

# **The Adventure of the Black Lady. A Novel**

Aphra Behn

# Table of Contents

<u>The Adventure of the Black Lady. A Novel</u> .....	1
<u>Aphra Behn</u> .....	1

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About the beginning of the last June (as near as I can remember) Bellamora came to Town from Hampshire; and was oblig'd to lodge the first Night at the same Inn where the Stage–Coach set up. The next Day she took Coach for Covent–Garden, where she thought to find Madam Brightly, a Relation of her's; with whom she design'd to continue for about half a Year undiscover'd, if possible, by her Friends in the Country: And order'd therefore her Trunk, with her Cloaths, and most of her Money and Jewels, to be brought after her to Madam Brightly's, by a strange Porter whom she spoke to in the Street as she was taking Coach; being utterly unacquainted with the neat Practices of this fine City. When she came to Bridges–street, where indeed her Cousin had lodged near three or four Years since; she was strangely surpriz'd that she cou'd not learn any thing of her; no, nor so much as meet with any one that had ever heard of her Cousin's Name. Till, at last, describing Madam Brightly to one of the house–keepers in that place, he told her, that there was such a kind of Lady, whom he had sometimes seen there about a Year and a half ago; but that he believ'd, she was married and remov'd towards So ho. In this Perplexity she quite forgot her Trunk and Money, and wander'd in her Hackney–Coach all over St. Ann's Parish; inquiring for Madam Brightly, still describing her Person, but in vain; for no soul cou'd give her any Tale or Tidings of such a Lady. After she had thus fruitlessly rambled, till she, the Coachman, and the very Horses were e'en tir'd, by good Fortune for her, she happen'd on a private House, where lived a good, discreet, ancient Gentlewoman, who was fallen a little to decay, and was forc'd to let Lodgings for the best part of her Livelihood: From whom she understood, that there was such a kind of a Lady who had lain there somewhat more than a Twelve–month, being near three Months after she was married: But that she was now gone abroad with the Gentleman her Husband; either to the Play, or to take the fresh Air; and she believ'd, wou'd not return till Night. This Discourse of the good Gentlewoman's so elevated Bellamora's drooping Spirits, that after she had begg'd the Liberty of staying there till they came home, she discharg'd the Coachman in all haste, still forgetting her Trunk, and the more valuable Furniture of it.

When they were alone, Bellamora desired she might be permitted the Freedom to send for a Pint of Sack; which, with some little Difficulty, was at last allow'd her. They began then to chat for a matter of half an hour of things indifferent: And, at length the ancient Gentlewoman ask'd the Fair Innocent (I must not say Foolish) one, of what Country, and what her Name was: To both which she answer'd very directly and truly; tho' it might have prov'd, not discreetly. She then inquir'd of Bellamora if her Parents were living, and the Occasion of her coming to Town. The Fair Unthinking Creature replied, That her Father and Mother were both dead: And that she had escap'd from her Uncle, under pretence of making a Visit to a young Lady, her Cousin who was lately married, and liv'd above Twenty Miles from her Uncle's in the Road to London; and, that the Cause of her quitting the Country, was to avoid the hated Importunities of a Gentleman, whose pretended Love to her she fear'd had been her eternal Ruine. At which she wept and sigh'd most extravagantly. The discreet Gentlewoman endeavour'd to comfort her by all the softest and most powerful Argument in her Capacity; promising her all the friendly Assistance that she cou'd expect from her, during Bellamora's stay in Town; which she did with so much Earnestness and visible Integrity, that the pretty innocent Creature was going to make her a full and real Discovery of her imaginary, insupportable Misfortunes; and (doubtless) had done it; had she not been prevented by the Return of the Lady, whom she hop'd to have found her Cousin Brightly. The Gentleman her Husband just saw her within Doors, and order'd the Coach to drive to some of his Bottle–Companions; which gave the Women the better Opportunity of entertaining one another, which happen'd to be with some Surprize on all sides. As the lady was going up to her Apartment, the Gentlewoman of the House told her there was a young Lady in the Parlour, who came out o' the Country that very Day on purpose to visit her: The Lady stept immediately to see who it was, and Bellamora approaching to receive her hop'd for Cousin, stopp'd on the the suddain just as she came to her; and sigh'd out loud, Ah, Madam! I am lost. < It is not your Ladyship I seek. No, Madam (return'd t'other) I am apt to think you did not intend me this Honour. But you are as welcome to me, as you could be to the dearest of your Acquaintance: Have you forgot me, Madam Bellamora? (continued she) that Name startled both the other: However, It was with a kind of Joy. Alas!

## The Adventure of the Black Lady. A Novel

Madam, (replied the young one I now remember that I have been so happy to have seen you: But where, and when, my Memory can't shew me. 'Tis indeed some Years since: (return'd the Lady) But of that another time.< Mean while, if your are unprovided of a lodging, I dare undertake, you shall be welcom to this Gentlewoman. The Fair Unfortunate return'd her Thanks; and whilst a Chamber was preparing for her, the Lady entertain'd her in her own. About Ten a Clock they parted, Bellamora being conducted to her new Lodging by the Mistress of the House, who then left her to take what Rest she cou'd amidst her so many seeming Misfortunes; returning to the other Lady, who desir'd her to search into the Cause of Bellamora's Retreat to Town.

The next Morning the good Gentlewoman of the House coming up to her, found Bellamora almost drown'd in Tears, which by many kind and sweet Words she at last stopp'd; and asking whence so great Signs of Sorrow shou'd proceed, vow'd a most profound Secrecy if she wou'd discover to her their Occasion; which, after some little Reluctancy, she did, in this manner:

I was courted (said she) above three Years ago, when my Mother was yet living, by one Mr. Fondlove, a Gentleman of a good Estate, and true Worth; and one who, I dare believe, did then really love me: He continu'd his Passion for me, with all the earnest and honest Solicitations imaginable, till some Month's before my Mother's Death; who at that time, was most desirous to see me dispos'd of in Marriage to another Gentleman, of a much better Estate than Mr. Fondlove: But one, whose Person and Humour did by no means hit with my Inclinations: And this gave Fondlove the unhappy Advantage over me. For, finding me one Day all alone in my Chamber, and lying on my Bed, in as mournful and wretched a Condition, to my then foolish Apprehension, as now I am; He urg'd his Passion with such Violence and accursed Success for me, with reiterated Promises of Marriage, whenever I pleas'd to challeng 'em, which he bound with the most sacred Oaths and most dreadful Excrations; that partly with my Aversion to the other, and partly with my Inclinations to pity him, I ruin'd my self.< Here she relaps'd into a greater Extravagance of Grief than before; which was so extreme, that it did not continue long. When therefore, she was pretty well come to her self, the ancient Gentlewoman ask'd her, why she imagin'd her self ruin'd? To which she answer'd, I am great with Child by him (Madam) and wonder you did not perceive it last Night. Alas! I have not a Month to go: I am sham'd, ruin'd, and damn'd, I fear, for ever lost. O, fie, Madam, think not so: (replied Bellamora) I doubt not that he wou'd marry me; for, soon after my Mother's Death, when I came to be at my own Disposal, which happen'd about two Months after, he offer'd, nay, most earnestly sollicitd me to it, which still he perseveres to do. This is strange! (return'd 'tother) And it appears to me to be your own Fault, that you are yet miserable. Why did you not, or why will you not consent to your own Happiness? Alas! alas! (cry'd Bellamora) 'Tis the only thing I dread in this World: For, I am certain he can never love me after: Besides, ever since, I have abhorr'd the Sight of him: And this is the only Cause that obliges me to forsake my Uncle, and all my Friends and Relations in the Country, hoping this populous and publick Place to be most private, especially, (Madam) in your House, and in your Fidelity and Discretion. Of the last you may assure your self, Madam, (said 't'other:) But what Provision have you made for the Reception of the young Stranger that you carry about you. Ah, Madam! (cry'd Bellamora) you have brought to mind another Misfortune: Then she acquainted her with the suppos'd Loss of her Money and Jewels, telling her withal, that she had but three Guinea's and some Silver left, and the Rings she wore, in her present Possession. The good Gentlewoman of the House told her, she wou'd send to inquire at the Inn where she lay the first Night she came to Town; for, (happily) they might give some account of the Porter to whom she had instrusted her Trunk; and withal repeated her Promise of all the help in her Power, and for that time left her much more compos'd than she found her. The good Gentlewoman went directly to the other Lady, her Lodger, to whom she recounted Bellamora's mournful Confession: At which the Lady appear'd mightily concern'd: And at last, she told her Land-lady, that she wou'd take Care that Bellamora should lie in according to her Quality: For, (added she) the Child (it seems) is my own Brothers.

Assoon as she had din'd, she went to the Exchange and bought Child-bed Linen; but desir'd that Bellamora might not have the least Notice of it: And at her Return dispatch'd a Letter to her Brother Fondlove in Hantshire, with an Account of every particular; which soon brought him up to Town, without satisfying any of his or her Friends with the Reason of his sudden Departure; mean while, the good Gentlewoman of the House had sent to the Star-inn on Fish-street-hill, to demand the Trunk; which she rightly suppos'd to have been carried back thither:

## The Adventure of the Black Lady. A Novel

For, by good Luck, it was a Fellow that plyed thereabouts who brought it to Bellamora's Lodgings that very Night, but unknown to her. Fondlove no sooner got to London, but he posts to his Sister's Lodgings, where he was advis'd not to be seen of Bellamora till they had work'd farther upon her, which the Land-Lady began in this manner; she told her that her things were miscarried, and she fear'd lost; that she had but little Money her self, and if the Overseers of the poor (justly so call'd from their over-looking 'em) shou'd have the least Suspicion of a strange and unmarried Person, who was entertain'd in her House big with Child and so near her time as Bellamora was, she shou'd be troubled, if they cou'd not give Security to the Parish of twenty or thirty Pound that they shou'd not suffer by her, which she cou'd not; or otherwise, she must be sent to the House of Correction, and her Child to a Parish-Nurse. This Discourse one may imagine, was very dreadful to a Person of her Youth, Beauty, Education, Family and Estate: However, she resolutely protested, that she had rather undergo all this, than be expos'd to the Scorn of her Friends and Relations in the Country. The other told her then, that she must write down to her Uncle a farewell Letter, as if she were just going abroad the Pacquet-boat for Holland; that he might not send to inquire for her in Town, when he shou'd understand she was not at her new-married Cousin's in the Country, which accordingly she did, keeping her self a close Prisoner to her Chamber; where she was daily visited by Fondlove's Sister and the Land-Lady, but by no Soul else, the first dissembling the Knowledge she had of her Misfortunes. Thus she continued for above three Weeks; not a Servant being suffer'd to enter her Chamber, so much as to make her Bed, lest they shou'd take Notice of her great Belly: But for all this Caution, the Secret had taken Wind, by the means of an Attendant of the other Lady below, who had over-heard her speaking of it to her Husband. This soon got out 'o Doors and spread abroad, till it reach'd the long Ears of the Wolves of the Parish; who next day design'd to give her an ungrateful Visit: But Fondlove, by good Providence, prevented it; who, the Night before, was usher'd into Bellamora's Chamber by this Sister, his Brother-in-Law, and the Land-Lady. At the sight of him she had like to have swoon'd away: But he taking her in his Arms, began again, as he was wont to do, with Tears in his Eyes, to beg that she wou'd marry him e'er she was delivered; if not for his, nor her own, yet for the Child's sake, which she hourly expected; that it might not be born out of Wedlock, and so be made incapable of inheriting either of their Estates; with a great many more pressing Arguments on all sides: To which at last she consented; and an honest officious Gentleman, whom they had before provided, was call'd up, who made an end of the Dispute: So to Bed they went together that Night; and next Day to the Exchange, for several pretty Businesses that Ladies in her Condition want. Whilst they were abroad, came the Vermin of the Parish, (I mean, the Overseers of the poor, who eat the Bread from 'em) to search for a young Black-hair'd Lady (for so was Bellamora) who was either brought to bed, or just ready to lie down. The Land-Lady shew'd 'em all the Rooms in her House, but no such Lady cou'd be found. At last she bethought her self, and led'em into her Parlour, where she open'd a little Closet-door, and shew'd 'em her Balck Cat that had just kitten'd; assuring 'em, that she shou'd never trouble the Parish as long as she had Rats or Mice in the House, and so dismiss'd 'em like Logger-heads as they came. FINIS.