

# Synopsis of *The Beaux' Stratagem*

Set in Lichfield, a village in the English countryside, *The Beaux' Stratagem* opens in Boniface's Inn, a lodging for travelers and a front for thieves. Jack Archer and Tom Aimwell enter, penniless gentlemen in search of wealthy women to marry. Archer poses as a servant to his "master" Aimwell, a disguise designed to help them woo and win a rich wife. The winner will then split half of his share with the other. From Boniface they learn that Lady Bountiful, a local healer, has a beautiful daughter, Dorinda, with a large dowry. Boniface, suspicious of Archer and Aimwell's true identity, asks his daughter Cherry to get information from them. Gloss, the chaplain for the militia and occasional highway robber, also questions Archer. Suspecting him to be a thief, Gloss offers Archer a job robbing Lady Bountiful's estate, planning to turn the tables on Gloss and Boniface by exposing the plan, defeating the thieves and winning the love of Dorinda.

In Lady Bountiful's house, Mrs. Sullen complains to her sister-in-law Dorinda of her marriage to Sullen, her drunken, rude husband. Dorinda reveals her crush on a handsome stranger, Aimwell, glimpsed in church. Curious about his identity, Mrs. Sullen and Dorinda decide to invite his "servant" Archer over for ale. Back at the inn, Cherry learns of the plot to rob Lady Bountiful and refuses to hide any more stolen goods for the highwaymen. Alone with Archer, Aimwell proclaims his love for a woman seen at church—Dorinda. Archer reveals the plan to rob Lady Bountiful's house; he will use the upcoming visit to see how the crime can be prevented. In the meantime, Aimwell decides to pretend to be his older brother, Lord Robert Aimwell, so that Dorinda will think he has a title and a fortune.

At Lady Bountiful's house, Archer and Mrs. Sullen immediately experience a mutual attraction to each other. Archer then declares that Aimwell has become



Jane Gurnett as Dorinda, Matyelok Gibbs as Lady Bountiful and Paul Mooney as Aimwell in Peter Wood's National Theatre Production, 1989. Photo by Clive Barda.

suddenly ill and needs the care of Lady Bountiful, thus getting him inside the house. Aimwell uses the opportunity to woo Dorinda; meanwhile, Archer declares his love for Mrs. Sullen.

Back at the inn, Aimwell and Archer overhear the robbers' plan for that evening. They hurry out to save Lady Bountiful's household. The scene shifts to a bedchamber in Lady Bountiful's house where Dorinda and

Mrs. Sullen discuss their respective passions for Aimwell and Archer. After Mrs. Sullen retires to bed, Archer sneaks through the window. Mrs. Sullen, frightened, nearly shoots him. The servant Scrub enters, announcing the robbery, and Archer declares that he is there to provide assistance. Scrub and Archer capture Gloss when he enters to rob Mrs. Sullen of her jewelry.

In another part of the house, Lady Bountiful and Dorinda are struggling with two thieves. Aimwell engages both of the thieves in a duel while declaring his love for Dorinda. Archer enters and assists his friend. Dorinda and Mrs. Sullen, both wielding swords, jump into the fray. After the thieves have been overtaken, a servant enters, announcing Sir Charles Freeman, Mrs. Sullen's brother. Archer worries that Sir Charles will reveal Aimwell's identity to Dorinda, since he knew the real Lord Robert. Aimwell, however, has decided to be honest and confess their plot to Dorinda. Dashed, Archer threatens to leave, but Dorinda enters with the news that Lord Robert Aimwell has died and has left his brother his title and fortune. Archer reminds Aimwell of their previous agreement to split any money acquired in the course of marrying a rich heiress; Aimwell, now the possessor of Dorinda's fortune as well as his own, agrees. The Sullens agree to divorce, making her available to marry Archer, and, at Cherry's request, her father, Boniface, is forgiven his crimes. A country dance concludes the happy ending.



**Beau** (pronounced BO, plural Beaux – pronounced BOZE): A man who gives excessive attention to dress, appearance and social etiquette.

**Stratagem** (pronounced STRAT-uh-gem): A trick or scheme designed to outwit an enemy or obtain an advantage.

**Dowry:** The money or property that a woman brings to her husband in marriage.

**Chaplain:** A clergyman who conducts religious exercises, sometimes officially attached to a branch of the military.