

THE QUEEN OF SOHO (6 PART SERIES TV PILOT)

"From straw to stardust"

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THE QUEEN OF SOHO, episode 1, Created and written by Julia Kogan

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TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. GEORGIAN COURTROOM - DAY

Renowned actress KITTY CLIVE (early 30s) stands in court before a wigged JUDGE (twice her age). She is surrounded by her fellow actors. A crowd of curious onlookers is in attendance.

JUDGE

(exasperated)

Zounds, Madam! What would you have us do with your petty dramatic squabbles? Theatre owners employ players, that much seems clear. These same players are to be found each night in Soho drinking, whoring and gambling their salaries away. Yet you plead poverty?

KITTY

(struggling to stay calm)

My Lord, the reputation of all actors cannot be based on the debauchery of a few among us.

She throws a quick reproachful glance at THEOPHILUS CIBBER (30s), who quickly draws a cross on his chest and HENRY FIELDING (late 20s), who flutters his eyelids and grins back at her with mock repentance.

KITTY (CONT'D)

(back to the judge,
suppressing a smile)

Many players lead exemplary lives on and off the stage, and we have our families to feed. The agreements we reached with the theatres were no sooner struck than broken. My Lord, we have not been paid, yet like everyone else, we must eat!

Pauses, playing to the crowd.

KITTY (CONT'D)

Unless, of course, this injustice is a ruse to keep our figures slim for the pleasure of the public?

Titters and a few whoops from the crowd. The Judge is not amused.

JUDGE

Mrs. Clive, wasting our precious time is no laughing matter. You are wholly unqualified to speak for yourself, this is not an operatic stage. If you wanted to take this matter up in court, why did you come here on your own? Your husband is a barrister - could he not plead on your behalf?

KITTY

(quick retort)
And why should he? He is not wronged, we are.

More titters from the crowd.

JUDGE

(pause, taken aback by
Kitty's brazen defiance of
authority)
Madam, you try the court's patience.
Who exactly do you take yourself for?

KITTY

(pause, in earnest)
Forgive me, my Lord, I do not profess to know your business and have no conceits about my own. I am both less than I seem and more than you imagine. Though I can barely spell my own name correctly, I am capable of fighting my own battles. This is not my first nor, I suppose, my last.

She pauses and looks at the sympathetic crowd.

KITTY (CONT'D)

I shall take this matter to the people! And I will make my voice heard.

Kitty turns to go abruptly, the camera follows her.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Case dismissed!

The Judge slams down his gavel.

CUT TO:

OPENING TITLES OVER BACH PRELUDE IN C MINOR BMV999 (GOULD RECORDING)

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FRONT OF A WEALTHY HOUSE OPPOSITE A PUB - A SUMMER MORNING

On screen caption

London 1728.

17 year old Kitty Raftor opens the front door and steps out with her bucket and cleaning brushes. She shuts the door behind her and begins to sweep. As she works, we hear the LADY OF THE HOUSE (40) with her MUSIC MASTER (50) through the open window.

MUSIC MASTER (O.S.)
(playing a few introductory
chords on the harpsichord as
he speaks)
Dear Lady, and how is our glorious
voice this morning? Are we ready to
give the songbirds outside our window
a run for their money?

A bashful giggle is heard in response. The Music Master plays an intro to Purcell's "I attempt from love's sickness to fly in vain". Kitty sweeps on.

MUSIC MASTER (CONT'D)
And one and two.

LADY OF THE HOUSE (O.S.)
(an audible breath followed
by loud screeching which
dies down progressively as
she runs out of air)
"I attempt from love's sickness to fly
in vain, for I am myself my own fever,
for I am myself my own fever and
pain."

Kitty winces and stops sweeping. The Music Master stops playing. Kitty catches herself daydreaming and gets back to work, dropping to her knees to dip a scrub brush into the bucket. She begins to wash the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. DRAWING ROOM - DAY.

The Music Master is seated at his instrument as the Lady of the House paces in front of him.

The beauty of the surroundings and her elegant dress run in stark contrast to what comes out of her.

MUSIC MASTER

(gingerly, cuing her in with his head)

Perhaps Madam might, erm, loosen her corset a touch to take a deeper breath? When you're ready, from the top, and one and two...

The Lady of the House fiddles with her dress and takes an exaggerated high breath before launching in once again.

CUT TO:

EXT. ON THE STEPS

As the music restarts, Kitty joins in, inventing her own words to the same tune. The Lady of the House can be heard singing simultaneously in the background.

KITTY

"I attempt from my Mistress to fly in vain. For she is herself my own fever, for she is herself my own fever and pain."

As Kitty sings and cleans with her head down, two drunk actors who have staggered out of the pub opposite approach the house stop and listen intently. We recognise them from the courtroom - Theophilus Cibber and Henry Fielding. They stare at Kitty in disbelief as they speak.

HENRY

Good lord. Has someone been tampering with the gin again?

THEOPHILUS

I had rum.

KITTY

(lost in her singing of the final climactic passage)

"No more now, no more now, no more with pride my heart swell. I cannot find forces, I dare not find forces enough to rebel."

Kitty finishes the song without looking up and scrubs on. Henry and Theophilus are dumbstruck for a beat. They look at each other and head straight for Kitty, who is startled by the sudden encroaching arrival of four legs on her freshly washed steps.

KITTY
 (looking up, annoyed)
 Sirs, are you expected?

THEOPHILUS
 (amused, milking it
 theatrically)
 Only to the initiated, little
 Miss...Miss what?

KITTY
 (coldly)
 Catherine. Raftor.

THEOPHILUS
 Miss Kitty Raftor! You're too
 charming for the long version. Miss
 Kitty, we're what you'd call your own
 personal "deus ex machina".

Henry laughs at the inside joke.

KITTY
 (losing patience)
 Catherine, sir! Sorry, you're my what?
 I don't follow, but I hope you have
 good reason to be standing here
 spreading muck on the steps. Now I'll
 have to start all over again but with
 no song for company!

Henry seizes his cue.

HENRY
 Aha! If it's a song for company that
 you want, we demand that you come with
 us to Drury Lane Theatre immediately.
 Don't we, Theo?

THEOPHILUS
 We positively insist on it. In fact,
 I've as good as decided for you.
 Easier that way for everyone
 concerned, really. Don't thank me yet.
 Wait to see what mood father's in
 first.

KITTY
 (fed up and indignant)
 I'll thank you both to leave. I can
 smell the booze on your breath.
 Apparently, unlike you, I've work to
 do.

HENRY

Indeed you do, but not the work you think! Let the muck take care of itself for a change. Theo, what say you to a staged abduction?

THEOPHILUS

A bit extreme, but why not? I hear abductions are all the rage in theatres across all of Europe this season. I'm at your service.

He performs an exaggerated bow to Henry.

HENRY

Good. Then hurry up and grab her other arm.

They act fast. Kitty lets out a yelp as she is unceremoniously dragged off. Her scream is drowned out by a new vocal attack from her mistress. They howl in unison as, unbeknownst to either of them, they part ways for good.

CUT TO:

INT. DRURY LANE THEATRE STAGE - DAY

COLLEY CIBBER (60) is on the stage wearing an improbably large powdered wig and high-heeled boots with large buckles, which look out of all proportion to his small frame. He alternates between speaking to a full-length mirror in front of him and an invisible audience, with the exception of the first line, which he speaks to an imaginary page off-stage. His manner is absurdly formal, wheedling and mannered. He sounds and looks utterly ridiculous.

CIBBER

Call La Vedrole: I would dress. Well, 'tis an unspeakable pleasure to be a man of quality, strike me dumb! My lord. Your lordship! My lord Foppington! Ah! C'est quelque-chose de beau, que le diable m'emporte! Why, the ladies were ready to puke at me whilst I had nothing but Sir Novelty to recommend me to 'em. Sure, whilst I was but a knight, I was a very nauseous fellow. Well, 'tis ten thousand pound well given, stamp my vitals!

A commotion is heard over the last few lines, followed by the entry of Theophilus and Henry, who are still dragging a struggling Kitty, arm in arm.

THEOPHILUS (O.S.)
 (singing in falsetto)
 Oh, Faaaaather!

The trio are now visible, with Theophilus leading the charge.

THEOPHILUS (CONT'D)
 I've brought you a gift! Don't thank
 me yet. Better wait to see what mood
 she's in first.

Kitty, who was furious a moment earlier, is released. Her anger gives way to wonder when she finds herself on stage. She's never been inside a real theatre and can't resist exploring her surroundings as the men argue.

CIBBER
 (incandescent with rage)
 Damnation, Theophilus, how dare you
 interrupt my rehearsal! Scoundrel! You
 know there is only one week left
 before I reprise my renowned
 performance as Lord Foppington. The
 crowds await, and the critics are
 sharpening their poisoned quills -
 there isn't a moment to spare for your
 tomfoolery, you rotten fruit of my
 loins. What the devil do you want?

THEOPHILUS
 (with exaggerated patience)
 Father, if you stop shouting and look,
 you will see that I have brought you
 this lovely maid. She excels at
 cleaning muck off steps, but that is
 not her only -

Cibber interrupts.

CIBBER
 We have all the servants we could
 conceivably use - every other girl in
 this city is trying to get her foot
 through the door, dreaming of stardom
 or some such folly.

He suddenly recognizes Henry, who has been keeping his head down under the wide brim of his hat.

CIBBER (CONT'D)
 Now this takes the biscuit. Fielding!
 You bastard, didn't I tell you never
 to set foot here again?

HENRY

(trying to appease and
cajole)

Oh, c'mon, Colley! It was just a
little joke, I meant no harm...

CIBBER

(overly dramatic, but with
real anger)

You parody my theatrical
accomplishments, beloved of King and
country, and then you turn up here
like some prodigal son? I cast thee
off, Henry Fielding! Never darken my
doorstep again - you've betrayed me,
and there is no going back.

HENRY

Colley, please. Descend from Mount
Parnassus for a moment, and take in
our little catch. We've fished you out
the Next Big Thing at Drury Lane, and
here you keep going on about
doorsteps, which happens to be where
we caught her cleaning and singing
away in the first place.

CIBBER

(to Henry and Theophilus)

Have you both lost your minds? You
bring me a girl you've found on a
doorstep? We have the finest divas of
our age from "le monde entier" here at
Drury Lane!

HENRY

(cocky, silencing Cibber with
his finger)

Colley, Colley. Let's not be too
hasty, eh? I'll make a deal with you.
I'll take no fee for discovering
little Miss Kitty Raftor here. But
when she becomes your top diva, you
must invite me back to turn her into
the biggest star in all of England!

Pushing away Henry's finger and starting to chase him around
the stage wielding a cane.

CIBBER

Fielding, my wig will sprout hairs on
its own before I invite you back...
Get out before I'm forced to hurt you!
No court in the land would convict me!

HENRY

(hopping around like a hare)
 Don't hurt me, Colley, you'll regret
 it one day soon. Theo, I leave you
 with your proud progenitor and our
 diamond in the rough. You'll all be
 begging to have me here before you
 know it! I must dash to celebrate my
 forthcoming return to Drury Lane with
 a well-earned gin!

Henry runs towards the stage door chased by Cibber and his cane
 when he runs straight into HENRY CAREY (45).

CAREY

(delighted to see Henry
 Fielding)
 Fielding! Never thought I'd see you
 here again! What's the occasion?

Carey unintentionally stands between Henry and Cibber.

CIBBER

(furious, swatting the cane
 around Carey)
 Out of my way!

HENRY

(in haste, sensing that his
 time is up)
 The girl! Carey, listen to the girl.

Carey tries to clarify, but Henry is gone. Carey steps into
 the theatre followed by Cibber, who is out of breath and
 clutching his heart from the unnecessary exertion.

CAREY

What is he on about? Who is the girl?

CIBBER

Some "Kitty" - a nobody. An ordinary
 maid my disappointment of a son and
 that agitator Fielding dragged away
 from her work.

Kitty finally tunes in to the conversation.

KITTY

If I'm a nobody, Sir, what does that
 make you, pray tell? A bee keeper,
 perchance? You seem to be carrying a
 beehive on your head!

Cibber is too taken aback to respond quickly but can't help reflexively removing his wig at the insult. Carey smiles. Theophilus tries to take control.

THEOPHILUS

Father, I know I'm drunk, but you're more fool sober. Won't you listen a moment?

CIBBER

Never! Get yourself and your strumpet out of my sight! I've work to do.

CAREY

Colley, I wish to hear her.

Cibber reacts with a gesture of great annoyance, but Carey's authority is clear.

KITTY

(suddenly anxious)
Sirs, fond as I am becoming of this misadventure, I must get back immediately. If I'm found out, I'll be in terrible trouble!

CAREY

(gently)
Of course, Kitty. But as you're here already could you not sing me one little song?

KITTY

(beat, too tempted)
Well, there is one little song that I love especially, but who'll play it?

CAREY

Whisper the name of it in my ear and I'll play.

Kitty does as told. Carey goes to the harpsichord and begins to play Purcell's "Music for a while". Kitty sings. She and her voice are completely pure and unaffected.

KITTY

"Music. Music for a while shall all your cares beguile, wondering how your pains were eased and maintaining to be pleased..."

Colley's irritation stops dead. He grabs Theophilus by his collar and pushes him off the stage and into the audience, where they stand a few rows back as Kitty's voice fills the hall. Cibber talks confidentially to Theophilus in the new deadpan tone of a consummate impresario.

CIBBER

You are not to let her leave, you understand me?

THEOPHILUS

(laughing, milking it)
What is this I hear, father? This little nobody of a maid? We have plenty more where she came from! She's got mucky steps to clean, and I must get back to the pub.

When Theophilus turns and pretends to go, Cibber grabs him and pulls a purse out of his own pocket. He's in no mood for games.

CIBBER

Take this money. Get her a proper dress. Find her lodging next to the theatre, and do it now. Don't let her out of your sight for a moment, I won't have her running off. Covent Garden must know nothing about this. I want her here first thing tomorrow morning.

Theo nods, laughing, and takes the money. Cibber walks back onto the stage as the music either stops or is interrupted by his arrival, depending on timing. Kitty is in the midst of an apotheosis. This is her first "performance", and she has just found her place in the world.

CIBBER (CONT'D)

(taking a beat to look at Kitty properly for the first time, then to Carey)
What say you?

Henry Carey and Cibber lock eyes for a moment. No discussions are necessary.

CIBBER (CONT'D)

(sighing)
Right then. Good luck. She's all yours!

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE IN SOHO - DAY

An organ grinder cranks out "Greensleeves" on the bustling street outside Kitty's new home. The camera zooms out, climbing up to the top floor window through which a sleeping Kitty becomes visible. She stirs and wakes to her new world as if in a fairy tale. Slowly, she climbs out of her first soft bed, running her hand over the fabric and giving her new feather pillow a squeeze and walks to the window to look out at the organ grinder and the glorious view. The music continues into the next two scenes and swells to an all-pervasive orchestral version of the song (Slatkin, Cleveland Phil recording).

CUT TO:

INT. KITTY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Kitty steps back from the window and walks over to her new dress draped over a chair, which she strokes admiringly. She picks up the vanity kit that lies on the dresser. Then she spots the clock in horror. It is already well past noon.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOHO STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The view from her window shows Kitty in her new finery running and tripping down the street towards Drury Lane Theatre. "Greensleeves" ends/resolves musically.

CUT TO:

INT. DRURY LANE THEATRE - DAY

Kitty runs through the stage door, shouting apologies which precede her onto the stage. As she bursts in, she is mortified to find actors in costume whose scene she has interrupted. A few of the actors eye her with irritation and suspicion. Carey is sitting in the stalls a few rows in front of the stage.

KITTY

(blushing crimson,
straightening herself up as
she speaks)
Oh, Mr. Carey! I don't know quite how
I overslept...

CAREY

(laughing and gesturing for
Kitty to come to him)
Kitty dear, come down and listen a
moment. We're rehearsing "The Provoked
Husband" for tomorrow's performance.

Kitty runs down to join Carey in the stalls and the play restarts. Restoration theatre superstar ANNE OLDFIELD (45) is on with an actor playing her husband and several other extras. She stands bolt upright and her hands gesture demurely. Her every movement is measured, unhurried and statuesque.

ANNE OLDFIELD/LADY TOWNLEY
(turning herself slowly to
show her silhouette to the
audience)

"What I have said, my Lord, is not my excuse, but my confession; my errors (give them, if you please, a harder name) cannot be defended, no plea can alter them! What then remains in my condition but resignation to your pleasure? Till I have lived an object of forgiveness, I dare not hope for pardon."

LORD TOWNLEY
(magnanimously)
"No, Madam! Your errors thus renounced this instant are forgotten! As from a shipwreck saved, we mingle tears with our embraces."

He embraces Lady T and the extras for good measure as they mutter approvingly. We cut to Kitty and Carey in the stalls.

KITTY
(softly to Carey, without
turning her head away from
the stage)
Crikey, what grace! Have you ever seen a more elegant gentlewoman?

CAREY
(amused)
Well...let's just say that old Anne hasn't been treading the floorboards all these years for nothing. She's picked up a trick or two. Do I detect a note of admiration in your voice?

KITTY
She's amazing! I'd do anything to be more like her.

CAREY
(smiling ear to ear)
Is that so? In that case, perhaps we should set up a little rendezvous?

You could glean the secrets of her craft straight from Anne herself.

KITTY

(thrilled)

What, me? Do you really think I could?

CAREY

(delighted by her naivete,
knowing it won't last)

And why on earth not? We could ask her. Anne Oldfield is a generous soul if ever there was one.

Kitty and Carey watch the end of the play on the stage.

ANNE OLDFIELD/LADY TOWNLEY

(meekly)

"What words, what love, what duty can repay such obligations?"

LORD TOWNLEY

"Preserve but this desire to please, and your power is endless."

ANNE OLDFIELD/LADY TOWNLEY

"Oh! Till this moment, never did I know, My Lord, I had a heart to give you!"

LORD TOWNLEY

(to the extras)

"By heaven! As you have often shared in my disquiet, partake of my new-born joy! See here, the bride of my desires! This may be called my wedding day."

CUT TO:

INT. DRURY LANE THEATRE BACKSTAGE - DAY

FADE IN.

Rehearsal has ended and Carey and Kitty are chatting with Anne, who is still glamorous in full wig and costume.

ANNE OLDFIELD

(the epitome of elegance,
laughing poshly, enunciating
a little too clearly)

...did those two really drag you off kicking and screaming? The very cheek of it!

CAREY

(shaking his head)

The muck is still drying on those steps, yet here she is with us! New dress, new shoes, a bed apparently too comfortable to get out of in the morning, and no idea about stagecraft.

KITTY

(nodding, nervous and excited)

Mrs. Oldfield, I barely dare ask, but might you explain how you...how you carry yourself like that? I've never seen such a lovely...erm, carriage?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(charmed, laughing)

I'll let the horses know!

KITTY

(mortified, fumbling, looking to Carey for rescue)

Oh no, I didn't mean..! I must have used the wrong word?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(flattered)

My dear, I'd be delighted to school you in the ways of the lady thespian! Won't you come to my house tomorrow morning away from prying men's ears? We girls must keep our little secrets. Carey knows how to find me.

Anne curtsies and strolls off, Kitty nearly swoons before grabbing Carey's hands and jumping up and down.

CAREY

(trying to maintain a serious demeanor, but giving way to his jovial nature)

Number 12, Long Acre Lane, 10 am.
Anne is a lady of leisure in the morning, but don't you be late! Add a layer of straw and sticks to your new feather mattress or something? Then hurry back here and tell me all!

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT DOOR OF ANNE'S HOUSE - THE FOLLOWING MORNING

The doorbell rings, and a tidy young maid opens it. She leads Kitty into the drawing room, where a dishevelled Anne is lounging, spread out on her settee. She is still in her nightgown. The house is rather splendid and kitsch, with much theatrical memorabilia from Anne's long and glorious career. Not a jot of Anne's stage persona remains in her manner. The posh elocution is gone, replaced with something far more basic verging on Cockney. Kitty is shocked at the sight of the real Anne but does her best to hide it. Anne gets up to greet Kitty, then plops back down again unceremoniously.

ANNE OLDFIELD

(throwing her arms around
Kitty)

Kitty, darling! Welcome to my humble
abode. Do sit down and make yourself
comfortable.

Anne motions for Kitty to sit down and hands her a cup of tea, which is already set up for them on the coffee table.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT'D)

(with the air of making an
important announcement)

Did you know you are heaven-sent?

KITTY

(taking the tea and sipping,
surprised)

Am I?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(in high spirits)

I just hope your timing is half as
good on stage! I can't possibly let
the next lot make a total cock up of
my life's work, now can I?

KITTY

What next lot?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(shaking her head - Kitty
really knows nothing)

Oh dear child, bless you. You may have
noticed that I'm no spring chicken?
I've been keeping up appearances, but
it's getting harder and harder to hold
up that "carriage", as you so
charmingly put it.

Anne gives her body a nice loose shake and sighs with pleasure.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT'D)

It is bliss to be unbound.

KITTY

Unbound?

ANNE OLDFIELD

From my corset, of course! Anyway, my garden is in need of attention, and quite frankly, I'm getting a bit tired of the game.

KITTY

(confused)

Ah, I see. But what does that have to do with me?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(explaining to a dunce)

Everything, of course! Who'll step into my shoes? If I want to make my art immortal, I've got to train the new me myself. And just as I'm thinking this, you turn up, fresh as a daisy. Is it a coincidence, I ask you?

KITTY

(the penny dropping,
startled)

I don't know. But how could I become the new you? We're so different?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(laughing)

Oh, Kitty, I'm not like me, either, don't you see? That is the game in a nutshell, and I am its master. Incidentally, we happen to be more alike than you think.

In earnest to Kitty, taking her hands in her own.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT'D.)

We were both born within the sound of Bow bells and have nothing but our own wits and talent to rely upon. I started out on Cheap Street, and look at where I am now! And best of all, I've earned it all myself! I shall teach you the game from start to finish so that you can have all this, too. Have no fear and leave it to me!

I'll train you better than any circus dog. You'll have audiences eating out of the palm of your hand in no time if you do as I say!

CUT TO:

INT. DRAWING ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Anne is behind Kitty, tying up the whalebone corset she has strapped her into.

KITTY

(gasping for air)
Mrs. Oldfield, how exactly am I to breathe?

ANNE OLDFIELD

Learn to take high and shallow breaths, my dear, like a proper lady. You're not dragging your cleaning buckets around now, are you? What do you need all that air for anyway? Real ladies are delicate as a blossom. And stand up straight, for heaven's sake. Shoulders back. That's it. Head up high! Nose in the air, please, you are an aristocrat now.

KITTY

(whimpering slightly but doing her best to comply)
Like this? It must be awfully uncomfortable being an aristocrat. Funny, I never noticed before.

ANNE OLDFIELD

(with mounting impatience)
Never mind all that! Now, turn your right foot out and place it in front of your left. Not bad. Now your arms - don't just leave them dangling there like sausages on a butcher's rack!

KITTY

(exasperated)
But they grow out of my shoulders and dangle all by themselves!

ANNE OLDFIELD

Yes, dear, but we're here to prevent it! They have a role to play in your new persona, too. Watch this and note the effect!

Anne stretches one arm in front of her and the other a little way back; her fingers are spread and rounded as in 18th century portraits. Anne's manner and voice change completely to act. She looks out in front of her as she delivers her line, then her head turns and her gaze drops demurely for the final moment.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT'D)

"Romeo, oh Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo?"

KITTY

She's looking for her lover but has the time and energy for all that posturing? What happens when he turns up? Does he pick her up and carry her off all stiff like a dummy in a shop window?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(vexed)

Now Catherine, do be serious. In life as in art, women must be women to appeal to the male eye! All our games have that one ultimate purpose. Men of quality don't want loose and flippant girls. If they did, they'd go courting at the vegetable stalls!

KITTY

(trying to make amends, she does her best to copy Anne)

"Romeo, oh Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

She looks and sounds silly and is devoid of Anne's dignity. Anne sighs. Kitty drops the stance.

ANNE OLDFIELD

Kitty, think of what's at stake here. Look around you and reflect a moment. Who runs the world?

KITTY

Well...lots of different men do, I suppose?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(earnestly, slowing down to mark each of the last five words)

Exactly! Men are the brains of this world. And it's heads. But women?

Though we women are inferior in strength and intelligence, we have something else at our disposal. What do you think that is, Catherine?

KITTY

(confused)

Our womanhood? We give birth.

ANNE OLDFIELD

(as if explaining to a fool)

Not quite. We have our femininity! If men are the heads of this world, we are, perhaps, the world's necks?

Kitty looks confused by this analogy.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT'D)

(explaining, savouring the end)

The heads need us to prop them up! And if we're really clever and use the gifts nature has granted us wisely, we can turn those heads any which way we want...

KITTY

(utterly perplexed)

But Miss Anne, it's all so strange. This may seem like a very silly question to you, but why can't I just be as I am?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(beat, more coldly)

Kitty, you are a sweet but naive girl. The truth is, nobody wants you as you are, dear. And nobody ever will!

CUT TO:

INT. STAGE OF DRURY LANE THEATRE - DAY

The stage is empty except for a few loose set items and Carey, who is composing at his harpsichord when Kitty bursts in, sobbing.

CAREY

(expecting it)

Kitty! What's the matter?

KITTY

(in tears)

Mr. Carey, I must ask you something.

Did you take me here to be as I am? Or did you bring me here to turn me into something else?

CAREY

(looking at Kitty intently)
What do you think I want you to be?

KITTY

(wiping her face)
Mr. Carey, I could never be the new Mrs. Oldfield. And even if I could, I just don't want to be!

CAREY

(empathetic, containing a smile)
But I thought you were ready to give anything to be more like Anne?

KITTY

I was, but...I've found out it's all fake!

CAREY

(with understanding and a touch of sadness)
And what did you imagine it was, Kitty? This is the theatre. And we are all players.

KITTY

(militant)
You may be, but I don't want to be anymore. At least as a maid, I was free to be myself. And now? I have no right to exist, except to grimace and delude myself and others. What is the point of it? I won't live my life as a lie! I'd rather clean muck. Goodbye, Mr. Carey, and thank you for being so kind to me. I'll leave all my new things in my room, along with the key.

Kitty turns to go, Carey stops her gently.

CAREY

Kitty, wait a moment. Isn't it my turn to ask you a question?

Kitty turns to him, still crying.

CAREY

Why do you think I hired you on the spot?

KITTY

(beat, she hadn't considered this before)

I don't know. Maybe you fancied yourself a real-life Pygmalion who could mold me into something you liked?

CAREY

Not quite... Kitty, has it occurred to you that you know nothing about me? You've filled in the blanks with your imagination, just as you assumed I'd done with you.

KITTY

(beat, reflecting)

So why did you hire me, then?

CAREY

(double-meaning, slowly, with a smile)

Because I know you will do exactly what I want you to do. You are absolutely right about that! We all have our little battles to fight. And without knowing it, you've just joined me in mine.

KITTY

(disappointed)

I don't want to fight anyone's battles, not even my own! I just want to have a small, quiet life without too much trouble, thank you very much.

CAREY

(sighs)

My dear Kitty...much as you may want a quiet life, I'm afraid you won't have one. The fates have spoken.

CUT TO:

INT. OPERA OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC - NIGHT

Kitty and Carey sit in the audience of the packed auditorium, which is lit with hundreds of candles.

Imperious and imposing FRANCESCA CUZZONI (40), the notorious reigning Italian diva of London's operatic stage, is singing the role of Cleopatra in HANDEL's *Guilio Cesare*. She is extremely silly, but the sound is glorious.

FRANCESCA CUZZONI
 (displaying a series of
 bizarre mannerisms as she
 sings)
 "Piangerò la sorte mia,
 sì crudele e tanto ria,
 finché vita in petto avrò."

Kitty and Carey turn to look at each other, and then look back at the stage. The fast section of the aria starts and Francesca takes off, gesticulating wildly.

FRANCESCA CUZZONI (CONT'D)
 "Ma poi morta d'ogn'intorno
 il tiranno e notte e giorno
 fatta spettro agiterò."

CUT TO:

INT. DRURY LANE THEATRE STAGE - DAY

Kitty and Carey are on the stage alone with his harpsichord, which he plays as Kitty sings another aria from the same opera.

KITTY
 "V'adoro pupille, saette d'amore, le
 vostre faville son grate nel sen."

Kitty starts out singing in her own way, completely naturally, with sincere and unaffected body language. Then she catches Carey's eye and begins to imitate Cuzzoni's every movement, lampooning and exaggerating as she goes. She walks over to Carey and uses him as a prop, shaking him in mock operatic fervour. They both can't go on and fall about laughing hysterically.

CAREY
 (catching his breath)
 Darling Kitty, you really must perform
 your Italian diva spoof on stage for
 everyone to see! You're killing me,
 it's the funniest thing...

KITTY
 (laughing, teasingly)
 So you don't want me to do that in
 earnest?

CAREY

(shaking his head in
disbelief)

And you actually thought I did? I've been fighting the establishment for years! I can't bear the sight of all that pompous nonsense! But Cibber refuses to stage anything I write that breaks with tradition.

KITTY

(touched)

I didn't know you wrote. May I hear what you've composed?

CAREY

Better yet, I'll write for you as you are, natural and true. Do you see now? I had to show you where theatre had come from so you could understand where it may go. What you've been watching on stage is the world of the past.

KITTY

I hadn't realised there was any other world?

CAREY

(a bit wild, revealing his
true nature)

There isn't! It is up to us to create one together, you and me! I don't want a doll to control, I want you as a partner.

KITTY

(astonished at the notion)

Me? How could I be your partner? I can read, but I'm not even educated. And in case you haven't noticed, I'm only a woman.

CAREY

(animated)

Your own good instincts will see you through. And how is a woman any less than a man? I've never understood that ridiculous notion. One day, people will look back on us and laugh.

Kitty runs to Carey and throws her arms around his neck.

KITTY

(sincerely, with affection)
I'll be your partner, with all my
heart!

CAREY

(delighted)
Good, and not a moment too soon.
Cibber is staging that ridiculous
tragedy, "Mithrades, King of Pontus",
as we speak. I can't stop him from
making a fool of himself, but I can
sneak you into a little role as a page
boy. And guess what? I've already
written you an air of your own...

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE AT DRURY LANE THEATRE - NIGHT

It is the opening night of the show. Actors are milling about backstage as Cibber's muffled dialogue is heard being performed in his usual over the top way from the stage. Theophilus is also on stage. Kitty, whose cue is coming, moves towards the wings dressed in her page boy outfit. For the first time, she looks lost and frightened. Cibber and Theophilus come off the stage, sweating profusely.

CIBBER

(urgently)
You're on, my dear! Carey is in the
pit with the orchestra awaiting your
entry.

Kitty stands rooted to the spot.

THEOPHILUS

(increasingly frantic)
Kitty! What is wrong with you? Now
you've grown shy? You're on! Go!

She stands there silent, eyes wide open.

CIBBER

(with desperation)
Oh, for the love of God! Theophilus,
your little maid has gone cold as a
fish on us. There's nothing for it.
Throw her out into the sea!

They grab her and hoist her onto the stage.

CUT TO:

INT. STAGE OF DRURY LANE THEATRE - NIGHT

The auditorium is packed. Kitty is thrown onto the stage and faces the audience, trembling head to foot. The public is rowdy and growing more impatient with each passing moment. Carey tries to catch her eye from the orchestra pit, but she stares blankly into the crowd. Carey cues in the orchestra and plays her introduction. After a long moment of silence, she begins to sing Henry Carey's "Cease to persuade", tentatively and without moving a muscle. Gradually, she comes alive. By the middle of her ballad, she is entirely connected to the audience.

KITTY

"Cease to persuade, nor say you love
sincerely. Once you've betrayed,
you'll treat me most severely. So fly
to what you once did pursue. So fly to
what you once did pursue."

The audience erupts into spontaneous applause.

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE AT DRURY LANE

After the show, everyone except Cibber is gathered around Kitty, congratulating her on her debut, which was clearly a big success.

THEOPHILUS

(beaming)
Well done, Kitty! You're almost one of
us now.

KITTY

(happy, laughing)
Almost?

THEOPHILUS

Most certainly! You are missing the
main part of our theatrical tradition.

KITTY

And what might that be, pray tell?

THEOPHILUS

The celebratory opening night drink at
the pub, of course! Come on everyone!
The new starlet is treating us all to
a round of drinks and merriment!
Kitty, unless you want to celebrate as
a page boy, you'd better go and
change. Your boozy baptism awaits.

KITTY

Oh, alright! Everyone is invited!
They'd better have some tea for me, or
I shall have nothing to drink!

THEOPHILUS

That and a good sausage roll, you can
count on it.

KITTY

Thank goodness, I'm starving. I
couldn't swallow a bite all day...

Cibber suddenly appears brandishing a newspaper. He is wild
with outrage.

CIBBER

(shouting theatrically)
Stop, you fools! The only place any of
you are going is straight to bed! Does
our entire theatre company live up its
own arse? Have none of you seen the
news from Covent Garden?

Everyone looks around. Nobody has any idea of what Cibber is on
about.

CAREY

(to Kitty)
Oh, what now? Another tempest in a
teacup?

CIBBER

(doubly exasperated)
John Gay's "Beggar's Opera" has just
opened to rave reviews! It's the talk
of the town and all anybody will want
to see from this day forth! Ladies are
carrying copies of their favourite
songs inside their fans. If we don't
come up with something to rival it
fast, we'll be having a beggar's opera
of our own, by which I mean that we
will all be begging in front of the
opera before you've recovered from
your hangovers!

Cibber stops his rant and looks around. Everyone stares back at
him in shocked silence. He takes a beat and recovers his
composure.

CIBBER (CONT'D)

Right!

I want you all here with your thinking caps on at 8 am sharp tomorrow! If you're even a minute late, I'll dock your pay for tonight's performance. Now everyone go home!

Cibber storms off. The actors groan and start to leave, deflated. Carey goes off and comes back with a bouquet of flowers he has prepared for Kitty. He bows before her as he hands them to her. She curtsies back and laughs. She is now officially a player.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOHO STREETS - NIGHT

Kitty walks home, bouquet in hand. She is still sky high and re-living her moment on the stage. She skips along, stopping to practice her curtain call, and bows to an imaginary audience.

FADE OUT:

CUT TO:

INT. KITTY'S ROOM - THE FOLLOWING MORNING

Kitty wakes to the sound of a shouting cockney NEWS VENDOR (20s) across the street. She goes to her window and looks out. The only discernible words are "Miss Lavinia Fenton" and "triumph".

CUT TO:

EXT. SOHO STREET

Kitty shuts the door behind her and heads for the newspaper stand, which also sells posters of "The Beggar's Opera" featuring an image of scantily-clad Miss Lavinia Fenton.

STREET VENDOR

(tipping his hat)

Top of the mornin', miss. What's yer pleasure?

KITTY

(pointing to the newspapers)

One of each of those, please, and the poster.

STREET VENDOR

(impressed, taking the papers and poster)

You'll be wanting the same story over and over, poster and all? 'Ere!

Miss Fenton'd be touched to know of
yer devotion!

Kitty pays and dashes towards Drury Lane with the papers in hand.

CUT TO:

INT. DRURY LANE THEATRE STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Kitty stands reading from the papers, a dozen of her fellow actors, Carey, and Cibber are scattered around perched on bits of stage furniture. Anne Oldfield occupies a regal armchair.

KITTY

(dropping one paper and
picking up another)

And the Daily Courant writes, "The
delightful and sprightly Miss Fenton
has the great advantage of being
entirely unschooled in her singing."

The actors erupt in groans and protestations.

KITTY (CONT'D)

"The grain of her voice thus exposed
can only manifest itself in her
charming person as nature intended."

Further uproar from one and all.

CIBBER

(exasperated)

What on earth has nature got to do
with it? We are arteeests!
Thespians, who have gone through great
pains to learn the nuanced art of the
theatre! How dare they...

THEOPHILUS

(annoyed)

For once, father, I must agree with
you. Has all our skill and training
suddenly been declared null and void
by the town's newspapers? What's
gotten into them?

CAREY

(bemused, looking at the
poster)

Cleavage, for a start!

THEOPHILUS
 (suddenly interested)
 Oh? Let me see!

Kitty passes him the poster with irritation.

CAREY
 There's an eyeful in those mezzotints
 of charming Miss Fenton's breasts -
 the poor girl is half-naked. I bet
 that will sell a poster or two, not to
 mention tickets.

KITTY
 Couldn't we go and see the show for
 ourselves? At least we'd find out what
 we're up against?

CIBBER
 I forbid any of my players to step
 inside that infested rat hole of a
 theatre, you'll be recognized! We
 won't give those Beggars the
 satisfaction of ogling their show only
 to be accused of plagiarism when we've
 got our own success.

THEOPHILUS
 (to Kitty, eyeing her
 breasts)
 We could give those Beggars a run for
 their money with young Kitty's rack
 here! Let's undress her and call for
 the engraver!

Theo looks around for the reaction from his fellow players. It
 is sceptical at best.

THEOPHILUS (CONT'D)
 (defensively)
 It couldn't hurt to try! Needs must,
 and what have you lot got to offer up?

KITTY
 (wrapping her arms
 protectively around her
 bosom)
 Nobody is undressing me for the
 engraver, least of all you!

THEOPHILUS
 Oh come on, Kitty, you take everything
 far too personally!

Our survival at Drury Lane is at stake, and you could save us all by showing a bit of skin! Don't be so selfish!

KITTY

(to Theo)

Why don't you start saving us all by removing your trousers and those ridiculous tights and show us what they contain. Let's call for the engraver and see whose unmentionables are more in tune with our newly emerging popular culture.

CAREY

(to Kitty)

"Popular culture"? Brilliant, Kitty! Let's just call it "pop culture" from now on, shall we? As clothes are to be scarce and vocal training unnecessary, why waste time on the long word?

ANNE OLDFIELD

(seething at the poster she has taken from Theo to examine the mezzotint)

Ha, I knew it! No wonder their interest in peaked!

She gets up, shaking her head.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT'D)

Well, my dears, I suppose we must resign ourselves to singing like the damsels at the fish market with our udders hanging out. Fashion dictates, after all. Who are we to argue with these strange times?

CAREY

(soothingly)

Now Anne, surely you'll be exempt from such a fate.

THEOPHILUS

(muttering under his breath)

Thank god. We need to sell tickets, not refund them.

ANNE OLDFIELD

(heatedly, to Carey)

It was bound to happen one day, Henry!

What with your "pop" culture, women will be dressing like men next, and vice versa. Mark my words...nobody knows who and what they are anymore. The boundaries of common decency are crumbling as we speak.

CAREY

(thoughtfully)

Hmmm. Boundaries. Are we really so very different from one another? Are we opera types another species from those fish sellers and their popular ballads? I don't think so for a minute. It's all six of one and half a dozen of the other.

CIBBER

Carey, it is like night and day!

CAREY

How so? I've had my biggest hit yet with "Sally in our Alley". I shouldn't wonder if it's the only work of mine that people will remember down the line!

Carey steps into the middle of the circle of players and launches into his song:

CAREY (CONT'D)

(singing with gusto)

"Of all the girls that are so smart,
there's none like pretty Sally; she is
the darling of my heart and lives in
our alley."

By the second line, all the actors, including Kitty, have merrily joined in. Cibber interrupts.

CIBBER

(outraged, Freudian slipping)

Udderly, I mean utterly ridiculous!

CAREY

(finally showing a bit of
temper)

Oh, yes? How come they all know it,
then?

KITTY

(interrupting excitedly to
Carey)

I had no idea you wrote that song, I love it!

Carey turns to Cibber with an I told you so expression.

CIBBER

(trying to talk sense)
Carey, have you finally gone completely mad? We are professionals!

CAREY

Apparently, it's amateurs that the public wants now! What say you to that? I've been trying to put on an English ballad opera for years, but you always stopped me!

CIBBER

(admitting defeat)
Well, I'm not stopping you now, damn it all to hell! John Gay can't be making the only "pop" in London. We'd better come up with something. Carey, you do the music. And I shall go off and lock myself in my lair until I create our next masterpiece.

CAREY

(flustered)
Oh, Colley, that is awfully kind of you, but couldn't we get Fielding to do the text? Or even I could write it, I wouldn't want you to waste your precious time on popular entertainment that's obviously beneath you...

The players all make a desperate attempt to agree with Carey before Cibber cuts in.

CIBBER

(dramatically)
I wouldn't hear of it! John Gay is not the only one around here who feels which way the wind is blowing!

THEOPHILUS

(trying to avert disaster)
Speaking of wind, father, maybe my generation is a slightly more attuned weathervane where the new "pop" is concerned? Won't you let me have a go? If you don't like what I come up with, you could always say no.

CIBBER

(with contempt)

Theophilus, you fool! How can you expect me to entrust the future of Drury Lane theatre to you when you can barely tie your own shoelaces?

Theo makes an escape with a comic shrug but is wounded to the core and humiliated.

CIBBER (CONT')

(to all)

Clearly, we must all change with the times! I shall write a ballad opera to make the less sophisticated members of our public laugh and weep, but I shall make it better, nobler than Gay's common muck. Just you wait...

Struck with inspiration, Cibber struts off in a trance. The players look around at one another.

CAREY

(sighing)

May the good Lord help us.

KITTY

(with a new idea in her head)

What a palaver. You'd think the world as we know it had come to an end? I wonder what all the fuss is about...

Kitty turns to go, but Theo catches up with her near the exit and puts an arm out to stop her from leaving.

THEOPHILUS

(in a new gentle tone, with a touch of fake bravado)

Kitty, something has come to my attention.

KITTY

(still annoyed from earlier)

And what would that be, Theo?

THEOPHILUS

Well, not much, really. Only that while I was examining your potential as Drury Lane's answer to Miss Lavinia Fenton, I noticed that you scrub up rather nicely.

Kitty stares back at him blankly, unclear as to what he's getting at.

THEOPHILUS (CONT'D)

(unsuccessfully masking his
shyness and genuine feeling
with banter)

...And I thought you might allow me to
take you out for that sausage roll I
promised you last night? It's big,
it's juicy, it's England's answer to
the Bratwurst. If you let me bring
along the engraver, I'll treat you to
champagne and caviar next time.

KITTY

(not wanting to hurt his
feelings)

I'm sorry, Theo, but I already have
plans for tonight.

THEOPHILUS

(hurt)

What could be more important than our
holy communion over a sausage roll?

KITTY

(flustered)

I'm afraid I'd rather not say...

Kitty ducks under his arm and dashes off.

CUT TO:

EXT. COVENT GARDEN THEATRE - NIGHT

A young woman in a modest dress and cape with a hood stands
hidden in a long line of would be spectators at the ticket
office of Covent Garden. As the camera moves in, Kitty is seen
in her maid's uniform. She inches her way along discreetly
until she comes up to the TICKET SELLER (50).

KITTY

(under her hood)

One ticket, please, sir!

TICKET SELLER

(checking the seating plan)

There's one seat in the upper gallery
left at a shilling, miss. It's rather
a lot, but will you have it all the
same?

KITTY

(quickly)

Ah no, forgive me, I meant I'd like
your best available seat, please?

TICKET SELLER
 (shocked, straining to see
 under her hood)
 But that's a whole guinea?! Two
 months' wages...

KITTY
 (interrupting, shocked at the
 intrusion)
 Never you mind! Here's the money.

Kitty takes the money out of a small refined-looking purse and hands it to the ticket seller, who looks at it with deep suspicion before handing it back to her.

TICKET SELLER
 (convinced of foul play)
 How you came into possession of that
 coin is none of my business, but I am
 not letting the likes of you sit next
 to respectable folk. It's the upper
 gallery or nothing if you want to see
 the show. Madam.

Sensing the futility of continuing the argument, Kitty reluctantly hands him the smaller coin and takes her ticket.

CUT TO:

INT. COVENT GARDEN THEATRE UPPER GALLERIES - MOMENTS LATER

Inside the theatre, a large poorly dressed crowd fights for space in the upper galleries, with Kitty among them. She looks down to the stalls, where she sees lots of empty seats.

CUT TO:

INT. COVENT GARDEN THEATRE STALLS - MOMENTS LATER

Kitty waits until the coast is clear before sneaking into an empty seat in the stalls, taking her place among elaborately dressed patrons, who eye her with condescension. A smartly dressed, elegant young man with a sensitive face locks eyes with her briefly from several seats away and smiles. He is barrister GEORGE CLIVE (25), an avid theatre fan and Kitty's future husband. Kitty smiles back shyly as an angry USHER (30) marches up to her.

USHER
 Madam, there must be some
 mistake...may I see your ticket?

Seeing Kitty's panic, Clive jumps up and places himself between Kitty and the USHER.

CLIVE
 (graciously but firmly)
 You've no need to bother the lady,
 she's with me.

USHER
 (suddenly docile)
 I beg your pardon, Mister Clive, I was
 not aware the lady was your guest.

The USHER leaves, Kitty starts to thank George, who makes a quick "it's nothing" gesture as the lights come down. The orchestra tunes up and launches into the overture of "The Beggar's Opera".

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. COVENT GARDEN THEATRE - AN HOUR LATER

Kitty looks on as the infamous LAVINIA FENTON (20) takes the stage. She is simple, self-possessed, unaffected. She begins to sing "Alas, Poor Polly" in a completely contemporary pop style.

LAVINIA/POLLY
 "When my hero in court appears,
 And stands arraign'd for his life;
 Then think of poor Polly's tears,
 For ah! Poor Polly's his wife.
 Like the sailor he holds up his hands,
 Distrest at the dashing wave.
 To die a dry death at land,
 Is as bad as a watery grave.
 But alas, poor Polly.
 Alack, and well-a-day!
 Before I was in love,
 Oh! Every month was May."

Kitty sits in the audience blinking away her tears. She is thunderstruck by the direct power of Fenton's heart on her sleeve, emotionally raw portrayal. "Pop" music's appearance on the Georgian stage has ushered in a new era in entertainment.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE AT DRURY LANE THEATRE - NIGHT