

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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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 (late 30s), who quickly draws a cross on his chest and HENRY FIELDING (late 30s), 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 introduction 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 the sounds she makes.

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 Bull Tavern opposite the house approach, 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
 (dismissive)
 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 Fielding, 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 merely 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.

KITTY

How dare you, Sir? I didn't ask to be brought here!

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? It's a good a place to start as any. 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 eyes
and 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? I am?

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.

KITTY

(trying hard to find her real lady self, repeating dutifully)
I shall be delicate as a blossom.

Anne stands back a moment and peruses the result. She is not satisfied.

ANNE OLDFIELD

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.

Kitty does this and finally gets a bit of positive reinforcement.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT')

Not bad, dear. Not bad at all.

Kitty is momentarily and prematurely pleased, but the moment passes right away.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT')

Now your arms - don't just leave them dangling there like sausages on a butcher's rack!

KITTY

(growing tired and 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)

Exactly! Men are the brains of this world. And its 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 to all the people on earth.

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 of her revelation slowly)

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 *Giulio 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 absurd 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 Bull Tavern, 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. They've
printed the words on playing cards! 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, I'm sure!

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 players, 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 native-grown
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 very 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?

Outrage all around.

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 ludicrous 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 is piqued!

She gets up, shaking her head.

ANNE OLDFIELD (CONT'D)

Well, my dears, I suppose we must resign ourselves to singing like the so-called native 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 hears this and throws Theo a withering look.

ANNE OLDFIELD

(heatedly, turning 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

(stunned and indignant)

Carey, what are you saying? The difference is like night and day!

CAREY

How so? I've had my biggest hit yet with "Sally in our Alley", which is very English indeed and singable by anybody. 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 she 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 sophisticated professionals of international stature!

CAREY

Apparently, it's English amateurs that the public wants now! What say you to that? I've been trying to put on a ballad opera for years, but you always stopped me! Italian opera has its charms, but why shouldn't we also have our own traditions?

CIBBER

(admitting defeat)
Well, I'm not stopping you now, damn it all to hell! You want to create your English traditions? Fine, have your fishmongers screeching away, so long as it fills the tills! John Gay can't be making the only "pop" in London. We need something fast. Carey, you write 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

(thundering 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 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 bows and leaves, and 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 arraigned 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,
Distressed 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.
George is seen sneaking a peek at Kitty. He is touched by her
reaction.

SLOW FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. IN FRONT OF COVENT GARDEN THEATRE - AFTER THE SHOW

Kitty dashes out of the theatre as soon as the show is over, followed by George Clive, who eventually catches up with her.

GEORGE
(out of breath)
Miss, I only want to know your name!

KITTY
(in a hurry to get away)
But why, Sir? What would someone like
you want with a servant girl?

Kitty continues to move away. George reaches out for her arm.

GEORGE
Nothing insulting, Miss. It's just
that you seemed so awfully moved by
what you saw. I only wanted to talk to
you about it a little...

KITTY
(pauses a moment)
And I want to thank you for coming to
a poor maid's rescue like that, Mister
Clive. You were so very kind.

GEORGE
(earnestly)
It was an honour to be of assistance.

KITTY
(stopping herself from being
drawn in)
You're certainly an unusual man,
Mister Clive, but I mustn't be spotted
here this evening.

GEORGE
Oh? Why not? Perhaps I could see you
elsewhere?

KITTY
Maybe at the theatre again someday?
I'm especially fond of Drury Lane
myself.

Kitty runs off. George begins to follow her but gives up and watches her go.

CUT TO:

INT. STAGE AT DRURY LANE THEATRE - NIGHT

The audience, a full house, is in attendance for Drury Lane's opening night of Cibber and Carey's new English ballad opera, "Love in a Riddle". Anticipation is running high. A couple of poshly-attired THEATRE CRITICS are sitting in a balcony just above the left side of the stage. They get out their note pads and quill pens, ready to do damage.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE AT DRURY LANE - SAME TIME

The usual hubbub of backstage life goes on in the wings and behind the scenery as the play on the stage is about to begin. In later scenes, action on stage is heard as background noise. Theo buttonholes Kitty in the wings as she rushes around getting ready.

THEOPHILUS

(confrontational)

Kitty, damn it, stop dashing about!
You've been avoiding me.

KITTY

Theo, we're on stage soon! Can't we
talk later?

THEOPHILUS

No! I finally have your attention!

KITTY

Look, there's nothing to discuss! I've
only been a bit busy.

THEOPHILUS

So what was more important than our
night out?

KITTY

There was no night out, only your
invitation.

THEOPHILUS

Same thing.

KITTY

You'll find it isn't. I'd tell you,
but could you keep it to yourself?
Your father would be furious with me.

THEOPHILUS

Oh, even better! Infuriating father
has been my very own speciality until
now.

KITTY

And I don't want it to become mine!
Cibber is rather more apt to throw me
out than you!

THEOPHILUS

Darling, you'd be surprised.

KITTY

Nonsense, Theo. You're his son.

THEOPHILUS

(passionately)
That man has never cared for me one
iota. He humiliates me at every
opportunity.

KITTY

(soothing)
Theo, you know how melodramatic he is.
You mustn't take it to heart so.

THEOPHILUS

(briskly changing the
subject)
So where did you go the other night?

KITTY

(hesitating)
Well, alright. If you must know, I
went to Covent Garden to see "The
Beggar's Opera".

THEODOPHILUS

(delighted)
Oh, did you now? In complete defiance
of father's orders?! Smashing! And how
was it?

KITTY

(gushing)
It was a revelation. I've never seen
anything like it.

THEOPHILUS

How so?

KITTY

Theo, it was real.

THEOPHILUS

What do you mean, real? Wasn't it an opera?

KITTY

Yes, but it was like real life. Only more so. The ballads were a cry from the streets of London.

THEOPHILUS

I wish you had taken me with you - I would have accompanied you gladly!

KITTY

It was bad enough me sneaking about in my old maid's uniform. Anybody would recognise you!

THEOPHILUS

(mock hurt)

I can dress down, too! I'd have carried your old bucket for you.

KITTY

I doubt my bucket would have made you or me any less conspicuous at the opera.

THEOPHILUS

Fine! I will sneak over on my own as soon as we get a night off! You're lucky to have seen it.

KITTY

No, you're the lucky one. I wish I were none the wiser. I'm struggling to go on.

THEOPHILUS

Are we really so awful in comparison?

KITTY

Theo, you have no idea just how ridiculous we are.

THEOPHILUS

So this may not be a good time to tell you that Prince Frederick is in attendance for our opening night?

KITTY

(mortified)

Oh, heavens, no. Please, please say you're joking!

THEOPHILUS

(staring at his shoes)

I'm joking.

KITTY

(after a beat)

But is he?!

THEOPHILUS

(straight to Kitty)

Yes. Second balcony on the right.

CUT TO:

INT. STAGE AT DRURY LANE THEATRE - MOMENTS LATER

As anticipation builds, the critics get into character. They've done this together many times before. The worse the play, the better for them.

THEATRE CRITIC #1

(bemused)

Well, darling, Love in a Riddle? This should be interesting! An English ballad opera from Colley Cibber Esquire, our theatre's most pompous "artiste"? John Gay's success must have gotten his goat. What are the odds old Colley has thrown in a heroic god or two?

THEATRE CRITIC #2

(laughing)

Along with a few strutting divas, for nobility's sake?

THEATRE CRITIC #1

I put my money on prancing sheep. He's going native, after all. There's no avoiding the damned pastoral theme.

THEATRE CRITIC #2

Oh look, there's Prince Frederick!

THEATRE CRITIC #1

(delighted)

The plot thickens.

Dashing PRINCE FREDERICK (22) sits in his boxes away from the critics, who bow their heads to him politely across the hall as they catch his eye. He is otherworldly in his sky blue silk costume. Abruptly, all attention is redirected towards the stage, where a bald, tall and spindly MR. WILKS (40) steps in front of the plush red curtain to deliver his Prologue. He quickly throws both arms out to silence the startled audience, which goes quiet at once. Wilks delivers his speech in elaborate and illustrative fashion, gesturing with every twist and turn of phrase.

MR. WILKS

(full of profundity)

"O Author, of his Rural Muse afraid,
Calls in, tonight, plain Sonnet to his
aid. Let our sounds have sense, old
England will from English throats
dispense and take what's well designed
for excellence!"

THEATRE CRITIC #2

(smirking)

We'll be the judge of that...

MR. WILKS

"It's not our nice performance that's
the thing - good songs will always
happy hearers bring, provided we find
airs which they themselves may sing."

THEATRE CRITIC #1

(whispering conspiratorially)

I'm ready to take over the singing at
a moment's notice!

MR. WILKS

"If songs are harmless revels of the
heart, why should our native tongue
not bear its part? Why after learned
warblers must we part, and dote on
airs, which only they can chant."

Fake birds drop from the sky as each is announced, complete with whistled bird song provided on cue by half-hidden players in the wings.

MR. WILKS (CONT')

"Methinks t'were hard, if, in the
cheerful spring, were none but
nightingales allowed to sing.

The lark, the sparrow, and the plain
cuckoo, have all an equal right to
chirp and woo."

Wilks flutters around fondly after a few birds suspended on
strings. Titters in the audience as this pronouncement is made.

THEATRE CRITIC #2

(snarky)

Oh, joy! Here comes the "Cuckoo".

Wilks stops running around and turns back to the audience,
dramatically.

MR. WILKS

"Even France in that her liberty
maintains, her songs, at least, are
free from foreign chains,
And peers and peasants sing their
native strains.

Wilks looks on admiringly as a small group of players dressed
as stereotypical French peasants in berets cross the stage
singing "Frère Jacques". Laughter from the audience.

MR. WILKS (CONT')

(looking after them, suddenly
scornful)

What, though our connoisseurs may love
Champagne, must never English ale go
down again? Must no mouth drink, and
yet at Taverns dine? All pockets reach
not fancy foreign wine.

A few "hear, hear"s are heard from the audience. Turning back
to the audience for this final summation.

MR. WILKS (CONT')

And since of late you've given our
hopes ground, let our old English
songs go round."

Weak applause from the audience along with fake enthusiasm from
the critics. The curtain opens onto the inevitable pastoral
scene. ARCAS (45), one of the stately players, is already on
the stage. He is jubilatory in the extreme. The critics talk
during the scene change.

THEATRE CRITIC #1

It's happy England day! Pass the
Champagne.

THEATRE CRITIC #2

You mean the Ale!

THEATRE CRITIC #1

I'll take the Champagne myself, dear,
but you suit yourself...

Theatre Critic 1 takes a Champagne bottle out of his satchel and drinks straight from it. A sudden jerky motion from Arcas silences everyone.

ARCAS

(stressing "hail" and "ye"
each time)

"Hail to the rising day! Hail, waking
nature, ye verdant plains, ye hills,
and fertile valleys, ye lowing herds,
and fleecy bleating flocks, ye
warbling groves, and murmuring
fountains. Hail once again!"

THEATRE CRITIC #1

(struggling to contain his
mirth)

A hail fellow well met!

THEATRE CRITIC #2

Aha! We've got our sheep!

ARCAS

(addressing the sky)

"O! Phoebus hear! God of refulgent
skies!"

Arcas suddenly drops to his knees in worship. The critics' piss-taking mood is starting to spread. The next lines are covered by the critics' banter.

ARCAS (CONT'D)

"All-glorious ruler of revolving
light, author of medicine, and
immortal song, deign to receive these
thanks of adoration."

THEATRE CRITIC #2

(dripping sarcasm)

I call that one god and counting.

THEATRE CRITIC #1

Good. This lot had better start
praying fast.

THEATRE CRITIC #2

I wouldn't want to be in their dainty shoes if this keeps on.

The crowd gets increasingly louder and starts to pound their feet on the floor and call for Cibber, the evening's architect.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE MOMENTS LATER

Cibber emerges from his changing room dressed as the young lover Philautus. His attempts to look younger are mostly down to heavy and effeminate cake makeup, but he is also firmly strapped into his too-tightly fitting pantaloons, which gives him a funny gait as he walks. Theo, Kitty and the handful of other players backstage are too anxious to enjoy Cibber's absurd appearance. Cibber arrives into the gathering like a lead balloon.

CIBBER

(triumphantly)

Do you hear that, you sorry doubters? My public calls for me by name! Not so gay now, eh, Mister Gay? I've waited my whole career for this moment. Hark, I mustn't keep them waiting any longer, or they'll tear the place apart!

KITTY

(trying to keep a grip on her nerves)

The crowd is growing restless, Mister Cibber. I hope you can calm them. I'm getting more nervous by the minute.

CIBBER

(patronising)

Ripe professionals never get nervous, Kitty!

THEOPHILUS

(grimly determined to enjoy the impending disaster)

Carry on, Father, make your entrance! Though isn't it premature to celebrate until the curtain falls and the applause rises? That's what you've always taught me!

CIBBER

(to Theo, warmly)

Yes, but today is a particular occasion. Mark my words, son, history will remember this pivotal moment at Drury Lane.

Cibber turns to go as nobly as his costume allows. The players watch him, shaking their heads in disbelief at his delusions.

CUT TO:

INT. DRURY LANE STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The rowdy crowd is now divided into those members of the public who are eating nuts, drinking booze and flirting bawdily and those who are focused on the stage with mounting anger. The first rotten fruits and vegetables are being flung as Cibber's name is called out. His triumphant entrance is met with a flourish of flinging, but the hall quiets down to see what Cibber has to offer. Momentarily taken aback by the flying objects, he regains control and tiptoes theatrically to center stage to deliver his monologue.

CIBBER

(putting a hand to his ear to hear his beloved)

"This way the sorrowful-sounding voice is directed: It can be only be she, the sad Pastora, soothing with melody her fond desire! I knew her female coyness was too faint to breathe intended scorn - my amorous arrows, whenever drawn, are punctual to the mark!

Cibber shoots an invisible love arrow, following its trajectory with his eyes as it flies forth accompanied by an off-stage whistle to mark its imaginary take off and landing. The latter puts Cibber into quasi-erotic raptures.

CIBBER (CONT')

The gentle fondling! How her sighs enchant me! Methinks I see her, on some flowery bank reposed and languishing with love. Her lily hand supports her pensive head, her drooping eyes, as conscious of my conquest, refuse the light that gazes on her shame! Now with desire her downy bosom heaves, while sighs diffused embalm the ambient air.

And yet I see her not – she cannot far
 be hence – perhaps a soft condoling
 strain may raise her from her woes to
 wakeful joy.”

From the notorious pit in front of the stage, PROSTITUTES
 mingle noisily with patrons. The first one gets a fellow to
 lift her up for her line.

PROSTITUTE #1
 (very loudly, addressing the
 whole theatre)
 ‘Ere, me downy bosom is heavin’ from
 laughter!

The audience roars.

PROSTITUTE #2
 (copy cat, not to be outdone)
 Me bosom desires you to get off the
 stage!

More shouts from the crowd. Cibber readies himself to sing as
 the audience gets ever louder in its discontent. The theatre
 critics speak over the introduction to the song.

THEATRE CRITIC #2
 (in hysterics)
 Save me, I’m dying right along with
 this absurd spectacle!

THEATRE CRITIC #1
 (sardonically)
 Those sighs and grimaces! He looks
 more like a pickpocket with designs on
 her purse than a lover to me.

In a final valiant effort to calm the crowd, Cibber makes a
 calming gesture and bursts into song. He can’t sing a note.

CIBBER
 “Lovely Turtle, once more coo! Call
 thy mate and find him true! Gently
 murmur to my ear! Tell me, charmer,
 tell, oh, tell me where love may find,
 and kill thy care. O call me! With thy
 mournful strains allure, coo, and call
 me to thy cure. O call me! Coo and
 call me, coo and call me to thy cure.
 Call me to thy cure.

Within seconds of the opening bars, the theatre explodes. As Cibber carries on singing stubbornly, calls to drop the curtain become persistent and violent. Bottles are now flying towards the stage.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The players and stage hands are in a panic.

THEOPHILUS

By god, do something! They'll kill him out there! Quick, drop the curtain!

The curtain drops. Cibber is seen behind it from the back. He turns and howls to Theophilus and the stage hands.

CIBBER

(anguished, in genuine tears)
It's happened! They've turned on me!
My own public! How is it possible?
After a lifetime on the stage, all
lost in a single moment. I wish I were
dead.

THEOPHILUS

(compassionate)
Father, please, let's go home. None of
it matters, you have your family.
We'll make do.

CIBBER

(not looking at Theo, shaking
violently)
Raise the curtain!

THEOPHILUS

But Father!

CIBBER

Do it! NOW! I will not be hounded off
my own stage!

THEOPHILUS

Father, please! Be sensible!

CIBBER

(finding genuine courage)
No. This fiasco is my fault. I will
die by my own sword!

CUT TO:

INT. STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The curtain rises slowly and unsteadily. The crowd is in an uproar. Cibber straightens up his body and faces them as himself, taking off his wig. The noise dies down in response to the unexpected gesture.

CIBBER

(humbly)

My fellow Londoners, please forgive
this old fool, Colley Cibber.

Murmurs of surprise from the crowd.

PROSTITUTE #2

No arguing the fool part!

Titters from the crowd, but the quiet holds.

CIBBER

Friends, you know me well. Many of you
have watched me on this stage for many
a year, donning wigs, putting on airs
and graces. Please know I have ever
been your humble servant. But today,
in my sincere desire to entertain,
I've overstepped the bounds of good
taste. I am no singer, I grant you
all.

The noise starts up again, people have had enough. Some agree
with his last sentiment noisily.

CIBBER (CONT')

(appeasing)

I have but one last request! An
indulgence I know I haven't earnt - I
ask for one last moment of your time.

The crowd kicks off again. Cries of "no" and "no more" can be
heard. Cibber speaks bravely and steadily over the noise.

CIBBER (CONT')

Please, I beg of you. Give us but one
more hearing. A final song.

Cibber exits the stage, which is left empty. The crowd is
perplexed and questioning murmurs rise. Prince Frederick is
seen taking out his pocket watch impatiently and sighing. A
long moment later, Cibber arrives leading an unwilling and
frightened Kitty onto the stage by the hand. He bows graciously
and presents her to the audience before turning to go. The
crowd noise starts up again - by now, they are out for blood.

Kitty stares at the crowd in horror for a moment, but catches Carey's eye as he plays the introduction to her song, smiling fatefully. What will be will be. She begins to sing Carey's simple but fiercely powerful tune, "Still he's the Man".

KITTY

"What Woman could do,
I have tried to be free.
Yet do all I can,
I find I love him.
And though he flies me,
Still, still he's the Man.
They tell me at once,
He to twenty will swear.
When vows are so sweet,
Who the falsehood can fear?
So, when you have said all you can,
still - still he's the Man."

The crowd's balloon of fury collapses in a moment and is replaced by stillness followed by tentative murmurs of unexpected delight. By the end of the song, one of the prostitutes is moved to tears. There is a beat of complete silence after Kitty's song finishes. Only one member of the audience breaks the communal trance when he stands up in his box and begins to clap slowly, gathering speed. It is the Prince. All rise to their feet and applaud. In a few seconds, the theatre is engulfed in rapturous applause and whistles. Instead of rotten fruit and bottles, flowers are thrown at the stage. Drury Lane is saved. A legend in her own time is born.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN: EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE BULL TAVERN - AN HOUR LATER

Kitty, wearing a beautiful dress and cape, walks towards the Bull Tavern with an assortment of flowers in her hands surrounded by the Drury Lane company of players. She is the hero of the day, and the mood of the entire company is akin to that induced by a last-minute reprieve from the hangman. The relief and joy are palpable. Theo is walking on a cloud, breaking into random dance steps as he goes. Carey escorts Anne Oldfield, walking arm in arm; both are calm but happy. All arrive at the tavern across from Kitty's old workplace.

THEOPHILUS

(trying to distract her)
Come inside now, Kitty, your well-
deserved king of sausage rolls awaits!
I'll even spring for a steak. You've
saved the day.

KITTY

(pausing)

I'll be along in just a minute, dear Theo.

THEOPHILUS

(with understanding)

Alright, but don't let your thoughts wander too far from this moment. The past is just that.

Theo walks over to Kitty and takes her face in his hands gently. The other players continue to enter the tavern.

THEOPHILUS (CONT')

Brava, my girl. No one could say you haven't done your drunk abductors proud!

Kitty smiles, but her gaze is drawn across the street to the house where she had grown up an indentured servant. Theo leaves her and joins the others. Kitty is alone with her thoughts. At the house, a young girl, cold and shivering in the wind, stands over her cleaning bucket, mopping the steps. The following black and white silent flashback sequence is underscored by Nimrod Borenstein's heart-rendering "The melancholic mobile" from Reminiscences of childhood, Op. 54.

CUT TO:

EXT. STEPS OF THE HOUSE - DAY, TEN YEARS EARLIER

Eight year old Kitty stands on the same steps with an older man, her FATHER (50). He is looking ill and unsteady on his feet. Both are poorly dressed. She looks up at his face, a tear rolls down his cheek. The door opens.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. IN FRONT OF ANOTHER DOOR - DAY

It is summer, and five year old Kitty opens another door and runs inside, followed by her younger and healthy looking father. Her young MOTHER is inside the modest but cozy house, cooking at the stove, a BABY held with one arm is on her hip. Kitty runs up and hugs her apron. Her mother hands her a cookie, which she takes and devours greedily, laughing.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE KITTY'S HOUSE - DAY

Five year old Kitty stands in front of her door and watches a street theatre performance. She is mesmerized.

The players are charmed by her presence and play to her. Kitty's front door opens and her father comes to get her. She doesn't want to come inside, but he scoops her up in his arms and brings her indoors.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Little Kitty is tucked up in bed, her father reads to her from a book of Greek mythology. She points to a picture and he explains something to her.

CUT TO:

EXT. ON THE STREET - DAY

Little Kitty and her father follow a hearse on the day of her mother's and brother's funeral. Two caskets, one small, one large, are being pulled along by a horse-drawn carriage. The mourners follow behind. Out of the corner of her eye, Kitty spots the street theatre troop engaged in a performance in front of a small crowd of onlookers. A player spots her and bows to her, smiling. She turns her head back to the hearse.

CUT TO:

INT. KITTY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kitty sits in front of an empty plate as her father drinks gin straight from a bottle. He is distraught. He hands her a crust of bread and heads to his desk, which is covered in the paperwork of his modest legal practice. He sits and tries to progress but is unable to focus and gives up, reaching for his bottle once again.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK OUTSIDE OF THE MANOR HOUSE - DAY

We are back to the day Kitty is dropped off to work as a servant. Before knocking on the door, her father leans down to hug her tight. Both are crying. He dries her tears but is seized by a coughing fit and puts a handkerchief to his mouth. It is splattered with blood, which he tries to hide from Kitty. He straightens up and knocks on the door. It opens, Kitty steps in, followed by her father.

CUT TO:

EXT. ON THE STEPS OF THE MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Fifteen year old Kitty washes the steps as her Lady has her singing lesson. She sings along, unnoticed, smiling.

CUT TO:

EXT. ON THE STEPS OF THE MANOR HOUSE - NIGHT

Back to colour and the present day. Kitty walks up to the new servant girl, who is flustered to see such a fine lady approach her. The girl moves to open the door for her, but Kitty stops her. She takes off her cape and puts it around the girl's shoulders, handing her the flowers. The girl is astonished but grateful. Kitty steps away, takes one last look, turns, and walks to the tavern, which she enters to join her fellow players.

THE END OF EPISODE I
(10.1.19)