with his sword, reducing it to splinters.⁵ The next day, the Earl fled from London, but he was eventually forgiven and returned to court. Five years later, syphilis and alcohol took him away for good. Charles would never need to banish or pardon his infuriating friend again.

On the other side of the garden lay the rooms of another intoxicating personality the King had at one time or another banished and pardoned. This was the most sensational of his many lovers, Barbara Palmer, Duchess of Cleveland, whose voracious sexual appetites had once thrilled him with all the

‘tricks of Aretin’, alluding to an Italian writer of bawdy poetry.[†] Some said Charles had starved his fleet of resources to lavish money upon her, leading to a humiliating military defeat in 1667 when the Dutch navy sailed up the River Medway and surprised the English fleet at anchor.⁶ Despite past difficulties, including amorous indiscretions, the Duchess was now back in the palace but no longer in the royal bed. The woman who held that honour had rooms at the southern end of the Long Gallery, towards which the royal spaniels were leading the way.

As the King made his elaborate progress, an older, more austere figure was also heading for the same suite of rooms: John Evelyn, the polymath and diarist, a man of Renaissance abilities who managed to be both a trusted ally of the King and a stern critic of his rule by the simple expedient of confiding his censures solely to his diary. Evelyn was one of the founders of the Royal Society and had made his name as a horticulturalist. He wrote on many scientific and religious topics and was trusted with important work for the government. A strongly religious man, Evelyn did not like the profane life in Whitehall.⁷ In a court filled with vice and licentiousness, he cut an incongruous figure.

By this time of the evening, Evelyn would have preferred to be seven miles away down the river at Deptford, where he lived at Saye Court surrounded by his books and two hundred acres of gardens. This evening, business had detained him at Whitehall, requiring him, as it so often did, to stay on and attend the court soirées. If Evelyn had a fault, it was that he had a saint’s delight in seeing how sinners lived and in recording the scenes for posterity.⁸

The King’s progress through the Long Gallery was slow. Years of over-indulgence had taken their toll and he was no longer as vigorous as before. An attack of gout clung on tenaciously and he had an abscess on his heel that refused to mend.⁹ Nor were the contents of the gallery what they had once been. In his father’s day it had held more than a hundred paintings, including the finest works by Correggio, Titian and Raphael. Following his father’s execution the paintings were sold and scattered across Europe. With limited resources he had attempted to restore the collection. Though the best were gone for ever, he rescued some favourites. One was a family portrait by Van Dyck, depicting his father and mother, his sister Mary, aged one, and himself at the age of two. He had been Prince of Wales then, heir to three thrones. Of the family group and its painter he was the sole survivor. His father had gone first in 1649, dying at the age of forty-eight on a scaffold scarcely two hundred feet from the entrance to the gallery. His mother died in 1669, possibly of an accidental overdose of the opiates she took for her bronchitis. His sister Henrietta Anne, to whom he was very close, died next in 1670, at the age of twenty-six, possibly poisoned by her husband Philippe, the openly homosexual brother of Louis XIV of France. Charles had been king now for twenty-five years and for all of those he had sought consolation for his family’s calamities in the pursuit of sexual pleasure.¹⁰

In the apartment at the end of the gallery a sociable crowd had gathered. *She* was at its centre – Louise de Kérouaille, Duchess of Portsmouth, his mistress-in-chief, holding sway over a court within a court. From the moment she awoke in the morning her role was to be beautiful and available. More than that, she had to be on display. Before dressing, she would sit before her mirror and pose, her nightclothes artfully arranged to show off her beauty – including a good deal of flesh – to advantage. Courtiers and young gallants came to her boudoir as if to a *tableau vivant*, to gaze upon her. Maids fussed around, brushing her lustrous dark hair, discussing her selection of clothes and jewellery and her appointments for the day ahead.¹¹ Her sexual power irradiated the room. Once, another woman had held this position, that of chief courtesan, the King’s consort in everything but title. This woman, the beautiful and voluptuous Barbara Villiers, whose marriage to Roger Palmer had resulted in his being cuckolded by the King and given an earldom in return for his wife, had ultimately been dropped from favour, but not before she had given the King five children. Well over a decade had passed since Louise had replaced Barbara, causing a sensation across the country, as she was notoriously both

Catholic and French.

Most mornings, ~~he~~ was among her admiring visitors, basking in the flattering remarks – for to flatter her was to flatter him. Her morning ritual was a piece of theatre reinforcing her position as the most alluring, the most desirable, the most radiant woman in the land. As the King's mistress she was an object of greater desire and envy than the Queen, wielding power and influence over the King and with access to his wealth. For those who had hoped that the King's return from exile would mark a return of the monarch as a living symbol of divine rule, here was the all too fleshy refutation of the myth. If anything was a symbol of the human appetites and mortality of the King, it was the image of his mistress in her palace within a palace, an emissary from the powerful court of Louis XIV, the Sun King, who bankrolled his cousin's inferior court in London. In all her pomp and display, Louise was the embodiment of the failure of Charles's reign to allay the religious fears of his subjects, to reconcile the divided aspirations of those he ruled over, or to become a viable symbol of the national self-image.

With his short but painful journey at an end, footmen bowed and swung open the doors, and King Charles II entered his own earthly paradise. Its perfection had been achieved at huge expense – he had paid for these rooms to be torn down and rebuilt three times before *she* had been satisfied. The Queen had to make do with rooms on which little or nothing had been spent in twenty years.¹² The grand salon was decorated in the style of a French palace, which was hardly surprising, as its furnishings had largely been donated by Louise's other benefactor, Louis XIV. The apartment was described by John Evelyn as 'ten times' more magnificent than that of the Queen. Rich tapestries covered the walls, depicting landscapes in which sat French royal palaces including Versailles and the Louvre. Each tapestry was ten feet high and nearly seventeen feet long. Hanging in a room beside the flat banks of the Thames, the tapestries provided a window onto a rolling Arcadian, and very French, dreamland. One tapestry even depicted the Sun King himself hunting boar in parkland in front of the incomparable Chateau de Monceau.¹³

There could be no doubt on the part of a visitor that these tapestries adorned the walls of a woman of power – a woman sponsored by not one but two kings. Solid silver tables and Japanese lacquered cabinets stood about, containing vases of gold and silver. Behind all this lavish decoration lay the cold fact that the French king had encouraged the liaison between Charles and this woman in order to cement treaties between the two nations in 1670 – parts of those treaties still remained secret, including Charles's pledge to convert to Roman Catholicism.

The King was greeted by a relaxed and opulent scene. Music played while many of the indulged and indulgent guests played cards. The huge sum of £2000 in gold coins lay wagered on the table.¹⁴ Apart from Louise herself, at least two of the King's former mistresses were present, the Duchesses of Mazarin and Cleveland. The sexual relationships between many of those in the room were so deliberately intertwined and exaggerated that they could best be described – like the décor itself – as baroque. It was no different for Charles himself. At one time or another he had thrown aside both Mazarin and Cleveland for their sexual infidelities, only to forgive them and allow their return to court. Such was the aura of sexual liberation for both sexes in the court that many of those present would have known one another in the most intimate manner. It was a time of freedom and sexual experimentation. Mazarin was infamous for her multiple affairs with both men and women, including, it was rumoured, Anne Lennard, the King's daughter by the Duchess of Cleveland herself (though some said Anne's father was really the Earl of Chesterfield). No one went so far as to claim Barbara's husband Roger Palmer was the father. As a French boy sang love songs and gallants paid extravagant compliments to ladies, gold coins clattered brightly across the gaming table and an aura of relaxed and luxurious decadence flooded the room. Charles felt at home.

John Evelyn, on his arrival, felt the exact opposite. He looked around, taking everything in with the eye of a recording angel, or at least of a disapproving intellectual. He observed every detail: the King's mistresses – those 'abandoned and prophane wretches' – and the courtiers who had wheedled their way into the King's confidence – those 'crafty men'.¹⁵ Evelyn was no late convert to attacking the way the royal court was run. As early as 1662 he had recorded reckless levels of gambling with dice, with the King playing his part and women losing heavily. Evelyn described such scenes as 'wicked folly', suggesting that the court should be 'an example of Virtue to the rest of the kingdome'.¹⁶ Twenty-three years later, little had changed. Evelyn expressed his dismay:

I can never forget the inexpressible profaneness and luxury, gaming and all manner of dissoluteness and as it were total forgetfulness of God (it being Sunday evening) . . . the King sitting and toying with his concubines . . . It being a scene of utmost vanity; and surely as they thought would never have an end.¹⁷

But it would have an end – and soon enough if they all but knew it. The gathering that shocked Evelyn was to prove the King's last night of pleasure in a life full of sensual gratification. When it was late and he was sated with enjoyment, Charles made his way back to his chambers and to bed. Courtiers remarked they had rarely seen him in better spirits.¹⁸ In the morning, he rose early as usual. He went to relieve himself and staggered out of the water closet confused and incapable of speech. He rallied a little but at eight o'clock, as he was about to be shaved, he cried out in pain and fell back in his chair in convulsions.¹⁹ Before the week was out he would be dead.

* The sundial, designed by the priest-philosopher Francis Line, is described as 'rising tree-like from its stone pedestal. Comprising altogether more than 250 units, there were six main pieces of the dial in the form of stacked circular tables and large globes supported by iron branches . . . Round the tables were dials showing time according to various historical and foreign forms of reckoning, above them glass plates bearing portraits of the royal family.' (Anita McConnell, *Dictionary of National Biography*).

† Pietro Aretino, a sixteenth-century Italian writer credited with inventing literary pornography with his sonnets, *Sonetti Lussurioso*.

THE MAKING OF A PRINCE

Charles's early years were marked by a struggle over his soul. While his mother, Henrietta Maria, was initially disappointed over his looks, she decided that at least his soul should be unblemished. She became determined that he should be brought up not in the religion of his father but in that of her native France, Roman Catholicism.

Charles was born on 29 May 1630, in a palace located on the site of an old leper hospital. This was St James's Palace, built to the orders of Henry VIII on the confiscated lands of an abbey whose monks had run the hospital dedicated to St James, the patron saint of lepers. * To begin with, Charles did not look as if he had the makings of a lothario. He was a large, sullen child and not at all good looking. The Queen complained about his dark complexion and wrote to her sister, 'He is so ugly that I am ashamed of him.'¹

As was the custom for royal princes, Charles was brought up in his own household, first at St James's Palace and later at Richmond, where he had a retinue several hundred strong. It included some suitable boys of rank to play with, including George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham, who was brought up in the royal household after his father's assassination by a renegade soldier. Villiers and the Prince became great friends, but in later life their friendship would turn to enmity, and Buckingham would even threaten the security of the throne.

Charles spent a great deal of his childhood separated from his mother and father, though by all accounts they were loving parents. During his infancy, Mrs Christabella Wyndham, the daughter of a Cornish landowner and wife of Sir Edmund Wyndham, a career soldier, was appointed as one of his nurses. She held this position until Charles was five, when she left the royal entourage. Ten years later she would reappear in the Prince's life in a most sensational fashion.

Charles's schooling was haphazard. The capable Earl of Newcastle became his governor, responsible for running the Prince's household and for his education. Though he could have taught Charles much, his visits to the boy were sporadic. To make up for his absences he wrote excellent letters that must have been music to the ears of a small boy. Newcastle was of the opinion that the Prince should not be too studious, for 'contemplation spoils action.' He also felt that 'I would rather have you study things than words, matter than language.'² The Prince took his mentor's words to heart, developing grace and style rather than any great learning. While charm would become one of Charles's abiding characteristics, so too would a phobia of reading. Here at the outset was formed the young man's habit of not thinking too deeply about any subject or issue, a practice that would bedevil his adult life and drive his more serious-minded ministers to distraction.

When Charles was eleven, Newcastle resigned as governor. He had spent £4000 on his duties, a sum he felt was quite enough, especially as it was the tip of a financial iceberg he had expended on trying (and failing) to gain a major position at court. With Newcastle's departure as governor, Charles was tucked under the wing of his mother. Henrietta Maria was to have a great influence upon her son. She took him to her private Roman Catholic chapel at Somerset House. The chapel was a 'lavish setting for the mass' designed by Inigo Jones. Among its adornments was a large painting of the royal family by Peter Paul Rubens. No finer setting could have been imagined for the introduction to the Catholic religion of the heir to a Protestant throne.

Inevitably word got out and a public storm erupted over rumours of the Prince's possible apostasy.

The King, who had complacently facilitated the debacle by encouraging his Queen to build a Catholic chapel in a royal palace, ensured that his heir was again given a suitable Anglican guardian. The task fell to the bookish but aged Earl of Hertford, who kept the Prince at Hampton Court, away from his mother's supposedly corrosive influence.

The matter of the Prince's religion did not go away and it was debated in Parliament. Concern over his mother's influence continued, with Parliament stipulating that the boy should be prevented from having contact with her. Here lay a problem that was to persist throughout Charles's life and his future as a king: the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism were enmeshed within his own family, between the faiths of his father and his mother and between those of their native countries.

Gradually, Charles grew into an agreeable youth, quick to see a joke and eager to learn about life. He began to take on his adult form, with a sallow complexion, black wavy hair and tall, athletic frame. The well-known portrait by Peter Lely from the 1660s captures his likeness well – the heavy lower eyelids and pronounced lower lip, and the early downward movement of the cheeks into jowls. Even on a canvas, Charles was no oil painting. But his quizzical good humour and restlessness shine through. He sits in his royal regalia, with his left hand clutching the arm of his gilded chair as if he might at any moment raise himself to be off. The pose, together with the fact that Lely never quite resolves the gaudy regal robes into a viable colour scheme, makes the painting appear initially ungainly. Longer inspection reveals that the painter has captured a great deal of the spirit of the man. If one forgets the regal clothes and setting, Charles looks for all the world like a canny gypsy horse breeder, anxious to be up and away from the painter's gaze and about his business, buying or selling horse or seducing the owner's daughter.

Once Charles entered his teens, his parents began to think of suitable marriage partners. Two possible candidates were considered. The Queen favoured a match with Louise Henrietta, the daughter of Frederick Henry, the Dutch Prince of Orange, though Louise was three years older than the Prince. When this was turned down by Frederick, the Queen turned her ambitions to a prize of much greater value, Anne-Marie Louise d'Orléans, Duchess of Monpensier, the phenomenally rich French heiress who was closely related to the French royal line. While Henrietta Maria harboured dreams of this paragon of position and wealth marrying her boy, the Duchess, also three years Charles's senior, had her own dreams of marrying the child king Louis XIV. She even called him 'my little king'. In the event, neither marriage would come to pass. Another possibility was a marriage to the eight-year-old Infanta Joana of Portugal, the daughter of King John IV, but this idea too came to nothing. Joana was the younger sister of Princess Catherine, who would decisively enter Charles's life at a later date.

As the Prince grew up, the fractious relationship between King and Parliament was rapidly deteriorating, taking with it any chance of reconciliation on taxes and control of the military. Relations had broken down irreconcilably by 1642 and war broke out. Charles was by then a spirited youngster who loved action rather than learning and was already an accomplished horseman. That October, at the first set-piece battle of the war, near the village of Edgehill in Warwickshire, the twelve-year-old Prince exhibited bravery in the face of danger. When an enemy force unexpectedly broke through the royalist lines near the spot where Charles and his younger brother James were stationed, the Prince drew his pistol and shouted, 'I fear them not!' and made ready to charge before cavalier grabbed the reins of his horse and led him away from danger.

Neither the Parliamentarians nor the King were to gain the quick victory both expected. The war fragmented into several theatres of battle spread across the country. By the spring of 1645, when the conflict had lasted two and a half years, the King became worried about the future both for himself and for his immediate family. The Queen had already left for France, taking with her Henrietta Anne her youngest child. The next youngest royal children, Elizabeth and Henry, were in London where they were held virtual captives on the order of Parliament. The Prince of Wales and brother James were

with their father at his headquarters in the royalist city of Oxford. For reasons of military strategy and for safety's sake, the King decided the Prince should no longer reside at Oxford, but should instead move to Bristol.³

In the south-west, the war was not going well for the royalist cause and the various local commanders were arguing over the best way forward. Seeing a means both to unite the forces in the west and to detach his eldest son from his side, King Charles appointed the Prince commander-in-chief of his Western Army. Although the title was largely honorary, the Prince was expected to act as a rallying point for deteriorating royalist efforts, allowing the King to concentrate on prosecuting the war elsewhere.

Aged a little less than fifteen, Charles left his father's headquarters at Oxford and for the first time in his life was expected to strike out in an autonomous role of importance. He was instructed to set up his flag in the royalist stronghold of Bristol where he had the military title of Captain-General, with his own royal court and council to make policy, with the Prince as a participant but without any veto. He left Oxford on 4 March.

At Bristol, the Prince entered a viper's nest. The local royalist grandees had failed to raise sufficient troops for the task at hand and quarrelled endlessly over who should defer to whom in military command. To make matters worse, Charles's flamboyant cousin Prince Rupert of the Rhine was in the West Country recruiting forces. Since Rupert was one of the royalists' best commanders, where did this place his much younger royal cousin in the pecking order? With forces raised by the local gentry, the idea of control going to a foreign commander, no matter how brilliant, was difficult to accept. In the circumstances, the Prince's advisory council found it equally difficult to assert its authority, even with the political heavyweight Edward Hyde, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as one of its members. The local grandees saw Hyde and the council as being peripheral to their efforts and a threat to their authority.

Hyde was the foremost royalist statesman of the time. He had come to politics after an academic career in which he had developed a strong liking for historical research into the nature of English political life. Though immersed for so much of his life in the maelstrom of contemporary affairs, Hyde was by temperament never happier than when surrounded by his books in quiet study and reflection. He believed strongly that the ancient constitution of England was essentially sound and could, with judicious negotiation and compromise, provide a framework in which both sides in the argument could be brought together. He thought the war unnecessary and felt negotiations should be undertaken with the Parliamentarians. While Hyde believed the Stuarts had not been the wisest monarchs, they were nevertheless kings by right and with the best advice (i.e. his advice) could continue to rule a broadly united nation. Hyde believed he was the man to lead these wrongheaded sovereigns towards wise and peaceful rule.

While Hyde's analysis of the situation was generally accurate, there were two particular difficulties: first, a general political crisis which was not about to be cured by absolute monarchy of the type believed in by the Stuarts, and secondly, Charles I's inclination to listen to his French Queen and the belligerent cavalier elements in his court rather than to appeasers like Hyde. While the statesman and former parliamentarian theorised as to how the two elements of the state might be brought back together, the Queen and the cavaliers supported war to crush the rebels.⁴ It was natural therefore that Hyde should have enemies in the King's court. When the idea of Prince Charles being dispatched to head the Western Alliance came up, his enemies seized upon it to have Hyde sent off with him, along with other like-minded privy councillors such as Lord Culpepper. The person who stood to gain most from this was Hyde's rival, Lord Digby, a clever but often misguided man who wielded much influence over the King.

Despite their differences, the King recognised in Hyde the steadfast, unwavering qualities

necessary to advise a prince not yet schooled in statecraft, let alone war. Unfortunately, Hyde's stern and schoolmasterish demeanour could make him appear a pompous and hectoring older man.

Although still only in his thirties, to a fourteen-year-old boy Hyde would have seemed antediluvian. Nevertheless, Hyde was at the head of the council that accompanied the Prince to the West Country.

In April, Hyde and his fellow advisors recommended that the Prince should hold a general meeting in order to iron out disagreements between the various local grandees who ran the war in the western counties. None of them had anything but optimism that the royalist cause would prevail. After all, the rebels were thought of as being in 'some disorder and confusion' having removed their commander-in-chief, the Earl of Essex, and replaced him with a man of lesser rank, Sir Thomas Fairfax.⁵ Prince Rupert advocated striking while the royalists' opponents were still in a state of disarray but his advice went unheeded.

What the royalists didn't know was that their opponents were pausing to reorganise themselves into the most efficient army of the age, one that was the forerunner of today's forces organised under unified command. This was Cromwell's New Model Army. The Parliamentary leaders sacked ineffective officers, appointed new ones, and used their economic power to put their new forces on a centralised stipend. By the spring of 1645, this reorganisation was all but complete and the fortunes of the Crown would change for ever.

The young Prince and his council, oblivious to this vital shift in military power, met in Bridgwater, situated on the River Parrett in the lee of the Quantock Hills, a few miles from the Bristol Channel. A vast red sandstone fort dominated the town. Built around 1200 on the orders of King John, the castle had a moat fed from the river and made an excellent command post for a royalist garrison led by Sir Edmund Wyndham, who was also the local MP. The Bridgwater summit was to have an outcome unforeseen by the watchful Hyde, marking his young charge's evolution into manhood.

The summit was interrupted by a startling change in the Prince's behaviour. Charles was expected to sit in on at least some meetings of the council, to apply himself to participating and use his powers of judgement. He did his best, until he was reacquainted with his former nurse, Christabella Wyndham, the garrison commander's much younger wife. Christabella, vivacious and beautiful, was a marvellous distraction from the frustrations and anxieties of adolescence.

Christabella's father had been a notorious critic of the King, so she had been a surprising choice as the Prince's nurse. In 1628, two years before the Prince was born, Christabella's father, Hugh Pyne, a Somerset landowner, barrister and Puritan, criticised Charles I for being as 'unwise a king as ever was' and suggesting his own shepherd was as fit to rule.⁶ Pyne was imprisoned and charged with treason. He was reprieved, thanks to arguing that the Treason Act contained nothing about being rude about a king.[†] Despite this awkward family history, Christabella was viewed as having redeemed herself by marrying a royalist.

It has been said that war can act as an aphrodisiac; if so, it certainly worked its spell on the young Prince and his former nurse. When they were reintroduced, sparks flew. This scandalous liaison was set the tone for much of Charles's future life – a desire to please himself, allied to a total disregard for propriety, rather than the expected interest in tedious activities and duties. Hyde was outraged; being a loyal servant of the Crown he was unable to criticise the Prince's character, so he vented his spleen by recording a far from glowing assessment of that of Christabella Wyndham:

she being a woman of no good breeding, and of a country pride, *Nihil muliebre praetor corpus gerens*,[‡] valued herself much upon the power and familiarity which her neighbours might see she had with the Prince of Wales; and therefore, upon all occasions, in company, and when the concourse of the people was greatest, would use great boldness towards him ..⁷

Worse was to come. It became clear that the Prince and his former nurse had developed a secret

world in which they shared private jokes. The Prince encouraged Christabella's disparaging views about his advisors, Hyde recalled:

coming to Bridgewater, and having an extraordinary kindness for Mrs Windham, who had been his nurse, he was not only diverted by her folly and petulancy from applying himself to the serious consideration of his business, but accustomed to hearing her speak negligently and scornfully of the Council; which, though at first it made no impression in him of disrespect towards them, encouraged other people who heard it, to take the like liberty; and from hence grew an irreverence towards them; which reflected upon himself, and served to bring prejudice of their councils throughout the whole course.⁸

What Hyde was describing was adolescent rebellion and defiance of authority, allied to a strongly emergent interest in sex. This adolescent behaviour would become a pattern throughout his life. In the fourteen-year-old boy frolicking with a woman, mocking those in authority, we have a perfect picture of the man he would become. The image in the Lely portrait was already coming to life.

From the public display of affection for her former charge, some of those present reached the conclusion that Christabella had deflowered the Prince. Charles was a month off his fifteenth birthday. Among the aristocracy it was considered quite normal for an older woman to show a young man the way in sexual matters. In the seventeenth century, royal princes and princesses could be married before their teens and live together from the age of twelve. Charles's own younger sister Mary had been married at the age of nine to the Prince of Orange. Therefore, the fact that the Prince's former wet nurse assumed the role of sexual educator was not in itself unusual. What caused comment was the open show of affection between the two. Hyde was particularly outraged.⁹ In his memoirs, he fulminated at the manner in which Christabella ran across a room packed with courtiers and members of the council, flinging herself at the Prince, showering kisses on his face and head.

According to contemporary accounts, Charles was 'diverted by her folly and petulancy'.¹⁰ Hyde, always watchful, felt Christabella showered the Prince with affection so that he might award grants of money or lands to her husband. When it became clear that the Prince was in no position to do any such thing without the agreement of his council, Christabella became even more disruptive, fomenting 'jealousies and dislikes' between members of the council and the Prince's household. Clarendon and his fellow councillors couldn't wait to get away and to sever contact between the Prince and his temptress. Business was hastily concluded and the court returned to Bristol.

Christabella's feisty spirit gave rise to a story, probably apocryphal, that when Bridgewater was besieged by Fairfax and Cromwell three months after Charles and his council had decamped for Bristol, she ran to the castle ramparts, bared one of her breasts to signify her closeness to the royal heir, grabbed a musket and fired a shot that missed either Fairfax or Cromwell (depending on the version) by a whisker, to plug a nearby adjutant or sergeant-at-arms. In truth, what seems to have happened was that when a messenger was sent by Fairfax demanding a surrender, Mrs Wyndham placed her hand on her breast and said, 'These breasts gave suck to Prince Charles, they shall never be at your mercy. We shall hold it to the last.'¹¹ She may not have bared a breast, but she had pluck all the same.

The fling with the beautiful Christabella would not be the last time that the Prince's attention would be diverted by a pretty woman when he should be dealing with more important matters. The pattern was to continue throughout his life and have a crucial effect upon his reign. Another pattern to emerge from this period was of Hyde's lifelong disapproval of the frivolous side of Charles's character. Many years later, it would drive a wedge between them.

Charles was back at Bristol for only a brief time before plague hit the city. His council recommended moving to Barnstaple. By now Charles, as a young man who loved outdoor sports and craved action over inactivity, was finding that his position as heir to the throne forced him into a life removed from the excitement of war. He whiled away his days riding in the open countryside and

enjoying the new sport of sailing. There was some good news. The Parliamentary expeditionary force to the West Country led by Sir William Waller was brilliantly routed by the best of Charles's — squabbling commanders, George Goring, the son of the 1st Earl of Norwich, and a professional soldier known as much for his drunkenness as for his ability as a commander. Despite this success, the royalist situation in the West of England was deteriorating much as it was in the rest of the country thanks to the New Model Army's superior fighting capability. Royalist armies were routed and strongholds besieged. Stuck out of the way in the west, Hyde could bring no pressure to bear upon the King to negotiate an end to the war. Prince Rupert could see which way the wind was blowing, but by adding his voice to the call for an agreed settlement, he was branded by some as a traitor.

On 14 June, at the advice of Lord Digby, the King risked his forces against the New Model Army at the Northamptonshire village of Naseby, fifty miles north of Oxford. It was the decisive battle of the war. Parliament's war machine crushed the King's army. By July, the situation looked precarious for the royal family and the King ordered the Queen to leave for France. Henrietta Maria went into exile, taking her youngest child, Henrietta Anne, who was barely a toddler.

Under orders from his council, the Prince moved further west to the fortress of Pendennis in Cornwall. It was obvious to Hyde that arrangements had to be made for the safety of the heir to the throne. Orders were given for a ship to lie off the coast, ready to take Charles away. A discussion took place among his advisors about his possible destination.[§] He could go to France, which was friendly towards the Stuarts, and where his mother Henrietta Maria was now living off the charity of her royal relatives; or he could go to Scotland, where the lairds had often complained about the Stuarts not making enough of their ancient connection, or to Denmark, where the family had relatives on the throne. There was even Ireland to consider, though this was the most risky due to friction among those leaders supportive of the King and a fluctuating military situation.

Despite the efforts of the better royalist commanders in the west, by the autumn the situation was lost. The dashing George Goring gave up and left for France. The situation deteriorated further as winter approached and in December the embattled King issued his eldest son with an ultimatum to leave the country so he would be at liberty to ensure a future for the Stuart dynasty. For two months, the Prince ignored his father's orders. It was a fine display of youthful folly and stubbornness, perhaps even bravado, but it also exhibited something of the young man's determination to suit only himself and no one else, a characteristic much in evidence in his mature years.

Finally, on 2 March 1646, Prince Charles sailed away from England and into a life of adventure and myth. On 4 March, he arrived on the Isles of Scilly, an archipelago lying twenty-eight miles off south-west Cornwall. It was one year to the day since he had left his father at Oxford. The Scillies were beautiful but badly provisioned. The arrival of the Prince and his court of nearly three hundred put an extra burden on the islands' meagre resources. News of his flight quickly reached the Parliamentarian forces and soon a flotilla of warships encircled the isles. But luck was with the Prince and a storm blew up, scattering his pursuers' fleet. Charles and his advisors debated what to do. To the surprise of his council, the Prince produced a letter from his father, which he had kept secret until then. The King had written to his eldest son the previous June, shortly after the Battle of Naseby, instructing the Prince to ensure his own safety even if his father's life was in danger: 'I command you (upon my blessing) never to yield to any conditions, that are dishonourable, unsafe for your Person, or Derogatory to Regal Authority, upon any considerations whatsoever, though it were for the saving of my Life.'¹²

Charles remained remarkably self-possessed and calm. Together with his council, he decided they must make for safer shores. On 16 April, with the enemy fleet still scattered, it was decided to seize the advantage and sail for Jersey, a more robust royalist stronghold 180 miles to the east. His luck held and, with favourable winds, Charles's ship reached Jersey without incident.

The Prince arrived in Jersey on 18 April, to be greeted by the governor Sir George Carteret, who ruled over the island from his fortress, the Elizabeth Castle, built on the site of the medieval abbey of St Helier on a rocky tidal island off the island's major port. Sir George, who was a member of Jersey's most prominent family, was pursuing a successful campaign of privateering, carrying out raids against Parliamentary shipping. In contrast to the Scillies, Jersey was an island of plenty. Produce was abundant and Sir George was able to lay on banquets the like of which Charles had not encountered since his days with his father at Oxford. The governor even welcomed his royal guest with a present of £1500 in cash.

While Jersey celebrated the arrival of the Prince, the New Model Army advanced on Oxford. Nine days after the Prince arrived at St Helier, his father disguised himself as a servant and left the city. On 5 May, he surrendered to the Scottish army at Newark in Nottinghamshire, gambling that he could do a deal with the Scots and perhaps regain his throne with their help. The King had long been in dispute with the Scots over the imposition of bishops and Anglican liturgy on the Scottish Church. Largely due to this disagreement, the Scots sided with the forces of the New Model Army. But a schism had also opened between the Scots and King Charles on the issue of the establishment of Presbyterianism in England – one that he hoped to exploit.

While the King parlayed with the Scots, his eldest son found himself facing enforced inaction inside the grim walls of Elizabeth Castle. Having been introduced to adult pleasures only the previous summer, Charles now found them replaced by eight months of abstinence. In the largely male environment of the garrison, it looked as if he would have to endure without female company.

However, Sir George Carteret had a daughter, Marguerite. According to a story promoted by the eminent nineteenth-century historian Lord Acton, the Prince had an affair with the girl – and even fathered a boy by her. Marguerite, aged about seventeen, was alleged to have given birth to an illegitimate son, who was named James de la Cloche after her husband, Jean de la Cloche, a member of another established Jersey family.¹³ As we shall see, the story of the birth of a boy fathered by Charles would lead to one of the most enduring myths that surround the life of the future Charles II – that the child would grow up to convert to Roman Catholicism with his father's blessing, so proving Charles's early conversion to that faith. Unfortunately for the story, no contemporary sources allude to the birth of such a child.

While the Prince weighed up whether to remain on Jersey or proceed to France, where he was sure of the protection of his cousin, Louis XIV, several of his advisors, Hyde among them, wished him to stay on the island. They were anxious that he should not fall under the Catholic influence of the Queen. Hyde also worried that the French would promise much in terms of support but deliver little. The King advised his son to go to France. The Queen added her voice to her husband's, saying, 'make all haste you can to show yourself a dutiful son.'¹⁴

Despite the misgivings of his council, Charles decided to obey his father and sail for France. Hyde, with serious misgivings about the French Catholic court, decided not to accompany him. Charles would leave without the only man who could have attempted to keep him on the Protestant straight and narrow – and who would have been a downright nuisance to a red-blooded young blue blood. Charles set sail towards the determined arms of his mother and into a licentious court where sexual temptations awaited a young prince open to adventure.

* St James's Palace was built between 1531 and 1536. The British court continues to this day to be known as the Court of St James, despite Queen Victoria having moved the official royal residence to Buckingham Palace.

† The Treason Act, brought in by Edward II in 1351, codified acts of treason, making it an offence to 'compass or imagine' the death of the king or to wage war against him.

‡ Literally, 'women wearing nothing but a body', meaning women without education or reasoning.

§ Charles's advisors included Edward Hyde (later Lord Clarendon), the Earl of Southampton, the Earl of Berkshire, the Duke of Richmond, Lord Culpepper and Sir Ralph Hopton.

EXILE AND FIRST LOVE

In the early summer of 1646 it appeared as if the Prince of Wales was leading a charmed life. Though a flotilla of Parliamentary warships had blockaded the Isles of Scilly, he had slipped through the net; next, on his way to Jersey, he had again evaded patrolling Parliamentary flotillas; and finally he had arrived in Calais without interception. For the action-loving Prince, the entire period must have been a marvellous escapade. In France, his love of action would be thwarted by the realities of a court in exile.

The Prince arrived in late June 1646. By then, royal expectations that the Scots would help restore his father to the throne had been dashed, and the King was held by the Scottish army in semi-captivity at Newcastle. While Parliament and the New Model Army engaged in a power struggle, King and Parliament held a series of negotiations aimed at finding a settlement, during which the King dragged his feet. Charles I was temperamentally incapable of negotiating in good faith but was not clever enough to play all sides against one another. Always one who preferred deals with well-born outsiders to negotiating with commoners from his own kingdom, Charles sent an emissary to the French in May, begging for military assistance. The man he approached was France's first minister, Cardinal Mazarin. Now, both father and son – Charles I and the Prince of Wales – had placed their destiny in the hands of one man.

The hereditary king, Louis XIV, was seven years old, so it fell to his chief minister, forty-four-year-old, Italian-born Cardinal Jules Mazarin, to run the country. While little Louis was the embodiment of the French crown, Mazarin was its moving spirit. Louis had inherited the throne three years previously upon the death of his father, Louis XIII. Upon being widowed, Queen Anne had appointed Mazarin, her husband's first minister, to continue to run the government and, given the new king's age, with vastly increased power.

Mazarin was born Giulio Mazzarino in Pescina, east of Rome. His ambition took him from the Jesuit School in Rome to service in the papal army, before he became nuncio, or papal envoy, in Paris. There he came to the attention of Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII's chief minister, and this led to service for the French crown. When Richelieu died, Mazarin took over his duties, and at the death of Louis XIII in 1643 Mazarin became the most powerful man in France. He continued Louis's expansionist foreign policy and championed the crown against the ambitions of the country's powerful regional aristocracy. Mazarin was at the heart of the most culturally magnificent royal court in Europe. The underlying cracks in the French state were covered over by opulent silk hangings. Charles, now further away than ever from his father's side, arrived with little except marvellous French royal connections, thanks to his mother.

The English prince had sailed away from the stern presence of Edward Hyde – but he would discover he was now under the uncompromising thumb of the Cardinal. As for the French court, it was a dazzling inner hub of wealth and excess surrounded by a land in which the peasantry were as poor as they had ever been, due to backward economic practices, disease and over-population.¹

The French court exhibited such wealth, such spending as the English prince could only long for. Charles's own purse was empty and he had a retinue to feed, composed of servants, gentlemen-in-waiting and cavaliers. Mazarin ensured he was given no money directly, though he cleverly increased Henrietta Maria's allowance so that she might support her son and his followers. Her allowance was

nevertheless deliberately ungenerous; hence the amount she spent on her son was trifling, keeping him totally beholden to her while she tried to woo him away from Anglicanism into the arms of Rome. Charles joined his mother at the palace of St Germain-en-Laye, to the west of Paris, in time to celebrate the second birthday of his sister, Henrietta Anne. She would grow up to be clever, beautiful and ill-fated – and his one true confidante and ally.

To begin with, Cardinal Mazarin ensured the Prince was kept well away from the centre of the court. He had his reasons; chief among them was his desire not to alienate the leaders of the New Model Army whom he had correctly identified as the most potent power in England.² Charles I's entreaties went unheeded. With the outward display of indifference established, in private the French court was able to show a more welcoming stance towards its young guest.

Life in exile had its compensations. The grand and ancient royal palace of St Germain-en-Laye was the birthplace of Louis XIV, and it would remain the official centre of the French court until the Palace of Versailles was ready many years later. St Germain became a magnet for royalist generals and commanders, including Charles's cousin, Prince Rupert. Even the Earl of Newcastle, Charles's old governor, turned up. Life for the cavalier young-bloods could be dull. Duels broke out as they quarrelled over past slights, military blunders and, of course, women.

Charles soon received invitations to dine with Louis XIV. This was the signal for him to be invited into the vortex of aristocratic Parisian society. For a boy who had been on the run just a few weeks before, this was more like it. He became a novel figure in the palaces around the capital. The ladies discussed him and wrote about him. His manners were compared to those of the finest French aristocrats and found wanting. His looks were gone over, compared to his Bourbon ancestors, and found to be more or less acceptable.

His mother went to work to find him a wife. She renewed her attempts to have him betrothed to Anne-Marie Louise d'Orléans, 'La Grande Mademoiselle' as she was known. Henrietta Maria believed she had the backing of Mazarin and the French Queen Mother for her plan. Such a match would bring a satisfactory link to the grandest of Bourbon royalty, since Anne-Marie was a cousin of the king and was satisfactorily both rich and Catholic. The Queen saw her wealth as a means of raising an army and restoring her husband to his throne. But there were several impediments, the major one being the Cardinal. Mazarin had no intention of allowing so much money to flow out of France and end up in England. Worst of all, from the French point of view, it might be used to strengthen England as a power at a time when France was already fighting a very expensive war with Spain.

Mademoiselle herself did not encourage the Prince, though she did at least entertain the notion of the marriage. She was a tall, stocky girl who suffered no lack of self-esteem. Hyde was very dismissive, describing the Duchess as 'Not at all handsome, being a lady of very low stature and that stature in no degree straight.'³ He was incorrect, as Anne-Marie was a large, blue-eyed creature, not at all small or ill-shapen. In her memoirs, the Duchess recorded how she paraded through the extravagant interiors of her world, stopping at each and every gilt-hung mirror to ensure no self-reflection went unacknowledged by the assembled admirers.⁴ Such self-love did not leave much room for an impecunious heir to a rocky English throne. Besides, she had wanted to marry Louis, her 'little king', before moving on to set her sights at the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Charles is not recorded as having pursued Mademoiselle with any great diligence. From what little is known, he refused to speak to Anne-Marie even when he accompanied her to balls. He claimed this was because he could not speak French, though Mademoiselle noticed he could understand her well enough. Apart from Anne-Marie, Charles was also connected with another possible suitor, the Duchesse de Châtillon. This, too, seems to have fizzled out.

Nothing, however, could deter Henrietta Maria from her desire to see her son wed to the haughty

Mademoiselle; in truth it was she who wooed Anne-Marie rather than her sullen, sex-starved son. In February 1647, a grand entertainment was held at the Palais Royal. Henrietta Maria pulled out all the stops to get her son into Mademoiselle's good books. She lent Anne-Marie diamonds to sew on her dress. Anne-Marie wore her favourite colours of black, white and rose, with the English diamonds on her frock. There were more diamonds and pearls in a fascinator, in the centre of which were three feathers, one in each of her favourite colours. Henrietta Maria could not have been more pleased with her strategy of helping the fabulous creature shine in the glittering gathering in front of the two kings of France and England.

'Nothing could have been seen better or more magnificently arrayed than I was that day,' recalled Mademoiselle modestly. 'I did not fail to find many people who assured me that my fine figure, my good looks, my pale complexion, and the splendour of my fair hair became me better than all the riches that shone upon my person.'⁵

The dancing took place on a large stage, brilliantly lighted by crystal chandeliers, with the spectators seated around the amphitheatre. In the centre of the stage was a throne, covered with cloth of gold, but the little King refused to mount it, out of courtesy to the Prince of Wales. Charles being equally polite, the throne remained empty until Mademoiselle ascended it without scruple. She felt – and was assured that she looked – born to a throne, and thoroughly enjoyed her position, having both the King and the Prince of Wales seated at her feet. If Charles had hoped his humble attitude would go down well with his cousin and placate his mother, he was mistaken. Temporary possession of the throne only served to increase Mademoiselle's self-esteem. She wrote:

While I was there, and the Prince of Wales was at my feet, my heart, as much as my eyes, regarded him de haut-en-bas; I had then taken into my head to marry the Emperor, of which there was much probability if the Court had only acted in good faith. . . The thought of the Empire so entirely occupied my mind that I only regarded the Prince of Wales as an object of pity.⁶

Fortunately, respite was on its way. The Duke of Buckingham – Charles's close childhood companion – arrived at St Germain in late 1646, together with his brother. The young aristocrats were en route back to England on the last leg of their grand tour. Buckingham and his brother were exceptionally rich. Buckingham was an irreverent and mischievous boy who poked fun at authority figures, including the Prince's father. If, as Hyde discerned, Christabella had exercised a bad influence over the Prince, Buckingham was ten times worse. The disapproving Bishop Gilbert Burnet wrote that Buckingham corrupted Charles.⁷ It is likely that he was already on his own path to perdition; if not exactly seeing the world through Buckingham's eyes, then at least searching for amusing antidotes to the starchy, self-important world of Louis XIV, who was as yet far too young to embark on his own ambitious sexual career.

The Prince spent his time partying. He sold his silver to pay his debts and failed to pay his servants. His father's situation meanwhile was much worse, and was rapidly deteriorating. Following a period of negotiation with the Scots, who found him as inflexible as the English, the Scots sold Charles to the English Parliament in a deal that included reparation for their part in the war. Before the King could return south and take up a settlement with the more amenable members of Parliament, the army kidnapped him and brought him to Hampton Court Palace, where he was placed under house arrest. There the King remained until he heard rumours of a plot to assassinate him. Believing this to be a strong possibility, he escaped by night and headed for the south coast. He put himself in the care of Colonel Hammond, the governor of the Isle of Wight, a Parliamentarian soldier whom Charles believed was sympathetic to his cause. Unfortunately for the King, Hammond saw his first duty as being to Parliament and locked him up in Carisbrooke Castle. From here, Charles plotted a new civil war. At the end of 1647 he made a secret pact with the Scots for Presbyterianism to be imposed in

England in return for the supply of an invading army that would free him and restore him to the throne.

By the spring of 1648, the Scots were making their own overtures to the Prince of Wales to come to Scotland and take command of an invading army. To the hyperactive Prince, this was irresistible. For him, as for the King and the Queen, it was an exercise in the art of the possible – what today is known as *realpolitik*. The Anglican (and Catholic) House of Stuart would throw in its lot with the Presbyterian Scots. To the Queen, who had been politicking so hard for so long, it was also a welcome release from wheedling for money and military aid from her French relatives. The Prince left St Germain and headed to Calais, then to Holland, accompanied by many of the military men who had passed their idle months as guests of the French by quarrelling and duelling.

In England, a royalist uprising began in the spring of 1648 but came to very little. Royalists launched small-scale operations around the country but the hoped-for swell of widespread approval did not materialise and Parliamentary forces easily crushed the small bands who took up arms. Thanks to this, any invading Scottish army would be faced with the undivided attention of the New Model Army. But it was the royalists' only hope.

At The Hague, Charles was warmly welcomed by his sister Mary, who was married to William, Prince of Orange, and by his younger brother James, Duke of York. James had been held captive by Parliament in St James's Palace, but was sprung in an audacious move by an Irish officer, Colonel Bampfield, who disguised him as a washerwoman and spirited him to Holland. Seeing how often royalty and the aristocracy dressed as women in the seventeenth century, one could be forgiven for thinking it was not the theatre but the cavaliers who gave rise to the pantomime dame.

Then came an unexpected stroke of good fortune. A great portion of the Parliamentary fleet mutinied and sailed to the Netherlands, arriving at the port of Helvoetsluys, south of The Hague. The possession of a fleet filled the young Prince with fresh hope. He seized the moment and set sail to rally support in the towns along England's eastern seaboard. There was even a plan to use the fleet to rescue his father from the Isle of Wight. Of all the options open to Charles, this was possibly the best but he chose not to take it. Instead, he attempted to establish a bridgehead at Yarmouth, where the locals declined to join him and opted only to provide him with supplies. The fleet then took to the sea with the intention of harrying Parliamentary shipping and supply routes. In the event, the fleet accomplished little and a small royalist uprising on land fizzled out or was soon extinguished by superior Parliamentary forces. Better news came in August with word that a Scottish army led by the Duke of Hamilton was heading into England. As the moment surely arrived for the Prince to reclaim his position as heir to the battered English crown, he met a girl and became infatuated.

Lucy Walter was the daughter of a Welsh nobleman and was about the same age as the Prince, possibly born in the same year, 1630.⁸ In the summer of 1648 they became lovers in The Hague. Lucy was one of at least seventeen lovers taken by Charles during his exile. Among the others was Lady Eleanor Byron, wife of the first Lord Byron and ancestor of the famous poet.⁹ Lucy, however, meant much more than any of the others, no matter how exalted, rich or beautiful. Much has been written about Lucy and her character, most of it bad. Whatever her true nature, she became a fixture in the young Prince's life for at least two years, and was to continue to have significance for many years after.

Lucy's parents were William Walter and his wife Elizabeth, the daughter of John Prothero and the niece of the 1st Earl of Carbery. The Walters, who were royalists, lived at Roche Castle near Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire. In 1644 Parliamentary forces destroyed their home. Some time before this, Lucy's father and mother had separated and Lucy moved between the two parents, staying at various times in Wales, the West Country and London. It has been suggested that Lucy accompanied her father to The Hague when he travelled to join forces with the Prince's court-in-exile.

Eighteen-year-old Lucy was, according to all who met her, physically and in character everything ~~Anne-Marie, La Grande Mademoiselle, was not. She had beautiful dark looks and was full of fun.~~ According to one version of her story, once she reached The Hague she became the mistress of a number of rich men. This account originated from James, Duke of York, who claimed that Algernon Sidney, the acclaimed Parliamentarian cavalry officer and political theorist, paid fifty gold pieces for Lucy to become his mistress. Apparently Sidney had to join his regiment in a hurry and so was unable to seal his bargain, which was taken up by his elder brother Robert, another cavalier officer and later Earl of Leicester.

This all makes for a good story of bad behaviour, but its factual basis is slight.¹⁰ It was out of character for Sidney, who was studious and not at all of a wild disposition. The sum of fifty guineas, moreover, was well outside his spending power, for although he was the son of an earl, his father believed in keeping his sons on a tight financial rein.¹¹ There remains the possibility that Lucy arrived on the Continent due to her aunt, with whom she lived for a time in London and who was married to a Dutch merchant. And if there was any connection with the Sidney family, it was Robert whom she met up with and who fathered her child.¹²

A much more credible account of how she met up with the Prince is that she travelled to France in the entourage of her relative John Barlow in 1648, when he joined the growing military force collecting around the exiled Stuart court at St Germain.¹³ This theory is supported by the fact that rather than go by her maiden name, Walter, she adopted that of her relative and was widely known as Mrs Barlow, possibly to make her less vulnerable while travelling alone.*

Everyone who met Lucy agreed on one thing: she was beautiful. Charles's brother James, writing later with the intent of defaming Lucy, admitted she was lovely, with little wit but a great deal of the cunning 'her profession usually have', his words indicating that he regarded her as a whore.¹⁴ John Evelyn described her as 'a brown, beautiful, bold but insipid creature' (insipid here meaning she had no education).¹⁵ Clarendon said she was 'of no good fame, but handsome'.¹⁶ In a portrait attributed to Peter Lely, Lucy stares at the viewer through almond-shaped brown eyes, with a half smile on her red lips, the lower of which is especially full. Her dark hair is fashionably piled up in ringlets and curls.¹⁷ In an unusual head and shoulders portrait now in the Pembrokeshire County Council collection, also attributed to Lely, she is even better looking. Lucy was a young beauty who could capture any prince. Delirious days of lovemaking followed. The young Prince's enjoyment was enhanced by having at his command a fleet and a plan to restore his father to the throne. Then everything fell apart; through superior tactics and strength, Cromwell crushed Hamilton's army.

What followed was worse. The King was taken to London and put on trial for treason against his people. On 30 January 1649, he was beheaded outside his grandfather's stately Banqueting House in Whitehall. Whether or not the affair between the Prince and his young lover continued throughout the time is unknown. A few days after the execution of the King, a messenger arrived at the royal palace at The Hague with the news. The Prince learned from his father's former chaplain that his father was dead and he was now king. He fled from the room in tears. Was Lucy there to comfort him? We don't know.

On 5 February 1649, Charles was declared King in Edinburgh. Nine weeks later, on 9 April, Lucy gave birth to a baby boy at Rotterdam. Charles immediately declared the child his own and he was christened James Scott, in recognition of Charles's grandfather and his Scottish ancestry. He was now in the odd position of having a son but, since the child was illegitimate, no heir – and no throne. His life was out of kilter. Lucy Walter and the new King of England faced their joint exile with a young child. Charles would later confer the title of Duke of Monmouth upon his son, whom he would continue to love dearly despite the trouble the boy would create throughout his eventful life.

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