

DESIGNS
OF A
GENTLEMAN
The Early Years

Excerpt from Chapter 10 of Designs of a Gentleman – The Early Years

(Book 1 of the series)

Philip was awakened by Monmouth bursting into his bedroom and pulling him out of bed.

“But where are we going?” Philip asked as Monmouth, talking excitedly, dived into his closet and threw him some clothes.

“I’ve just told you, to fight the fire.”

“What ourselves?”

“Yes, isn’t it a lark? Everyone is helping, even the seamen from Woolwich and Deptford have been called in to blow up whatever properties must be demolished. What’s that on your shoulder?” He pointed to a livid mark, a souvenir of Philip’s most recent encounter with Barbara.

“Never mind that.” Philip took the shirt Monmouth was holding and quickly put it on. “But what are we to do? I’ve never put a fire out in my life.”

“Nor I, but it will be a fine adventure, won’t it?”

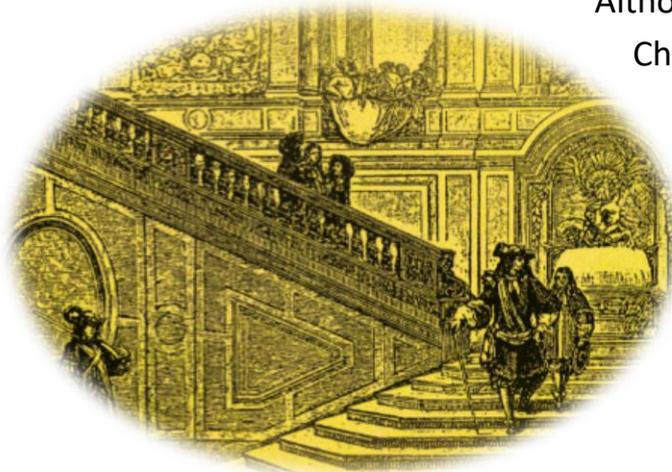
Philip knew that to Monmouth everything in life was an adventure, one he wished Philip to share with him. “Well I suppose I should be grateful,” he said as Monmouth pulled his boots on for him. “After all it is not every day I have a duke to help me dress!”

“Should we go to waken Lord Rochester, do you think?”

“Are you mad? It’s bad enough that you have woken me,” Philip said as he was dragged downstairs, still fastening his coat.

Despite his protestations, he was willing enough to assist in whatever way he could and, once outside, he better understood Monmouth’s urgency.

Although the fire was more than a mile away from Charing Cross they could feel the heat as it carried toward them on a fierce easterly gale, which was whipping the flames to a frenzy. As they hurried closer they heard the crackling of the flames and the shrieks of people scurrying this way and that with bundles of belongings, all



Judith Thomson

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GENTLEMAN
The Early Years

making for the river.

The whole city had taken fright. As they neared Worcester House they saw that Lord Clarendon's possessions were being thrown into a fleet of lighters. The Thames was cluttered with craft of every size and shape. Some were over laden and Philip saw one capsize into the murky waters, losing forever the precious bundles which contained all that their owners had managed to salvage of their worldly goods.

There were frequent explosions of gunpowder and the sky was suddenly peppered with sparks from collapsing masonry as the seamen did their work. Soldiers were clearing the old wooden wharves along the sides of the River Fleet, whilst others were hollowing out the trunks of elm trees to carry water from the river.

All around was feverish activity but, even as Philip and Monmouth wondered where they should first begin to lend a hand, they saw Charles himself. He was on horseback, riding with his guards through the very middle of the chaos, stopping to encourage workers in their efforts and, from time to time, tossing golden guineas amongst them from a leather pouch slung across his shoulder.

He caught sight of the pair and beckoned them over. "Thank you both for coming to help. London needs you."

"Is much lost?" Monmouth asked him.

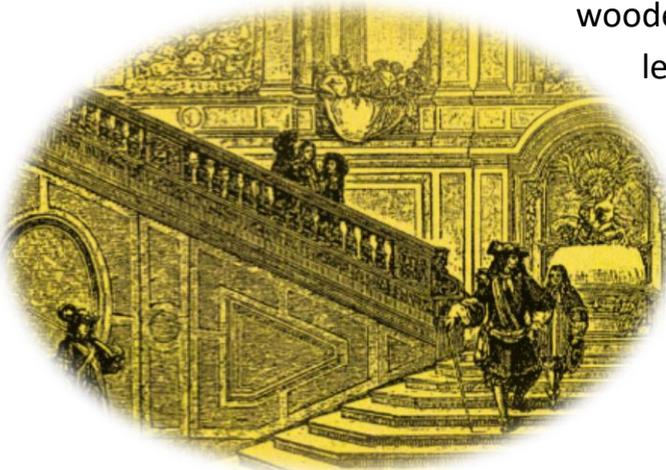
"Yes, I fear so. The Waterman's Hall is gone and the Post Office. The blaze has now reached Guildhall and we cannot save the Royal Exchange."

Philip was particularly sorry to hear of the loss of the Royal Exchange, for the 'Change, as it was known, was the gathering place of fashionable folk and Philip had spent many a happy hour there selecting laces, gloves or buckles for his shoes. So much had been destroyed already and he realised, suddenly, that the London he had come to know would never be quite the same again.

They hastened toward Guildhall but at Cripplegate they encountered a small force labouring hopelessly against the flames that were lighting the overhanging wooden gables all along the street and they decided to

lend a hand there instead. They helped form a chain to pass buckets of water along to those who manned the fire squirts, but the squirts held nowhere near enough and were slow to fill.

Each church was intended to carry a



Judith Thomson

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GENTLEMAN
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supply of ladders, axes and fire hooks so Philip took some men to the nearby church of Saint Sepulchre's but the provisions had been neglected and the church had nothing save a few leather buckets. They took these but Philip thought how much more useful it would be to have iron hooks to pull down the fiery gables.

It was many hours before the fire was out in Cripplegate. Philip and Monmouth worked harder than they ever had in their lives. They were both filthy dirty and soaked through to their skins. Cheapside was still engulfed in flames so they set to work again. Night came but, just before midnight, the sky seemed to become as light as day when the great cathedral of Saint Paul's became a fiery torch, its flames rising higher than the rest.

Images flashed through Philip's mind as he worked. He recalled the day when he had bought a bunch of lavender upon the steps of the cathedral and looked down Ludgate Hill, amazed at the sights and smells and sounds of the bustling city street. Now it was all gone.

Charles rode by in the early hours of the morning and stopped to talk to them. His face was black and he was as wet and dirty as they were.

"You have done well," he told them, surveying the smouldering remains of Cheapside. The wind stirred the ashes and a flame darted up, but Charles held up his hand as they both made a move toward it. "No more. Let others do it now. Go home and get some rest."

"Should you not rest too, father?" Monmouth asked him.

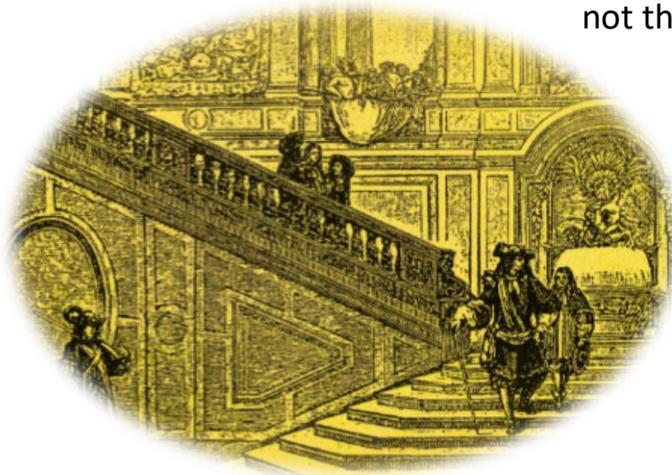
"I cannot rest," Charles said, "not whilst my people suffer and my capital is destroyed. The homeless are encamped at Moor Fields and I must visit them to give whatever comfort I can."

"We'll go too," Monmouth offered. "Shall we Philip?"

"Yes, of course, if it will help." Philip wearily pushed a muddy lock of hair out of his eyes. He was aching in every muscle but, like Monmouth, he still had the spirit, if not the strength, to continue the fight.

Charles smiled at them. "Wait until the morning. Sleep, refresh yourselves and you'll be worth a dozen of the men you are now. Those are my orders and you must obey them!"

Monmouth lodged in King Street, nearby, and he insisted Philip came home with him.



Judith Thomson

DESIGNS
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GENTLEMAN
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They stripped off their sodden clothes and threw themselves on his bed, utterly exhausted but content in the knowledge that they had done their very best.

“I am glad that you were with me, Philip,” Monmouth said impulsively. “I’ve never had a proper friend before, have you?”

“No, I haven’t.” Philip felt a little guilty as he said it, for he had not forgotten John Bone, but times had changed for him. His associates now were dukes, not farm labourers.

“Shall we vow that we will always be good friends?”

“If you like.” Philip closed his eyes and let the weariness flow over him, turning his limbs to lead.

“And shall we promise we would die for one another.”

Philip struggled with the delightful, drifting sensation that was already numbing his brain and fought his way back to consciousness. “What?”

“I said let us pledge that we would die for one another.”

“Really, James!”

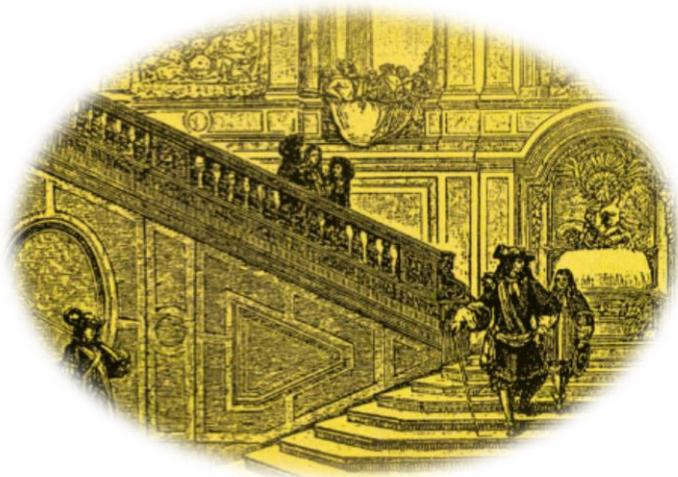
“Wouldn’t you die for me, then?” Monmouth sounded disappointed.

“Yes, I suppose I would, but I can scarcely ask that you do the same for me, now can I? You are the King’s son, after all.”

“Then you can promise you would die for me and I will promise to always do my utmost to protect you.” Monmouth said brightly. “Shall we take an oath on it?”

Philip was more tired than he had ever thought he could be but he knew how much the oath would mean to his earnest friend and he smiled at him fondly. “If you like.”

There was no way he could have predicted what fate had in store for both of them.



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