

opening extract from

the diamond of drury lane

written by

julia golding

published by egmont

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

A Note to the Reader

Be warned, that the story you are about to read is not for the squeamish. I intend to bring you life as I live it. This is not the world of the drawing room and country estate, but backstage at Drury Lane and on the streets of London. If you want to survive in my neighbourhood, you have to be prepared to use coarse language that packs a verbal punch. I include a glossary at the back to assist you. But are you bold enough to follow me? If so, read on.

Catherine 'Cat' Royal



LIST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS
MAP
PROLOGUE A Riot
Act I SCENE 1 A Balloon Ride
SCENE 2 Gang Leader
SCENE 3 A Triumph
Act II SCENE 1 The Duke's Children
SCENE 2 High Society
SCENE 3 Bow St Butcher v. Camden Crusher
SCENE 4 Billy 'Boil' Shepherd
Act III SCENE 1 A Reward
SCENE 2 The Rookeries
SCENE 3 Backstage
SCENE 4 Snowballs
Act IV SCENE 1 Friends
SCENE 2 Pawnbroker
SCENE 3 Attack
Act V SCENE 1 Dresses
SCENE 2 The Thames
SCENE 3 Gaol
SCENE 4 Champagne
EPILOGUE Diamond
GLOSSARY

Principal Characters

IN THE THEATRE

Miss Catherine 'Cat' Royal – ward of the theatre

Mr Pedro Hawkins – gifted African violinist, former slave

Mr Sheridan – playwright, politician, theatre owner

Mr Johnny Smith – the new prompt with a secret

COVENT GARDEN MARKET

Mr Syd Fletcher – boxer, leader of the Butcher's boys

Mr Billy 'Boil' Shepherd – leader of rival gang, handy with the razor

Mr Jonas Miller – hog-grubber clerk

THE DUKE'S HOUSEHOLD

Lord Francis – son of a duke who wants to be a chimney sweep

Lady Elizabeth – intelligent and pretty daughter of duke

Duke of Avon – pro-reform peer and friend of Mr Sheridan

Mr Marzi-pain Marchmont – acquaintance of Lord Francis, a real pain in the a**e

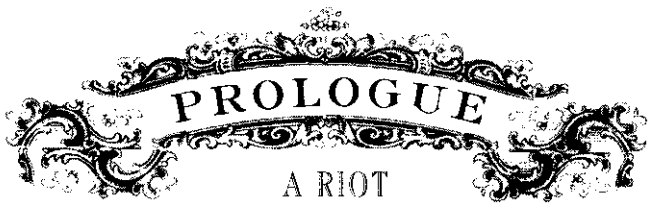
The Earl of Ranworth – a nice old gent

Actors, boatmen, rioters, boxing spectators, maids, etc.


THAMES
RIVER
Somerset House
Temple Bar
Palace Yard
Westminster Hall
Westminster Abbey
St. Paul's
Cheapside
Bridge Street
Fleet Street
Strand
Holborn
Ludgate Hill
Cornhill
Lombard Street
Tower
Tower Hill
Tower Ditch
Billingsgate
London Bridge
Southwark Bridge
Blackfriars Bridge
Waterloo Bridge
Westminster Bridge
Lambeth
Vauxhall
Surrey Side
Middlesex Side
Whitehall
Charing Cross
Cockspur Street
Pall Mall
St. James's Park
Green Park
Hyde Park
Piccadilly
Oxford Street
Tottenham Court Road
Gray's Inn Lane
Holborn Hill
Fetter Lane
Chancery Lane
Temple
Aldersgate Street
Aldgate
Leadenhall Street
Fenchurch Street
Minories
Houndsditch
Bishopsgate Street
Moorfields
Finsbury Square
Finsbury Pavement
Old Street
Goswell Street
Clerkenwell
Smithfield
Barbican
Cripplegate
Whitecross Street
Old Bailey
Newgate Street
Ludgate Hill
Blackfriars Road
Southwark
Borough
Bankside
Lambeth Marsh
Lambeth Palace
Vauxhall Gardens
Spring Gardens
Admiralty
Horse Guards
Parade
Treasury
Exchequer
Privy Garden
Whitehall Gardens
Scotland Yard
Palace Yard
Westminster Hall
Abbey
Old Palace Yard
Houses of Parliament
House of Lords
House of Commons
Royal Exchange
Mansion House
Bank of England
Stock Exchange
Guildhall
Gresham College
Custom House
Trinity House
Navy Office
Victualling Office
Ordnance Office
Excise Office
Stamp Office
Post Office
Sessions House
Newgate
Debtors' Prison
Fleet Prison
Bridewell
Christ's Hospital
Charterhouse
Foundling Hospital
Bethlem Hospital
Lincoln's Inn
Lincoln's Inn Fields
Gray's Inn
Temple Gardens
Inner Temple
Middle Temple
Somerset House
Strand Bridge
Adelphi
Adelphi Terrace
Buckingham House
Buckingham Gardens
Queen's Palace
St. James's Palace
St. James's Square
Pall Mall
Cockspur Street
Charing Cross
Northumberland House
Suffolk House
Arundel House
Durham House
Whitefriars
Temple Bar
Fleet Ditch
Holborn Bridge
Snow Hill
Cheapside
Poultry
Cornhill
Leadenhall Market
Fenchurch Street
Aldgate
Whitechapel
Minories
Tower Hill
Tower Ditch
Tower of London
Billingsgate
London Bridge
Old London Bridge
Fishmongers' Hall
Monument
Pudding Lane
Eastcheap
Thames Street
Upper Thames Street
Queenhithe
Blackfriars
Blackfriars Bridge
Southwark Bridge
Bankside
Paris Garden
Globe Theatre
Surrey Theatre
Lambeth Marsh
Lambeth Palace
Vauxhall Bridge
Vauxhall Gardens
Spring Gardens
Waterloo Bridge
Westminster Bridge
Westminster Abbey
Old Palace Yard
Houses of Parliament
Whitehall
Charing Cross
Cockspur Street
Pall Mall
St. James's Park
Green Park
Hyde Park
Piccadilly
Oxford Street
Tottenham Court Road
Gray's Inn Lane
Holborn Hill
Fetter Lane
Chancery Lane
Temple
Aldersgate Street
Aldgate
Leadenhall Street
Fenchurch Street
Minories
Houndsditch
Bishopsgate Street
Moorfields
Finsbury Square
Finsbury Pavement
Old Street
Goswell Street
Clerkenwell
Smithfield
Barbican
Cripplegate
Whitecross Street
Old Bailey
Newgate Street
Ludgate Hill
Blackfriars Road
Southwark
Borough
Bankside
Lambeth Marsh
Lambeth Palace
Vauxhall Gardens
Spring Gardens
Admiralty
Horse Guards
Parade
Treasury
Exchequer
Privy Garden
Whitehall Gardens
Scotland Yard
Palace Yard
Westminster Hall
Abbey
Old Palace Yard
Houses of Parliament
House of Lords
House of Commons
Royal Exchange
Mansion House
Bank of England
Stock Exchange
Guildhall
Gresham College
Custom House
Trinity House
Navy Office
Victualling Office
Ordnance Office
Excise Office
Stamp Office
Post Office
Sessions House
Newgate
Debtors' Prison
Fleet Prison
Bridewell
Christ's Hospital
Charterhouse
Foundling Hospital
Bethlem Hospital
Lincoln's Inn
Lincoln's Inn Fields
Gray's Inn
Temple Gardens
Inner Temple
Middle Temple
Somerset House
Strand Bridge
Adelphi
Adelphi Terrace
Buckingham House
Buckingham Gardens
Queen's Palace
St. James's Palace
St. James's Square
Pall Mall
Cockspur Street
Charing Cross
Northumberland House
Suffolk House
Arundel House
Durham House
Whitefriars
Temple Bar
Fleet Ditch
Holborn Bridge
Snow Hill
Cheapside
Poultry
Cornhill
Leadenhall Market
Fenchurch Street
Aldgate
Whitechapel
Minories
Tower Hill
Tower Ditch
Tower of London
Billingsgate
London Bridge
Old London Bridge
Fishmongers' Hall
Monument
Pudding Lane
Eastcheap
Thames Street
Upper Thames Street
Queenhithe
Blackfriars
Blackfriars Bridge
Southwark Bridge
Bankside
Paris Garden
Globe Theatre
Surrey Theatre
Lambeth Marsh
Lambeth Palace
Vauxhall Bridge
Vauxhall Gardens
Spring Gardens
Waterloo Bridge
Westminster Bridge

London, January 1790

Curtain rises.



Reader, you are set to embark on an adventure about one hidden treasure, two bare-knuckle boxers, three enemies and four hundred and thirty-eight rioters. It is told by an ignorant and prejudiced author – me. My name is Cat Royal, though how I came to be called this, I will explain later. For the moment I will start with the riot, for that was where the story really began.

It was the opening night of Mr Salter's new play, *The Mad Father*. I sat as usual curled up behind a curtain in the manager's box, watching the audience as much as I watched the stage. I love a full house: there is always so much to see. The vast auditorium was packed: all London was there from the flash dandies in the Pit to the ha'penny harlots

high up in the gods. Candles blazed in the chandeliers, catching on the jewels and polished fans of the ladies in the boxes. It was a gorgeous display.

Tonight the mood of the crowd was dangerous. There was a low buzz in the room like a hive of angry bees threatening to swarm. The theatre owner, Mr Sheridan, was sitting hunched over the box rail, looking like thunder. In the candlelight, the red flush across his face burned brighter than ever. His dark eyes glinted. I am never quite sure what he is thinking but I guessed that this evening he must be feeling very foolish. In my humble opinion, it had been a mad idea for him to agree to put the play on in the first place, but even I didn't dare mention this to him. I had seen it in rehearsal – an arsy-varsy affair, not a patch on Mr Sheridan's own comedies, which were guaranteed to have the audience in fits of laughter. Mr Salter's play by contrast was not worth a fart.

Prejudiced though I was against it, I was alarmed to see that the gentlemen of the Pit were exceedingly bored after the first act. Mr Kemble, our leading actor, had to struggle against a hostile

shower of orange peel. I could tell that it would not be long before a more dangerous rain of bottles and rotten vegetables would fall. Some of the audience were climbing over the benches in an attempt to reach the forestage. Leading the vanguard was vile Jonas Miller from the lawyer's office across the road. You should know, Reader, that he is a real hog-grubber that one. He thinks so highly of his own taste that he believes he has a right to praise or damn a play by forcing the actors off the stage. Ducking out of the shadows of the box, I filched Mr Sheridan's opera glasses from his hand and took a swift look at the other parts of the House. The galleries, particularly the footmen in the gods, were on the point of revolt, giving a crude Anne's fan to the actors with their white-gloved hands, wigs askew as they pushed and shoved to reach the rail. The ladies were gathering their shawls about them in anticipation of the riot to come. I noticed one party directly opposite was already on its feet, heading for the exit.

'It's not looking pretty, Cat,' Mr Sheridan remarked over his shoulder. He too had read the

signs. 'I suggest we make a tactical retreat before the oranges are aimed in my direction.'

With a nod of agreement, I uncurled from my comfortable lookout. Jonas and his cronies had now reached the spikes guarding the stage from audience invasions. Poor Mr Kemble faltered in his speech, sensing that he was about to be upstaged by the frenzy of an audience demanding their money back.

'I hope Kemble can turn the play around and stop them ripping up the benches: it cost hundreds of pounds to repair the damage after the last riot,' Mr Sheridan muttered half to himself as I followed him down the dark corridors leading backstage. 'I can't afford it. Mr Salter is costing me far more than he's worth.'

I rejoiced inwardly to hear my enemy so criticised by his employer. Ever since Mr Salter got off the Norwich mail coach and knocked on the door of Drury Lane looking for work as a playwright, he has been no friend of mine. In my defence, I should point out that he started it by calling me a 'dirty beggar' and suggesting that the Foundlings Hospital was a more suitable place for

an orphan like myself than a theatre. Since then, I am not ashamed to admit that it has been open war between us. And as he has been angling for the job of prompt for weeks after Old Carver got too deaf to carry on, he knows that I've been using all my influence with Mr Sheridan and Mr Kemble to stop him getting the job.

Leaving the noise of the bellowing, braying audience behind, Mr Sheridan ducked into the shadowy labyrinth behind stage and made his way deftly around the scenery, ropes and barrels that littered his path. This was the world never seen by the paying public – workshops, storerooms, dressing rooms and cellars: the underbelly of the theatre. You could get lost in here for hours. But Mr Sheridan did not put a foot wrong; we both knew this place like the back of our hands. We passed Mr Salter who was quivering in the wings, his old tie wig scrunched up in his hands as he gazed in agony at the destruction of his hopes on stage. Mr Sheridan barely spared him a glance but pressed on without offering a word of comfort, a bitter smile on his lips. He seemed to have forgotten I was with

him as he was now striding along, hands clasped behind his back, whistling 'Rule, Britannia' under his breath, horribly out of tune. His mind had clearly turned to other things. And there were many things that he could be thinking about – in addition to owning the theatre, he is a member of parliament, a leading figure in opposition to Prime Minister Pitt's government, as well as best friend of the Prince of Wales. He has made himself into one of the first men in the country – which is no mean feat for an Irish actor's son, you must agree. I admire him more than anyone I know – though even I am not blind to his shortcomings. You could not spend five minutes among my friends backstage without knowing that his inability to pay wages is probably his chief fault. He is distinctly devious about money matters and always in trouble with someone about his failure to pay up.

With all this on his plate, I could not even begin to imagine what business might be on his mind, but that did not stop me trying to find out. Curious to know where he was going in this purposeful manner, I followed him, slinking behind like his shadow.

Perhaps he was only going for a breath of fresh air? Sure enough, Mr Sheridan stopped at the stage door and said a few friendly words to Caleb, the doorkeeper, offering him a pinch from his snuffbox, which the old man gratefully received. I lingered in a dark corner, wondering if there would be anything more interesting to see. A stray rioter perhaps?

'Has my visitor arrived yet?' Mr Sheridan asked Caleb quietly, though I thought his expressive eyes twinkled with more than usual interest to hear the answer.

'No, sir,' Caleb replied hoarsely. 'Not a sight nor sound of anybody round the back tonight. All the excitement's out front from what I 'ear.' The night breeze carried with it the sound of breaking glass and raucous voices; the protest at Mr Salter's execrable writing had spilled over on to the street.

'Oh, he'll be here all right,' said Mr Sheridan, looking out into the bleak January evening. 'He has no choice but be here. Go get yourself a drink, Caleb. I'll watch the door for a few minutes.' There was a chink as he dropped some coins into the doorkeeper's gnarled palm.

'Thank 'ee very much, sir,' wheezed Caleb. 'I don't mind if I do.' He shuffled off in the direction of Bow Street in search of a warming mug of porter.

As soon as the old man had limped out of sight, there was a cough in the darkness beyond the doors. Mr Sheridan took a step outside.

'Marchmont, is that you?' he called.

Something scuffled over to our right behind a stack of barrels but it was too black to see anything. A rat?

'Anyone there?' challenged Mr Sheridan, moving towards the sound.

A gentleman stepped out of the night behind his back. He was much taller and slighter than the stocky Mr Sheridan, swathed in a black cloak and had a three-cornered hat pulled low on his brow, giving him a most villainous appearance. I shrank behind the door curtain, keeping out of sight but within call in case Mr Sheridan should need help.

'Sherry, my old friend, of course it's me. Why, were you expecting someone else?' the man replied. His thin, high-pitched voice would have sent a shiver down my spine if I hadn't already

been trembling in the bitter wind blowing through the open door. I hid further in the folds of the door curtain, trying not to sneeze as my nose rubbed against the musty material.

Mr Sheridan ignored his question. He shifted uneasily, looking about him into the shadows.

'Do you have the diamond?' he asked, speaking so low I could barely hear him.

I swallowed my expression of surprise. No wonder he had sent Caleb away! He did not want anyone to hear this. This was evidently a conversation on which I should not be eavesdropping – that of course made it all the more tempting to listen.

Marchmont must have also noticed Mr Sheridan's agitation for he laughed in a shrill neigh. 'Don't be so worried, old friend. The riot has distracted everyone, as you predicted. The diamond will be with you later tonight. We can slip our jewel across town without anyone noticing.'

So Mr Sheridan had not been as deficient in taste as I thought: the choice of play was deliberate, I noted.

'Good, good,' said Mr Sheridan, relaxing a

little. 'Would you like to come in for something to take off the chill? I have a few bottles stashed away in my room.'

'Of course you do,' Marchmont said with a knowing leer at one of England's most celebrated drinkers. 'I dare say I could force down a drop of something. The river was damned cold tonight.'

The two men stepped back into the theatre. I kept very still, hardly daring to breath. I would have got away with it too if the fastening of the man's cloak had not snagged on the curtain. He turned to tug it free and caught sight of a pair of white-stockinged legs peeping out.

'What's this?' Marchmont barked. I felt my arm seized in a fierce grip as I was wrenched into the open. Two fingers pinched my ear, dragging me upwards so I had to stand on tiptoes or part company with my earlobe. I squealed with the pain and tried to push him off. 'A spy? What have you heard, girl?'

Behind Marchmont I could see Mr Sheridan looking back at me, his face white with shock except for the inflamed patch across his nose that

was flushed red like a warning flag.

'Nothing!' I lied.

'I don't believe you! Why were you hiding there? Who's paid you to follow me, eh? Tell me quickly or you'll find yourself at the bottom of the Thames with only the fish to spy on.'

He twisted my ear, causing me to yelp in pain a second time.

Mr Sheridan took a step forward and grabbed Marchmont's wrist, making him release his grip.

'Don't frighten the child, Marchmont. It's only my little Cat. No one's paid her to spy on us.' He turned to me, his eyes sparkling with anger at my presumption. 'What are you doing here, Cat? What did you hear? Everything, I'll be bound.'

I nodded miserably, eyes trained on the shiny caps of his shoes. 'Sorry, sir. I just followed you when we got backstage.'

'And?' he said threateningly.

'And I stayed to see who you were meeting.'

'And?'

'And I heard you talking about the diamond.' I looked up to see if I could read my fate in his face.

Surely he wouldn't throw me out on to the streets after all these years? 'But I promise I'll not tell anyone, sir,' I ended lamely.

Mr Sheridan's expression was enigmatic. I could not be sure but there seemed to a ghost of a smile hovering around his lips.

'You'll keep my jewel safe for me, won't you, Cat?'

I nodded my head vigorously. 'Yes, sir.'

'You'll let me know if anyone comes sniffing around for my treasure – anyone that shouldn't be here?'

'Of course, sir.'

Marchmont laid an unnaturally white hand on Mr Sheridan's arm. 'Is this wise, Sherry? The girl already knows too much. You should get rid of her.'

Mr Sheridan ruffled my hair. 'They've been saying that to me for years but somehow Drury Lane would not be the same without its Cat.' He pushed me out of Marchmont's reach. 'Run along now and keep your ears open for me, won't you?'

'Yes, sir!' I saluted him before darting away, eager to escape from the presence of Mr Marchmont. He made my skin crawl.

The conversation I had overheard gave me plenty to think about that night as I settled down in the Sparrow's Nest – the costume store on the top floor of the theatre where I was allowed to sleep. The place was misnamed – the magpie would have been a more suitable bird in view of the treasures that lay scattered through the wardrobe. It was like a museum of curiosities: the regalia of heathen kings lay next to those of Christian saints; presses were filled with the cast-offs of Roman emperors and Egyptian queens, now mingled in democratic abandon with the rags of mechanicals and shepherdesses. I made my bed on the couch with Lady Macduff's velvet cloak for my blanket, careful to blow out my candle as instructed, for one spark in here would set the whole theatre ablaze.

So, I thought, staring open-eyed into the darkness, listening to the raucous noises of the night revellers outside as the four hundred and thirty-eight rioters ended their evening smashing bottles and shouting in the street, Mr Sheridan wanted to hide a treasure in the theatre? And he had tasked me to protect it. It was a charge I was determined to take most seriously.