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*Mistress Nell*

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ness too to execute her plans.

She approached the King, with the confident air possessed by great women who have been bred at court.

"Your Majesty recognizes this ring?" she asked in mildest accents.

"The one I gave to Nell!" answered the astonished King.

"The one Adair this night gave to me," said Portsmouth, calmly.

"'Tis false!" cried Nell, who could restrain her tongue no longer. "I gave that ring to dear old Strings."

"A rare jewel to bestow upon a fiddler," said the Duchess, sarcastically.

"It is true," said Strings, who had wormed his way through the group at mention of his name and now stood the meek central figure at the strange hearing. "My little ones were starving, Sire; and Nell gave me the ring—all she had. They could not eat the gold; so I sold it to the Duke of Buckingham!"

"We are lost," whispered Buckingham to Portsmouth, scarce audibly.

"Coward!" sneered the Duchess, con-