

HARLOTS

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Episode 1

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ON A BLACK SCREEN:

*London, 1763. One in five women
made her living selling sex.*

*Every year, 'Harris's List of
Covent Garden Ladies' published
reviews of their services.*

The age of consent was 12.

HARLOTS

1 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN. KITCHEN. NIGHT 1.** 1

LUCY WELLS (15), is at the table, a mischievous smile on her angelic features, relishing the new edition of *Harris's List*.

LUCY

"Betsey Fletcher, Russell Street.
This girl is new on the town,
having been debauched not six
months ago..."

CUT TO:

2 **EXT. COVENT GARDEN. STREET. NIGHT 1.** 2

Somewhere between the lights of Covent Garden and the gloomy streets where the poor hordes live, three GIRLS wait for trade, trying to keep warm.

LUCY (V.O.)

"Her breath is sweet and her eyes
beam a torrent of delight..."

ROBERT OSWALD approaches. Scottish, 25, a lawyer with artistic pretensions; sucker for a street whore. The youngest girl BETSEY FLETCHER (16), puts herself in his path.

LUCY (V.O.)

"She is most dextrous at the manual
operations and can turn her hand to
anything, at a most comeatable
price."

Oswald resists only for a moment. He follows Betsey into the darkness as the other girls cheer them on.

CUT TO:

3

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT 1.

3

LUCY

"Five shillings will admit you to these yielding premises...

KITTY

She's one of Nancy's girls.

KITTY CARTER, a warm, sisterly girl of twenty five, is at the stove preparing a tray of hot chocolate.

EMILY

She won't be with Nancy for long, not with a listing like that. Some other house'll snap her up.

EMILY LACEY is washing her parts in a corner washtub. She's the house beauty, a brittle girl of eighteen.

LUCY

My Ma might take her on. And sack one of you.

This thought worries FANNY LAMBERT; a plump, under-confident girl of nineteen, who is rapidly finishing her meal.

NORTH

We got enough women round here...

By the fire is WILLIAM NORTH (Black, late 30s), the house "bully" or troubleshooter. A man with an air of crushed optimism, as if he still can't believe how bad the world is.

KITTY

Is Nancy Burroughs in there?

CUT TO:

4

INT. NANCY BURROUGHS' HOUSE, RUSSELL ST. A SEEDY ROOM. NIGHT 4.

NANCY BURROUGHS (40s) dressed to inspire fear, brings down her rod on an elderly cleric. Her house is pokey and drab.

LUCY (V.O.)

"Nancy Burroughs, Russell Street. Very impudent and ugly...

We hear the girls whoop and cheer.

LUCY (V.O.)

"Chiefly a dealer with the old fellows. She uses more birch rods in a week than Westminster school in a twelvemonth...

The girls laugh; Nancy's clearly a favourite of theirs.

CUT TO:

5 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT 1.** 5

Kitty is pouring hot chocolate.

KITTY
Read your sister's.

LUCY
Miss Charlotte Wells...

CUT TO:

6 **INT. ST JAMES'S. A GAMBLING CLUB. NIGHT 1.** 6

CHARLOTTE WELLS, celebrated courtesan, a fiery and subversive spirit, throws an earring into the middle of a gaming table. It is reckless and she knows it.

LUCY (V.O.)
Her extravagance will scatter the fortune of any but the most ambitious keeper. But her eyes dart delight; her bosom enchants to rapture...

Charlotte's bluff is called. Her cards are worthless. She dissolves into laughter. The hardened rakes and cardsharps can't help admiring her good humour.

LUCY (V.O.)
The smoothness of her flesh is unparalleled... And more than all of these, her wit makes her the very meteor of the hour.

LORD REPTON, a libertine in his fifties, takes the winnings.

LUCY (V.O.)
A king could squander his tax chest and do no better than Miss Charlotte Wells.

CUT TO:

7 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT 1.** 7

The girls are blown away. Lucy is filled with pride.

LUCY
I'll be in next year...

EMILY

I doubt it; your Ma keeps you
cosseted up like a baby.

LUCY

She's waiting for the right cull.

EMILY

Well she'd better get a move on;
you're losing your shine.

LUCY

Like you have?

EMILY

Read mine.

LUCY

Here's Kitty's.

KITTY

I've read it already. Same as last
year; I'm appealing.

EMILY

Appalling - read mine.

LUCY

Here's yours, Fanny.

Fanny puts her hands over her eyes in dread.

LUCY (CONT'D)

"Fanny Lambert, at Mrs Wells',
Catherine Street. The very thing in
winter for those who love a fat,
jolly girl; and not amiss in the
summer, barring perspiration. A man
need not be very hungry to make a
love meal upon her."

Emily laughs. Fanny is puzzled. North glances, concerned.

FANNY

Does it say I stink?

KITTY

Perspire doesn't mean stink...

EMILY

Yes it does; read mine.

KITTY

It says you're fat, you lucky
thing. The culls appreciate a bit
of flesh.

A knock at the front door. North goes to answer it.

LUCY

Emily Lacey...

LUCY (CONT'D)

"A smirking, lecherous hussey. Her entrance is wide as a church door -

EMILY

It doesn't say that!

LUCY

"And her breath worse than a Welsh bagpipe."

Emily gasps. She grabs the book. She tears out her page.

EMILY

When your time comes, I hope your quim splits.

Lucy laughs at her. MARGARET WELLS enters. In her forties, whoring from twelve. Indomitable, shrewd, unshockable. Full of buried damage and deep laughter. A brutal nose for business; heart kept at bay. Emily quails.

MARGARET

That gutter pedigree shines through, Miss Lacey.

NORTH

(Entering behind Margaret)
Mr Holland for you...

From the hallway we hear a man call "Miss Lacey - take me to the circle of bliss!"

MARGARET

Go and service him before he expires.

Emily exits. Margaret turns to Lucy.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Don't you vex my best girl. She earns more than the rest of you put together.

This stings Fanny, who is now washing herself.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Scrub up, Fanny. You're wanted.

(To Lucy)

I've two men and only one Fanny. You'll have to play for them.

Margaret touches North affectionately, on her way past.

CUT TO:

8

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. PARLOUR. NIGHT 1.

8

Two men, KENT (a naval officer) and GIBBON (a fat merchant) are with Margaret, listening to Lucy play the harpsichord. She is straight-backed, her eyes on the task.

MARGARET

She's been at boarding school and has learnt all her accomplishments.

KENT

Quite enchanting.

MARGARET

She is pure as the snow on St Paul's.

There is the noise of a thumping bed punctuating the refined sound of the harpsichord.

GIBBON

What's your price, so I may have her?

MARGARET

I hope you'll appreciate my frank reply Mr Gibbon, when I tell you that you'll mount that harpsichord before you lay a hand on my daughter.

This amuses Lucy. JACOB WELLS NORTH (aged 10, mixed race) enters, dressed in livery with a tray of wine; Margaret's youngest child.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(To Kent)

My little business here has met with great success, so I'm taking a new house in Soho. Dean Street.

GIBBON

I'll give you ten pounds to have her now.

Lucy is unsettled. Jacob goes.

MARGARET

When we're settled there, I'll be taking sealed bids for her maidenhood. You're both welcome to try your hand.

GIBBON

Twenty five.

MARGARET

Sealed bids. As I did for
Charlotte.

KENT

I like my wine a little more
mature.

MARGARET

My older daughter, Miss Charlotte
Wells, is currently kept by Sir
George Howard, baronet.

KENT

Charlotte Wells? The papers are
full of her.

MARGARET

One of the brightest stars in
London's firmament. I intend no
less for Lucy.

Fanny enters, freshly washed.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Here is Miss Lambert. Fanny, the
good Captain would cherish a voyage
upon your peaks.

Fanny curtsies sheepishly and leads Kent upstairs.

GIBBON

I'll give you thirty pounds to have
her now on that stool.

Lucy falters in her playing.

MARGARET

I'm afraid that is out of the
question.

GIBBON

Thirty five.

MARGARET

When we move to our new premises -

GIBBON

Forty.

MARGARET

I know her value.

GIBBON

God damn you I could buy a slave as
cheap and have it to keep!

MARGARET

Then do so.

GIBBON

Fifty pounds.

This is a lot of money. Lucy raises her eyes, afraid of her mother's response.

MARGARET

Lucy, what is keeping Miss Carter?

Lucy leaves, relieved. Gibbon is hot with frustration.

GIBBON

What a hell-bound spider you are.

MARGARET

Well, if I'm to scuttle downwards,
I shall raise my girls up as high
as I can before I go.

CUT TO:

9

INT. SOHO. GOLDEN SQUARE. LYDIA QUIGLEY'S HOUSE. NIGHT 1.

9

An opulent palace of pleasure. LYDIA QUIGLEY (50s, the Lady Macbeth of brothel keepers; hugely successful, avaricious, ruthless, wearing white makeup and a high-fashion gown) is brandishing a copy of *Harris's List* in front of her prize girl, MARIE-LOUISE D'AUBIGNE (French, a statuesque beauty with severe depression).

LYDIA

It says you're dead behind the
eyes. Dead!

CHARLES

Morte derriere les yeux.

CHARLES QUIGLEY is translating (mid 20s, bloated with indulgence, a mother's boy with wit but no spine).

LYDIA

I want to see a smile on your face
and a spring in your step,
comprends? Or I'll sell you to the
pimps of Cheapside and you won't be
smiling then!

Marie-Louise puts on a smile. She speaks in French.

MARIE-LOUISE

Why don't I just jump in the Thames
and pull your bitch of a mother
down with me?

CHARLES

She says that from now on, she'll
be the very spirit of joy.

Marie-Louise exits. Lydia sits at her mirror. She starts to
take her makeup off.

LYDIA

You're in charge tonight, Charlie.

CHARLES

Where are you going?

LYDIA

Widow White is going to watch the
sport in Covent Garden.

CHARLES

(Anxiously)

Mumma, why are you poking a rat
with a stick?... It might turn
nasty.

LYDIA

This rat has been left alone too
long. It's growing fat - and it
must be dealt with.

CUT TO:

10 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. BEDROOM. NIGHT 1.** 10

During Kent's loud voyage, Fanny sneaks a worried sniff at
her armpit.

CUT TO:

11 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. LANDING. NIGHT 1.** 11

Lucy is listening at the door, wondering.

CUT TO:

12 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. PARLOUR. NIGHT 1.** 12

Gibbon has disappeared up Kitty's skirts. She longs for him
to finish.

CUT TO:

13 **EXT. COVENT GARDEN. AN ALLEY. NIGHT 1.** 13

Up against the wall, Robert Oswald is having sex with Betsey.

CUT TO:

14 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. BEDROOM. NIGHT 1.** 14

Emily is astride SAM HOLLAND. He's an actor and writer - almost too drunk to function. He reads *Harris's List*.

HOLLAND

"This young votary of Venus
possesses between her lithesome
legs, a gateway to the temple of
bliss..."

EMILY

That's me. I'm amazing. I'm
amazing.

Emily is riding high, aroused by her own beauty.

CUT TO:

15 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. LANDING. NIGHT 1.** 15

Lucy puts her ear to the door. She finds Emily's vanity ludicrous. Jacob joins her at the door; they share a conspiratorial look. Two whorehouse children together.

CUT TO:

16 **EXT. COVENT GARDEN. AN ALLEY. NIGHT 1.** 16

Oswald has just finished. He is instantly covered in shame.

OSWALD

I'm so low; sunk in lust and
lechery. What is the cost to my
soul?

BETSEY

Five shillings.

CUT TO:

17 **EXT. NANCY BURROUGHS' HOUSE. NIGHT 1.** 17

Nancy is seeing the cleric out of her dingy dwelling. She suddenly pulls him into the shadows.

At the edge of the piazza, a crowd is gathering; constables and night watchmen. They have warrants, torches and cudgels. The CHIEF CONSTABLE brings them to order.

NANCY

Go home to your wife, Ned.

The cleric takes off into the darkness as fast as he can. Nancy walks further up the street for a better view.

CUT TO:

18

EXT. COVENT GARDEN PIAZZA. NIGHT 1.

18

Next to the Chief Constable is FLORENCE SCANWELL (50s), a blind widow. She stands with her daughter AMELIA(20). Florence is an extraordinarily charismatic preacher. Her words have an electric effect on the crowd.

FLORENCE

The fornicators, the adulterers,
the abusers of themselves, the
childstealers - and all the
abominations of Sodom... They have
taken our great city and sunk it in
the vilest sin.

Nancy spits, as if the lawmen are criminals. Also watching, is Lydia Quigley, wearing the black widow's weeds of her alter-ego, 'Widow White'.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

We will cleanse these streets with
a fire of purity in our hearts.
It's God's work that we do tonight.
O Lord, let us pray that we do it
well...

Cheers and "amen's" from the crowd. Lydia is very impressed by the power that Florence exerts.

CHIEF CONSTABLE

You have your warrants. You know
the houses. May God be with you.

Nancy glimpses her old enemy, Lydia Quigley, standing with the righteous. She is intrigued.

CUT TO:

19

EXT. COVENT GARDEN PIAZZA. NIGHT 1.

19

A group of WATCHMEN batter the door of a nearby bawdy house (low-rent brothel). We see them push their way in.

Lydia watches, unnoticed in her widow's garb. She sees the watchmen pick wretched BEGGAR-WHORES out of their street-nests; shoeless and gin-ravaged. PUNTERS flee, half dressed.

CUT TO:

20

EXT. COVENT GARDEN. AN ALLEY. NIGHT 1.

20

Oswald and Betsey watch the chaos from the end of the alley.

BETSEY

Will you walk with me? If we seem a couple, they might not arrest me.

Oswald knows his chances are better alone.

OSWALD

I'm sorry.

He abandons Betsey and scurries away - past Lydia. She has found a discreet position to observe Margaret's house.

CUT TO:

21

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. COUNTING ROOM. NIGHT 1.

21

North is at the window. Outside, shouting is heard down the street; a window smashes. Margaret joins them.

MARGARET

They deserve to be raided; those kennels. Poor girls rutted within an inch of their lives -

NORTH

They're coming for us.

Sure enough, the watchmen are approaching.

MARGARET

No, they've never touched us, all the years we've been here...

Jacob enters. Outside, the CHIEF CONSTABLE and his henchmen rap on the door. Margaret is totally dismayed.

NORTH

I'll hold them off. Get the children out.

JACOB

I'm not going.

Margaret thinks on her feet, glancing at Jacob.

MARGARET
Stay with Pa.

She takes all her cash out of its hiding place.

CUT TO:

22

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. HALLWAY. NIGHT 1.

22

More banging on the door. We hear the constable outside.

CHIEF CONSTABLE
Open the door in the name of
the king!

NORTH
Will you wait a while; we're
all abed!

CHIEF CONSTABLE
Open the door!

NORTH (CONT'D)
Why wake Christian people in
the middle of the night?

Margaret passes through and enters the parlour. Gibbon is
emerging from KITTY'S skirts.

MARGARET
It pains me to tell you that
the constables have come.

CHIEF CONSTABLE (O.S.)
(Audible from outside)
We have a warrant signed that
this is a disorderly house!

Kitty flies up the stairs.

GIBBON
I haven't had her yet - Curse you!

Kent is running down the stairs, dressing. Fanny behind him.

MARGARET
We shall get you out. Your
reputations are safe.

NORTH (O.S.)
You have mistaken the house,
my friend. You know we're all
honest citizens here.

Gibbon joins Kent. Fanny leads them out through the back.

CHIEF CONSTABLE (O.S.)
Open the door, William North! I
know exactly what you are.

NORTH
Now give me a moment to locate the
keys and you gentlemen are welcome.

Lucy appears from the kitchen. Margaret grabs her hand.

MARGARET
Find some of Jacob's things to
wear. You're my best asset. I need
to get you out.

LUCY

I want to stay with you.

MARGARET

Do you want those watchmen to have
you for nothing?

Lucy flies upstairs. Margaret goes to the front door.

CHIEF CONSTABLE (O.S.)

I have the King's warrant.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Good sirs, for Mercy, we
cannot find the keys!

NORTH

They'll break it down.

MARGARET

Take the boy and go.

NORTH

You are funny.

MARGARET

They'll beat you and torment him.

NORTH

And do worse to you and the girls.

Another crash on the door.

MARGARET

Take the boy and stay out of chains.

NORTH

Jacob, your place is here.

North pulls the boy to his side and refuses to budge. Jacob stands with his father. Another crash on the door. Margaret knows she won't win.

Upstairs, a door flies open. Emily Lacey appears, followed by Sam Holland, naked, his wig over his genitals.

HOLLAND

I won't go until I'm done.

EMILY

I am telling you there is a raid -

HOLLAND

Who dares interfere with an
Englishman's right to go whoring?

MARGARET

(Hurrying upstairs)

Mr Holland - Get yourself in order!
Think of the safety of these girls!

Holland sheepishly realises the raid is in earnest.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Go sir, while you still can.

Holland disappears to dress.

FANNY
What if they burn us down?... We should run! Let's run!

EMILY

Kitty has brought her toddler down from the attic.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
If you run, you'll be rape fodder!

This frightens the girls.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Now put yourselves straight; Sunday
best. We must have decorum.

Lucy comes down the stairs, dressed in breeches and a boy's jacket. Margaret tucks Lucy's hair into a tricorne hat.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Go to Charlotte.
(slipping her the money)
Give her this. I might need it.

Lucy nods and climbs out of the window. Another crash.

NORTH
Hold your violence - there are
children in the house!

Margaret stands on the stairs before Fanny, Emily, Kitty and her bawling toddler. North opens the door; Jacob at his side.

NORTH (CONT'D)
I will see your warrant.

CHIEF CONSTABLE
Margaret Wells, I am charging
you under the Disorderly
Houses Act of 1752, that you
do keep an obscene and bawdy
house -

MARGARET
No, no, this is lies! My
house is *not* disorderly -

CHIEF CONSTABLE
Where acts of lewdness
publicly take place, where
thieving is encouraged and
vice holds sway -

MARGARET (CONT'D)
You lie and your warrant is a
trumped-up sham! If your men
lay a finger on my tenants -

MARGARET (O.S.)
Get your hands off - GET -

Margaret stands in front of her girls like an eighteenth century Boudicea. She won't go without a fight.

CUT TO:

23 **EXT. NANCY BURROUGHS' HOUSE. NIGHT 1.**

23

Nancy is counting her girls in through the door. Two of Betsey's friends appear -

NANCY
Get in the house.

Then the third, VIOLET CROSS; a West Indian girl of twenty.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Where's Betsey?

VIOLET
She went with a cull.

Betsey turns a corner and comes running towards them. She is chased down by two watchmen. They bring her to the ground.

VIOLET (CONT'D)
They'll take her to jail.

NANCY
Can't do nothing about it. Not tonight.

Nancy shuts the door and bolts it.

CUT TO:

24 **EXT. COVENT GARDEN. OUTSIDE MARGARET'S HOUSE. NIGHT 1.**

24

Lydia Quigley is watching Margaret Wells and her girls being led outside. It gives her great satisfaction. The Chief Constable hands Kitty's child to North.

CHIEF CONSTABLE
Just the women we want.

North is left on the threshold with Jacob and the bawling toddler. His eyes don't leave Margaret's.

CUT TO:

25 **EXT. COVENT GARDEN PIAZZA. NIGHT 1.**

25

Lucy is moving through the chaos. She sees that everywhere, men are rounding up women. A horrible bawd runs past her, shoving her out of the way. Lucy stumbles. She sees a girl sprawled nearby, her head bloodied.

Lucy stares, realising the girl is dead. Florence Scanwell preaches on to the distressed crowd.

FLORENCE

For burning are the harlots -
burning!

Lucy runs. As Margaret is led away, she looks for her daughter anxiously through the chaos.

BREAK.

26

EXT. A FINE STREET. DAWN 2.

26

As first light comes, Lucy has reached the entrance of St James's Park. A different world from Covent Garden; green, peaceful. She stops under the trees, gathering her wits. She heads for some fine houses.

CUT TO:

27

INT. ST JAMES'S STREET. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. DAWN 2.

27

SIR GEORGE HOWARD (20s), is taking off a travelling cloak; a man in possession of his wife's fortune, a puppy-like enthusiasm and a vicious streak. He gazes at Charlotte Wells, who lies on the bed, make-up smeared, one earring missing. She is snoring; a heavy night.

HOWARD

She looks like a saint when she's
asleep. I've often noticed it...
Her gift, Haxby.

THOMAS HAXBY, Howard's Estate Manager, regards Charlotte. A puritanical moralist, skilled at keeping his opinions to himself. He hands Howard a box.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Charlotte...

Charlotte snores herself awake. Surprised to see him.

CHARLOTTE

Howard! Curse my maid for a slut;
she hasn't woken me.

Charlotte sits up, aware of her dishevelled appearance.

HOWARD

I've ridden hard to be with you.

CHARLOTTE

Now you must ride harder.

Howard leaps into the bed. Haxby is glad to leave.

HOWARD
Have you signed the contract? Are you mine?

CHARLOTTE
How I have pined for you.

HOWARD
I want you exclusively for my own.

CHARLOTTE
Night after night, here all alone while you enjoy congress with your wife...

HOWARD
Don't mention her name - you will disarouse me! Charlotte, I must have that contract. I want to care for you as your Lord and Master.

CHARLOTTE
(Pulling him down)
Surely you don't want to talk about it *now*?

CUT TO:

28 **INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. HAXBY'S OFFICE. DAWN 2.** 28

Haxby is preparing for his day's work. A tap on the window. A boy staring in at him. Lucy. He opens the door.

HAXBY
Where's your note, boy?

Lucy nervously backs away, stumbling over the step. Her hat slides off, revealing her hair.

CUT TO:

29 **INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. DAWN 2.** 29

Howard is losing himself to his passion. The wooden box comes into Charlotte's line of vision.

CHARLOTTE
What's in the box?

HOWARD
Later.

CHARLOTTE
It's a gift isn't it?

She pulls the box towards her and is about to open it.

HOWARD

Wait.

He puts his hand on the lid, collecting himself.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

This gift is the perfectest
expression of my ardour... For you
have a matchless flavour. In short -

He opens the box. A small, hothouse pineapple is displayed.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You are the pineapple of Great
Britain. As rare as this exotic
fruit...

Charlotte is trying to hide her urge to laugh.

CHARLOTTE

Most lovers would bring pearls. I'm
honoured that you think of fruit.

HOWARD

I cut it from our hothouse. And as
I did so, I thought of Eve... She
came to my mind in your form.

CHARLOTTE

Eve?

Howard's desire is getting the better of him.

HOWARD

Naked, she was tempted by such a
fruit - tempted to pluck from the
tree of knowledge, tempted to know
sin...

CHARLOTTE

So if I am Eve, then you are -

HOWARD

The serpent.

Howard loses himself to his lust. Charlotte turns her head
away to laugh. Haxby has just arrived at the open door.

CHARLOTTE

Mr Haxby.

HOWARD

What is it God damn you!

HAXBY
(averting his eyes)
A person is here for Miss Wells. Her
sister.

CHARLOTTE
Lucy...

Charlotte flies past Haxby and down the stairs.

HOWARD
Curse you, Haxby. Curse and confound
you for a stupid dolt. Why didn't you
damn well wait?

The pineapple comes flying at Haxby.

CUT TO:

30 **INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. HAXBY'S OFFICE. DAWN 2.** 30

Charlotte meets Lucy. They embrace.

LUCY
It's Ma...

CUT TO:

31 **INT. COVENT GARDEN MAGISTRATES COURT. HOLDING ROOM. DAY 2.** 31

Long benches of bawds, pimps and prostitutes rounded up by
the raiders, waiting to be heard before the Justice of the
Peace. From grandmothers, to girls in their early teens.

Betsey Fletcher sits alone, hungry, resigned. In the cold
light of day, her youth and her hunger seem more apparent.

Compared to the other defendants, Margaret and her girls are
the image of middle-class respectability.

MARGARET
The Justice won't be hard on us; not
with all this gutter-slurry here. I
am no monstrous pimp and he will see
that. It'll be a small fine at worst.

Robert Oswald is at the door.

OSWALD
The crown calls Mrs Margaret Wells!

Margaret stands, determined. Oswald sees Betsey staring at him. He is smitten with shame.

CUT TO:

32

INT. THE MAGISTRATES COURTROOM. DAY 2.

32

Constables and witnesses jostle with the righteous and the gutter press - Sam Holland among them, quill poised - all crammed into a small room. This is justice at street level.

Nancy Burroughs (smoking her pipe) sits with Violet Cross. Florence Scanwell with her daughter, Amelia. Lydia Quigley, her identity hidden as Widow White, is watching Margaret with anticipation. At the back, keeping a low profile, is North.

The magistrate, JOHN CUNLIFFE, sits with Oswald on a raised dais at one end of a long table. He's a man in his mid-fifties, soberly dressed. He knows every detail of the law and he values his power, greatly. Margaret stands at the other end with her girls. She is speaking confidently.

MARGARET

I pay my taxes and my levies. I support the night watch. I donate to the parish for the poor; I keep my house in excellent repair - The constables themselves must tell you they've never been called to any trouble under my roof.

CUNLIFFE

The warrant is signed by a witness who declares he paid you for intimate congress with the women who abide with you.

MARGARET

What witness?

OSWALD

The court is not obliged to name him.

MARGARET

I take money for furnished rooms. These girls are my tenants. There's nothing illegal in rent.

CUNLIFFE

Your business is procuring harlots.

MARGARET

No Sir! -

CHARLOTTE
(Calling from the back)
Forgive the interruption, your
honour. I am Charlotte Wells and I
am here to speak for my mother -

A thrill of whispers. Charlotte pushes her way to the front with Lucy - who is bursting with pride.

MARGARET
Charlotte sit down!

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
I've come to do what I can on
her behalf, for her presence
here is a dreadful mistake.

Lydia looks at Charlotte, confounded. Amelia whispers in Florence Scanwell's ear, describing her.

CUNLIFFE
How dare you interrupt this court.

MARGARET
Sit down I said!

CHARLOTTE
The warrant must be faulty
and the witness false. He can
only have been paid to smear
my mother's name -

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Sir - my daughter has no
knowledge of court procedure.
She means no impertinence -

FLORENCE
Nothing would distress this
dissolute and shameless whore!

North is finding this hard to bear. His eyes meet Lucy's.

OSWALD
Order!

FLORENCE
Let not her tongue sway you,
for this harlot has slithered
from her mother's womb to
lure mankind to vice.

OSWALD (CONT'D)
If you cannot be silent you
will be removed.

Lucy puts a calming hand on Charlotte - too late.

CHARLOTTE
I have never lured anyone in
my life! I've been pursued,
implored; pled with; mown
down and vanquished by men's
desire! None of these girls
have husbands or fathers to
protect them. They're at the
mercy of any man's lust!

FLORENCE
These girls are the false
flowers who poison our sons,
laying waste to their health
and their worldly goods.
These she-hounds are a blight
on our streets, the cancer in
our city. They must be cut
out!

Lydia Quigley looks strangely inspired by Florence's words.

CHARLOTTE

It is men who make harlots! We are not born.

This provokes shock and cheers in equal measure.

MARGARET

Charlotte - SIT DOWN!

Lucy instinctively knows that Charlotte has gone too far.

CUNLIFFE

You will not use my courtroom to defend your vice. In your own words, you have admitted that these girls are harlots.

CHARLOTTE

(Dismayed)

I said nothing of the kind...

CUNLIFFE

(Turning back to Margaret)

I grieve for the desperate women I've seen today, who faced with starvation have sold their flesh. But you are no such creature, Margaret Wells. You are a leech, grown fat upon the sins of others. You feed upon youth and innocence; a vile parasite engaged in a brutal trade.

Lydia Quigley is rejoicing. Florence Scanwell is gratified.

CUNLIFFE (CONT'D)

I fine you one hundred pounds for running a disorderly house. And if I see you before me again I'll have you whipped and transported.

An intake of breath. This is excessive.

On North's face; his deep concern.

Margaret is appalled; as if she physically takes a blow.

There is uproar.

CUT TO:

Lucy is between her mother and sister, as Charlotte's dainty carriage moves through the streets. A tense silence. Margaret reaches over Lucy and smacks Charlotte; a domestic slap.

MARGARET

A hundred pounds!

CHARLOTTE

He would have sent you to the
clink!

MARGARET

You just about called him a liar!
And that blind bitch -

CHARLOTTE

Someone had to shut her up.

MARGARET

You've made some powerful enemies
today. Those righteous bastards
could close me down!

Lucy, hating their rows, tries to stare out of the window.

CHARLOTTE

Word'll spread that Charlotte Wells
spoke up in your defence. And your
house'll be bursting at the seams,
tonight.

MARGARET

You have imperilled my move to Dean
Street! My final payment is today -
and how will I afford it now?

CHARLOTTE

I'll help you...

MARGARET

(Holding out her hand)
Damn right you will; a hundred
pounds!

CHARLOTTE

Of course I do not have the money
just at present, but -

MARGARET

Yes you do. He keeps you rioting in
splendour.

CHARLOTTE

Momentarily, I am in debt.

MARGARET

In *what*?

CHARLOTTE

I have some pressing gaming debts.
But once they're clear -

MARGARET

You're contracted to a baronet - He should pay your debts!

CHARLOTTE

(Doesn't like to admit it)
Ma... I haven't signed.

Lucy is surprised. Margaret is completely incredulous.

MARGARET

You need to be his property. Men don't respect whores; they respect property. Damn you for a stupid slut!

Charlotte suddenly smacks her mother.

CHARLOTTE

That's for what you made me.

Lucy puts a restraining arm on each one. They sit back. Silent recriminations.

CUT TO:

34

INT. THE MAGISTRATES COURTROOM. DAY 2.

34

Betsey is on the stand, gazing at Oswald. Violet and Nancy await Cunliffe's judgement.

OSWALD

She has no previous convictions. I would suggest leniency, due to her very young age.

VIOLET

(whispers to Nancy)
That's Betsey's cull...

Cunliffe assesses Betsey. His eyes roam over her.

CUNLIFFE

One month beating hemp in a Bridewell house of correction.

He bangs his gavel. Betsey is led away, crushed. She gazes at Oswald - but he is far too guilty to meet her eye.

CUNLIFFE (CONT'D)

Leniency breeds vice. The law is a rod, Oswald. It must make its mark.

Nancy fingers the birch rod at her side. She spits.

CUT TO:

35

EXT. COVENT GARDEN PIAZZA. DAY 2.

35

North is escorting Fanny, Kitty and Emily home.

The aftermath of the raid is still being cleared. Windows mended, glass swept up, bony dogs licking at vomit. Whores and beggars huddle around bonfires to exchange tales of woe.

Emily makes sure North can't hear her.

EMILY

Bloody Margaret Wells. She leaves us picking our way through the sludge - while she rides off in a carriage. She don't even get us sedan chairs!

FANNY

They took all her money.

EMILY

She's tight as a nun's nip.

KITTY

Why are you moaning? She loves you.

EMILY

She loves my profit. She loves my big heavers. She'll have them worn out to sagging - and for what?

NORTH

Enough of your spite and lamenting. It's morning 'til night with you; like a stinging fly!

This is a rare outburst. North recovers himself. He walks on. Fanny goes with him.

EMILY

My cunny puts food on his table. I'm sick of Covent Garden; sick of Margaret Wells and all her two-faced clucking!

KITTY

Well, sweet Emily. Why don't you cluck off?

Kitty leaves Emily standing. Fanny slips her arm through North's.

FANNY

I was worried you'd be in jail... I thought you'd get it worse, on account of your blackness.

North is touched. He quietly laughs.

NORTH

You won't catch me in no jail.

Standing in the street, Emily watches North, Fanny and Kitty go into the house. She makes a decision. She turns.

CUT TO:

36 **INT. SOHO. DEAN STREET. MARGARET WELL'S TOWNHOUSE. DAY 2.** 36

The reception room of an empty house. Generous space, modern colours. Margaret is with the landlord, LEWIS and his heavy-looking 'AGENT'. She comes to join Charlotte and Lucy.

LEWIS

I cannot wait for payment; the house is too desirable. I could let it five times over before Monday and prices in this area -

MARGARET

Don't lecture me about prices. I know how much you're creaming off. You're charging twice as much because of my profession. You'll never get another rent as high.

LEWIS

There's lots of other households of young ladies who've seen the perfect setting of this house. And they have not been hauled before a judge.

CUT TO:

37 **INT. SOHO. DEAN STREET. MARGARET WELLS' TOWNHOUSE. EMPTY ROOM. DAY 2.**

Margaret walks towards Charlotte and Lucy, livid.

MARGARET

He's given me 'til Monday to raise the final payment.

She leads them through a reception room to the wide landing.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

This is what it's like for a woman in trade. When people know you're struggling, they squeeze.

Margaret stands for a moment, stunned, gazing at the house.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

We must have this place.

CHARLOTTE

It's got a feeling, hasn't it?

Lucy tries to sense the 'feeling'.

MARGARET

If I had the girls on their backs for a week, they couldn't earn enough in time.

CHARLOTTE

Ma, there's your solution; right there...

She is referring to Lucy. Lucy blinks.

MARGARET

No. I want to keep her intact until we move in.

LUCY

Why?

MARGARET

You'll get a finer class. You may leap up where Charlotte is, in one great step.

CHARLOTTE

You had me out at twelve -

MARGARET

Do not think I baulk at it -

CHARLOTTE

She's past fourteen. You'll soon miss her peak price.

MARGARET

People know I'm in need. They'll take advantage.

CHARLOTTE

You're squeamish.

MARGARET

I am not squeamish!

CHARLOTTE

If you want to keep her immaculate, fine. Let her marry a shopkeeper.

LUCY

No -

MARGARET

I wouldn't wish marriage on a dog.
Even for a rich girl it's torment.
All her money becomes his -

LUCY

Ma, I'm ready.

Charlotte and Margaret look at Lucy. She is in earnest. Margaret can find no argument to counter her. But we see her conflict as she tries.

MARGARET

They can view you at the playhouse
tonight. And I'll take sealed bids.

CHARLOTTE

You see? She's one of us.

Lucy is gratified. Margaret walks away.

BREAK.

38

INT. FLORENCE SCANWELL'S HOUSE, WARDOUR STREET. DAY 2.

38

Lydia Quigley, as Widow White, is taking tea with Florence Scanwell and her sallow, stooping daughter, Amelia.

LYDIA

Every word you said chimed with me.
When I was orphaned, my brother
Henry was my only solace in this
world. I cared for him like my own
child. And he was... damaged by one
of these degraded creatures.

FLORENCE

Christ knew the pain of temptation,
Mrs White. Your brother will find
guidance in His word.

LYDIA

He is dead.

Lydia states this as a simple truth.

FLORENCE

If I could burn those houses to the
ground with all the harlots in them,
it would be God's cleansing fire.

LYDIA

I'd like to contribute to your
righteous campaign. What do you
plan next, against Margaret Wells?

FLORENCE

It's not the Wells house in particular, but all such houses -

LYDIA

It was Margaret Wells who destroyed my Henry.

Florence acknowledges this.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

I have good information that she's taking larger premises in Soho. Just around the corner from your home, Mrs Scanwell. Dean Street.

FLORENCE

She must be stopped.

LYDIA

One day she will be publicly flayed until her back resembles a latticed tart. But until then, we'll settle for stopped. How shall we manage it?

Lydia puts a purse full of coins in Florence's hand. Before Lydia can remove her hand, Florence clasps it. She feels Lydia's rings; her talons. Uncanny perception.

FLORENCE

"Behold, I shall cast her into a bed with all those who commit adultery. I shall kill her children with death and she shall know that I am He that searcheth veins and hearts."

Lydia is completely unnerved.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

God sees Margaret Wells. God sees us all.

CUT TO:

39

INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. DAY 2.

39

Howard is rooting through Charlotte's things. He has her rouge on his lips. He is wearing her stays. He puts on one of her wigs. He caresses one of Charlotte's dresses. He makes the dress touch him.

HOWARD

(As the dress)

I worship you, George Howard.

A knock on the door. Howard dashes the wig off. He goes to the desk, fumbles with some paperwork and calls:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Enter.

Haxby enters, takes in the whole scene.

HAXBY

I've prepared a fresh copy of the contract, as you requested. You'll become responsible for her debts as well as her upkeep. I must advise you, it will drain your funds. The loose arrangement you currently have is far more beneficial -

HOWARD

I want sole ownership, now! I want Charlotte Wells contracted as mine!

Haxby puts down a newspaper.

HAXBY

There's an early report of the Covent Garden raids in the paper, my lord. Along with all the other scandals of the week.

Haxby bows and leaves. He has circled an article headed *WISHING WELLS*. Howard reads.

KITTY (V.O.)

"A busy week for toast of the town Miss C.W., lately in the keeping of young Baronet Hardhead.

Howard's face falls. He picks up a magnifying glass.

KITTY (V.O.)

"She was blazing a trail at the boxing on Tuesday...

CUT TO:

40

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY 2.

40

Kitty is reading the same article aloud to Fanny and North as they tidy up after the raid.

KITTY

"At Mrs Cornely's Masquerade on Wednesday sporting with young buck Captain Longshaft. She lit up Almack's on Thursday with old flame Lord Reptile and climbed into Count Fortissimo's carriage, for a hard ride around the park.

CUT TO:

41 INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. DAY 2.

41

KITTY (V.O.)

"Is Wells wishing for another keeper?"

On Howard's face: His deep insecurity, His shock.

CUT TO:

42 INT. NANCY BURROUGHS' HOUSE. PARLOUR. DAY 2.

42

Nancy pours Margaret a gin, in her grimy parlour.

MARGARET

I hear Florence Scanwell is behind
it. Am I right?

NANCY

Fancy a blind bitch wielding so
much power? Admirable, ain't it.

MARGARET

What d'you know about her?

NANCY

I know that on her wedding night,
she saw her husband's prick and
thought it such a fiendish thing,
she stabbed her own eyes out with a
brooch...

Margaret genuinely laughs. A welcome release of tension.

MARGARET

I hear they took a girl of yours.

NANCY

Betsey Fletcher. Locked her up in
Bridewell for a month...

MARGARET

(Gives her a coin)
Poor lamb... This is for her needs.

Nancy takes it, with a nod. Violet Cross enters with two
shabby, half-cut SOLDIERS.

VIOLET

These boys come to pay my rent.

Violet and the soldiers disappear upstairs.

MARGARET

Why are they raiding, when there's a
whole army needs our service?

NANCY

Strange about the timing though,
isn't it? Just as you're set to move
up in the world, you get raided.

MARGARET

Who wants me, Nancy?

NANCY

Who have you offended?

Margaret places another coin on the table.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Some of the pimps and bawds round
here... I'd love to see 'em hanged
and kicking. But you're a good sort
Mags.

Another coin goes down.

MARGARET

Whose name is on that warrant?

CUT TO:

43

INT. LYDIA QUIGLEY'S HOUSE. DRAWING ROOM. DAY 2.

43

An opulent room, decorated in the height of Parisian fashion.
Lydia Quigley finishes applying her lurid make-up. Charles
shows Emily Lacey in.

CHARLES

Look what came to the door, Ma. I
would have sent it away but it has
some unusual curves. It's looking
for a position.

EMILY

(Flirtatiously)

I'm never stuck for a position, sir.

CHARLES

It's got a spark.

EMILY

I've been told that Mrs Quigley's
is the outstanding house. This is
my entry in the List. I have the
gateway to the temple of bliss.

She hands the scrap of paper to Lydia, who discards it.

LYDIA

Have you been long on the town?

EMILY

I've got good experience. I'm the best girl in my current house.

LYDIA

Are you clean?

EMILY

We have the physician every week.

LYDIA

Any children?

Barely a beat.

EMILY

None living.

LYDIA

What do you know of art and culture and the current subjects of conversation?

EMILY

(nonplussed)

I can talk if they want.

LYDIA

What instruments do you play?

EMILY

The male instrument.

LYDIA

In other words, you're nothing but a rutting post?

Emily's face falls.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Every one of my girls moves, eats, speaks, sings and plays like a lady. The only way she differs, is in her worship of Venus.

EMILY

I earn a fortune for my current house.

LYDIA

You're nothing but a bare-forked animal, my dear. Shakespeare - and my girls would know that.

(To Charles)

Take her out. She's quite unsuitable.

EMILY

I am constantly asked for. Mrs Wells has me on my back morning, noon and night and I know I can do better.

A change comes over Mrs Quigley at the mention of Mrs Wells. She looks at Emily anew.

LYDIA

You come from Margaret Wells?

EMILY

I've no quarrel with her; I just want something better.

CUT TO:

44

INT. LYDIA QUIGLEY'S HOUSE. STAIRWELL/ EMILY'S BEDROOM. DAY 4A

Lydia leads Emily up a wide staircase. They pass a statue of Venus and gold-framed paintings of lascivious nudes.

LYDIA

Presumably Margaret Wells owns the dress you're standing in. What's your debt to her?

EMILY

Don't know. Maybe fifteen pounds.

LYDIA

Did you intend to leave her without paying? She'd have you for theft before you could sneeze...

Emily is dismayed.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

As an act of benevolence, I'll settle with her. Then your debt becomes payable to me.

EMILY

So... you will take me?

Two of Mrs Quigley's fashionable girls stand at the top of the stairs. They stare at Emily with haughty curiosity.

LYDIA

I'll have to refine you and dress you in a proper style. These costs will be added to your debt. So you'll work like a black. Do you understand?

Lydia shows Emily into a ghastly ornate bedroom. Emily doesn't like the look of it. She turns, doubtfully.

EMILY
Maybe I'll -

Lydia neatly shuts the door and locks Emily in. It gives her immense satisfaction. She listens at the door as Emily realises her position.

EMILY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You can't lock me in... Let me OUT!
LET ME OUT!

CUT TO:

45

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. COUNTING ROOM. DAY 2.

45

Margaret is resting in the arms of William North. She stirs.

NORTH
Stay. You need rest.

Again, she stirs.

MARGARET
I must sort things for Lucy.

NORTH
(Not letting her go)
I've reserved the box. The word is out. You will have bids.

Margaret stays in his arms. All the breath goes out of her. He senses her pain. He just keeps holding her.

NORTH (CONT'D)
It is the world, girl...

CUT TO:

46

INT. A CANDLELIT CHURCH. EVENING 2.

46

The sun sinks through the stained glass windows. Oswald prays fervently. Nancy sits in the pew beside him.

NANCY
There's a special demon in hell whose job is flaying the hypocrite.

OSWALD
(Startled)
How dare you address me.

NANCY
A month in jail beating hemp for my girl, Betsey. An eternity on the bonfire for you.

OSWALD

I've nothing to say to you.

Oswald tries to get away. Nancy is sitting on his coat tails.

NANCY

It's unfortunate that you have met me. Because now you'll see me everywhere. Every time you buy prick relief, I will be waiting. Just like that special demon.

OSWALD

(Hangs his head)

There was nothing I could do...

Nancy's birch rod twitches. Oswald trembles.

NANCY

Then you need to pay your penance. Firstly, I want a name...

CUT TO:

47

INT. LYDIA QUIGLEY'S HOUSE. EMILY'S BEDROOM. EVENING 2.

47

Emily whacks the locked door.

EMILY

You let me out or I'll smash every window in this poxy place!

The key turns. Charles enters.

CHARLES

You'll learn to live with the locks.

EMILY

Let me go.

CHARLES

Our customers want to be assured of your devotion. So we keep you like nuns. It's a closed order.

Emily takes this in. Charles is undoing his buttons.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Mama's ordered me to try the goods.

EMILY

Let me out or I'll tell every cull I'm a prisoner here. You'll be hanged for a kidnapping pimp.

CHARLES

Then go.

He opens the door. Emily heads for it. He kicks it shut.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
As soon as your debt is paid.

Emily sighs. It's hopeless.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
What's your name?

EMILY
Emily Lacey.

CHARLES
Miss Lacey... I bet you made that up.
What's your real name, Sally Piddle?

EMILY
(Gathering her pride)
I'm the Duchess of Quim.

Charles laughs.

CHARLES
I'll wager you're a wild bouncing
kind of a ride... Our girls stay
because this is where the fabulously
wealthy come. And they'll like your
street spark, Duchess - whatever my
mother might say. If you play your
hand well, you could end up being
bought out and kept. We'll teach you
all the refinements you need, music,
dancing, French. So climb on. I won't
harm you; look.

Charles pulls a baggy sheep's-gut condom out of his pocket.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
We had a girl who left here to be
mistress to the Duke of Norfolk.

Emily considers. She summons every instinct for survival.

EMILY
You will teach my cunny French?

Charles laughs.

CHARLES
Oui. Now montez ici for a lesson.

CUT TO:

48 **INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. EVENING 2.**

48

Charlotte enters. Her face falls as Howard, dressed for the playhouse, bears down upon her like a Furie.

HOWARD
You are cutting out my HEART! You
FAITHLESS WHORE!!

CHARLOTTE
Howard?...

He grabs a copy of the paper and shoves it at her.

HOWARD
Pining alone? You've been out every
night. Don't you dare come to the
playhouse. You treacherous cheating
liar - You don't deserve to LIVE!

He storms out, his heels clacking. His footman closes the door. Maidservants scuttle out of sight. Charlotte looks at the paper. She rolls her eyes.

CUT TO:

49 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. PARLOUR. EVENING 2.**

49

Margaret is getting Lucy dressed for the Opera.

MARGARET
See what I've been keeping for you?

Lucy takes a package. Unwraps it. Inside, a pair of satin shoes. She examines them.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
My mother took me down St Martin's
Lane. It was winter and I didn't have
shoes; just the raw churn of hunger.
She'd spent every last farthing on
her gin, the slut - and she was a
bunter; no one'd go near her. She
sold me to a house that dealt in
little girls.

LUCY
I know.

MARGARET
You know what she got for me? You
know what I was worth?

LUCY
Yes.

Lucy puts the shoes on the floor.

MARGARET

The mother there, she dressed me warm and gave me a full meal. I would have done anything for her from that day on. And I did. It won't be like that for you.

LUCY

I know.

MARGARET

I sent you to school. I've given you time to -

LUCY

Ma, I'm grown.

Lucy tries to put her feet into the shoes.

MARGARET

Do you like them?

Lucy feels almost guilty. She hates to disappoint her mother.

LUCY

They don't fit.

BREAK.

50 **INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. MASTER BEDROOM. NIGHT 2.** 50

Charlotte is looking at the contract. She sighs, making up her mind.

CUT TO:

51 **INT. SIR HOWARD'S TOWNHOUSE. HAXBY'S OFFICE. NIGHT 2.** 51

Charlotte comes in holding the contract. Haxby stands. He is at his desk, the pineapple cut up on a plate beside him.

CHARLOTTE

I need a witness, Mr Haxby.

HAXBY

Of course...

Charlotte sits and signs.

HAXBY (CONT'D)

You're fully aware of the terms?

CHARLOTTE

I am exclusively Sir George Howard's from now on.

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

He may demand congress at any time, in return for which... I will empty his pockets.

HAXBY

He requires your submission and your fidelity. You must obey him in all things. And if you are inconstant -

CHARLOTTE

(Turning on him)

I am not inconstant. If I go out upon the town, it's to quench my boredom, not my lust. I hate lust. The scandal sheet you gave him was a lie.

Charlotte eats a piece of pineapple.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Quite the epicure aren't you Mr Haxby, under that Puritan suit?

HAXBY

I dislike waste, Miss Wells.

Haxby takes the contract, folding it.

CHARLOTTE

You may call my coachman.

HAXBY

Sir George insists you remain here.

Even this small constraint has an overpowering impact on Charlotte. She cannot bear it.

CHARLOTTE

I'm going to the playhouse; call my coach.

Haxby is enjoying his greater power.

HAXBY

Sir George has given his instruction. We are both bound to obey him.

Charlotte plucks the contract from him; puts it on the fire.

CHARLOTTE

He pays you what? Two hundred a year for managing his whole estate? I get ten times that, for managing one small part of his anatomy. No wonder you seek to poison him against me.

HAXBY

Is there anything else, Miss Wells?

CHARLOTTE

Don't ignite my enmity, or you'll
find I'm made of fire.

Charlotte goes. Haxby sits down to work, brushing her off.

HAXBY

Fire burns, leaving but ashes.

CUT TO:

52

EXT. A STREET. NIGHT 2.

52

Charlotte is being hurried along in a sedan chair. Her chair man is a young Irishman, DANIEL MAHONEY.

MAHONEY

I've carried you before, Miss Wells.
I'd be insulted that you don't recall
- only I was at the back. Now I've
graduated to the front. This sedan
chair is my own property. Won in a
game of hazard, Tuesday last.

CHARLOTTE

Congratulations.

MAHONEY

Thank you, but I won't be doing this
for long. I have plans. I thought I
might set myself up as a fancy-man.
There must be many a lady in these
fine streets who'd pay for a throw
with a well-shaped man like me. Would
you like to try my services yourself?

Charlotte has been very amused - but this crosses the line.

CHARLOTTE

You go too far.

MAHONEY

I go all the way for a lady's
pleasure. And my price is very fair.
I'd even give you the first one free.

His cheek is irresistible. Charlotte finds herself smiling.

CHARLOTTE

You are a harlot, sir.

CUT TO:

53

INT. COVENT GARDEN THEATRE ROYAL. FOYER. NIGHT 2.

53

LORD and LADY REPTON approach Howard through the throng; middle-aged, wealthy sexual adventurers.

REPTON
Howard, where's your fine lady?

HOWARD
With my parents.

REPTON
Not your wife, man!

LADY REPTON
He means Miss Wells. Lord Repton is besotted with Miss Wells.

They walk up the stairs towards their boxes.

REPTON
The sister comes out tonight, have you heard? Wells junior. Maidenhood to the highest bidder and I swear that will be me.

LADY REPTON
My husband loves a hymen...

REPTON
I had Charlotte's. I would like her sister's too.

LADY REPTON
Isn't he perfectly hideous?

Lady Repton is laughing. Howard is shocked.

CUT TO:

54

INT. THEATRE ROYAL. AUDITORIUM. MARGARET'S BOX. NIGHT 2.

54

Margaret enters a box, with Lucy. Lucy looks around, awed.

MARGARET
It's a marvel, isn't it? This is yours for the taking, Lucy. Now sit forward. We need you to be seen.

Lucy finds her light. She sees Lydia Quigley in another box, with Charles and her girls.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
That white-faced death's head is Lydia Quigley, pimping her piteous wares. Avoid her like poison.

Lucy gazes at another box – a party of girls being prodded and placed by their overdressed mother.

LUCY
Are they harlots too?

MARGARET
That's the Duchess of Marlborough
and her daughters. Worth twenty
thousand a piece; sluts.

CUT TO:

55 **INT. THEATRE ROYAL. AUDITORIUM. LYDIA'S BOX. NIGHT 2.** 55

Lydia notices Marie-Louise grimacing a smile. Lydia hisses.

LYDIA
What are you doing? You look like a
sick cat.

Lydia notices Margaret and Lucy. Her eyes narrow.

CUT TO:

56 **INT. THEATRE ROYAL. AUDITORIUM. MARGARET'S BOX. NIGHT 2.** 56

Lucy keeps looking bravely around. She sees Howard in his box, alone. The Reptons and Gibbon are staring right at her. She turns her attention to the stage.

On the stage, the duet 'Oh too lovely too unkind' begins, sung by the MALE CONTRALTO and FEMALE SOPRANO. Lucy watches, entranced. A vision of love and loss.

CUT TO:

57 **INT. THEATRE ROYAL. AUDITORIUM. HOWARD'S BOX. NIGHT 2.** 57

In Howard's box, Charlotte enters and sits. There is a ripple of interest around the whole theatre. Even the CONDUCTOR glances up and acknowledges her presence.

HOWARD
You lied to me.

CHARLOTTE
Because I went out? I spent every
night talking of you – all London
knows my constancy.

HOWARD
So why do you not sign my contract?

CHARLOTTE
I won't be owned, like your wife.

HOWARD
Then I have no surety of your faith.

CHARLOTTE
You have my word.

HOWARD
A whore's word?

Charlotte has had enough. She stands.

CHARLOTTE
Take it or not, as you please.

Another ripple of interest goes round the auditorium.
Charlotte leaves the box. Everyone is aware of their dispute.

CUT TO:

58

INT. THEATRE ROYAL. AUDITORIUM. MARGARET'S BOX. NIGHT 2.

58

Lucy is aware of nothing but the opera. It has overwhelmed her with an inarticulate sense of loss. She is barely aware of Charlotte entering their box.

MARGARET
What have you done? Why does he scorn you?

CHARLOTTE
I won't sign his poxy contract.

MARGARET
You are the village idiot.

The aria ends with applause and the interval. The tragedy of it is too much for Lucy. Her face is wet with tears.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Lucy - whatever is the matter?
Control yourself. You must shine!

There is a knock on the door. Margaret answers it. Repton.

REPTON
My dear. Let me see her.

GIBBON
(Appearing)
If I may whisper in your ear?

MARGARET
The silly girl. The opera has moved her and she cries.

REPTON
Why, the poor lamb...

LUCY
The story is so sad.

The men are enchanted. But Lucy sees the reality of them.

GIBBON
If I may offer you this note?

Margaret goes out of the box, closing the door behind her.
Charlotte tries to comfort her.

CHARLOTTE
You know why the men sing so high,
don't you?

Charlotte mimes a scissors action.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Done to them when they're little boys
to stop their voices breaking.

Lucy looks at her in disbelief.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
That's the cruelty of the opera.
The subject is love, the men have
no balls and the virgins are all
played by whores...

When her smile fades, Lucy can finally admit the truth.

LUCY
I'm not ready.

CHARLOTTE
Neither was I.

A moment of connection between the sisters. Margaret returns.

MARGARET
The tears worked, you clever minx.
They want you more than ever.

Another knock. Margaret looks out. Violet Cross is there.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
What do you want?

VIOLET
Nancy Burroughs sent me. I've got
the name you want.

MARGARET
Who signed that warrant?

Violet has her hand out. Margaret pays her.

VIOLET
Charles Quigley.

We see the effect on Margaret's features.

CUT TO:

59

INT. THEATRE ROYAL. CIRCLE 'BAR'. NIGHT 2.

59

Margaret approaches Lydia and her party.

MARGARET
Are you coming after me with lawmen
and judges? You??

Lydia ignores her; too superior to meet Margaret's eye.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Have you forgotten where it ended
when you came for me before?

LYDIA
See how this sluice rat behaves at
the opera.

Lydia's gaze finally locks with Margaret's. Hatred. Charles holds out a purse full of coins.

CHARLES
Mumma wants to give you this.

MARGARET
Your molly boy's fake warrant has
cost me dear. I want one hundred
pounds - one hundred - or I'll have
you up before that judge for a
malicious prosecution.

LYDIA
He threatened you with whipping and
with transportation. Do you really
think you'll have his ear?

Charlotte and Lucy have caught up.

CHARLOTTE
Ma, what are you doing?

MARGARET
(Her composure lost)
Stay away from this bitch. She's
poison. Her very breath corrupts
the air around her.

LYDIA

(Enjoying the attack)

One of your girls came to me today,
fleeing from the horrors of your
house. A pert little doxy by the
name of Miss Lacey.

CHARLES

A very rideable piece.

LYDIA

She's mine now. That pays her debt.

Margaret takes in what has happened.

MARGARET

You cannot steal my girls!

LYDIA

I'm paying for her, as you see. She
implored me to take her from your
flyblown cunny house.

MARGARET

Damn you for a kidnapping pimp.
I've put you in the pillory before
and if you weren't such a clap-
raddled hag I'd put you there
again!

Charlotte and Lucy weave their arms through Margaret's. The
face-off is now attracting a lot of attention. Lydia's girls
are nudging each other in excitement. Marie-Louise is most
impressed by Margaret Wells.

LYDIA

Sluice rats belong in the sewer.
And when they try to climb into the
light, we must set the dogs on
them, to chase them down.

MARGARET

I'll have my new house. Raid or
not, you cannot stop me.

CHARLES

(Peacemaking)

Here is cash for Emily Lacey...

CHARLOTTE

She's a ha'penny slut, Ma. Settle
it.

LYDIA

Nothing settles what lies between
us.

MARGARET

Then it's war.

LYDIA

I tremble. Come, my doves. Let's
leave this rat to pimp its young.

(To Charlotte and Lucy)

You'd do far better with me in
Golden Square, my dears...

Lydia leads her party away, with a final lingering glance at
Charlotte. The three Wells women remain, alone in the midst
of society. Charlotte sees Howard staring at her. He leaves.

CHARLOTTE

I'm going.

Charlotte follows him. An usher brings Margaret a note.
Margaret gives it to Lucy.

MARGARET

What does it say?

LUCY

(Uncomfortable)

He offers twice your highest bid...

CUT TO:

60

INT. BRIDEWELL HOUSE OF CORRECTION. NIGHT 2.

60

A hell-hole filled with the voices of women. Nancy awaits.
Betsey Fletcher is brought out of the darkness - by Oswald.

NANCY

How are the fleas biting, Bets?

BETSEY

The judge gave me a month.

NANCY

He meant but a day. Isn't that right?

OSWALD

Yes... a clerical error...

Oswald ashamedly leads them out.

NANCY

The law's an old bucket, Bets. Kick
it and it's full of holes...

CUT TO:

61

INT. HOWARD'S CARRIAGE. NIGHT 2.

61

Howard is on his knees, lifting Charlotte's skirts in the midst of passion. Charlotte is looking out of the window.

HOWARD

Every second we're apart I'm in agony
- and you torment me with lies.

CHARLOTTE

I am constant, George. Your contract
won't bring you peace. Only trust can
do that.

HOWARD

I just want to secure your love. You
can understand that. I'd pour gold
into your lap if I was sure of your
love.

CHARLOTTE

I'll show you how I love.

HOWARD

I want your soul's devotion.

CHARLOTTE

You have it.

HOWARD

Love me.

CHARLOTTE

I love you, Howard.

For a second, Howard believes her. Then he holds her down.

HOWARD

I told you not to lie! If you are
free to lie and play the whore,
then so will I be.

The coachman opens the door. Charlotte sees that she is
outside her mother's house.

CHARLOTTE

This is my mother's house. Are you
sending me home in disgrace?

HOWARD

No. You will wait in the carriage.

Howard descends from the coach. The truth dawns on Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

You have bid for Lucy...

HOWARD

You've forced me to this extreme.
This is *your fault*.

CHARLOTTE

My mother has accepted...

HOWARD

I've never fathomed the allure of virgins. The last one I had was my wife - and she was scarcely more diverting than a corpse. But a man must do his duty... Now you know how it feels to be made jealous.

CHARLOTTE

Do you imagine I am JEALOUS? I would burn this city down with you and your carriage in it. Take her! Take her God damn you - May you rot in hell!

Howard is totally taken aback by the passion of Charlotte's distress. She gets out of the coach.

HOWARD

The girl will learn pleasure - and you will learn your place. I told you to wait here!

CHARLOTTE

I'd rather be cut in quarters.

Charlotte storms off. Margaret is coming towards Howard.

HOWARD

Charlotte!!

MARGARET

I'll go after her.

HOWARD

CHARLOTTE -

CUT TO:

62

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. BEDROOM. NIGHT 2.

62

Full of trepidation, Lucy hears Howard's furious cry:

HOWARD (O.S.)

- You infernal WHORE!...

CUT TO:

63 **EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. NIGHT 2.**

63

Margaret speaks firmly to Howard.

MARGARET

We are honoured by your generous bid. We offer your prize on the terms in your note. My precious girl awaits.

Howard pulls himself together. He enters the house.

NORTH

Welcome, your Lordship, to our house of recreation and delights -

HOWARD

Where is it?

North, his expression strained, shows him up the stairs.

CUT TO:

64 **INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. BEDROOM. NIGHT 2. CONTINUOUS.**

64

Lucy is waiting, increasingly anxious. North knocks and opens the door. He looks at her - is she all right? Lucy nods.

NORTH

This is Miss Lucy Wells.

Howard enters, flushed, upset.

HOWARD

Get out.

North leaves, closing the door. Lucy curtsies, nervous, unsure, unready. The culmination of everything she has been waiting for. But Howard is ignoring her.

He goes to the mantelpiece trying to contain himself. He starts to cry spoilt, boyish tears.

Lucy watches him, bewildered.

CUT TO:

65 **EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. NIGHT 2.**

65

Margaret hurries after Charlotte. The streets are dark.

MARGARET

I had to. He offered to double the highest bid. And he's a good start for Lucy.

CHARLOTTE

I know that!

MARGARET

Why are you driving him away? He's an easy keeper -

CHARLOTTE

He's a jealous snake.

MARGARET

You could have him dropping jewels on your pillow - but you provoke him to this spite! Do not lose the easiest of incomes. Indulge him. Take his contract.

CHARLOTTE

It makes him my master.

MARGARET

It gives you security. I'm thinking of your future.

CHARLOTTE

Is that why you're crying?

MARGARET

I'm not crying; don't you dare.

CHARLOTTE

Real tears.

MARGARET

If I was crying, they'd be tears of joy that you have never begged for food or sold yourself for pence! My Ma sold me for a pair o' shoes.

CHARLOTTE

I've heard about that pair o' shoes so much I could start a cobblers.

MARGARET

The only safety is in money!

CHARLOTTE

I *hate* money!!

In the darkness, human forms. Beggars, street-whores. Charlotte blazes in her dazzling dress.

MARGARET

That is funny. I've got tears of laughter now. If I was sleeping on these streets I'd throw a turd at you for saying that; I'd throw a dying cat.

Charlotte is ashamed. Margaret approaches, more gentle.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

You'd like to be free of it, wouldn't you? Free from money and from men?

Margaret has nailed it. Charlotte looks at her, surprised.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

You'll only get that freedom, if you're rich. Money is a woman's only power in this world. Make it your solace and your dream and one day wealth, real lasting wealth will make you free.

CHARLOTTE

Are you free, mother?

MARGARET

I will be. My new house. More girls. I'll be respected.

Charlotte steadies herself, breathing deeply.

CHARLOTTE

Sometimes, a feeling comes up in me, as like to make me retch.

MARGARET

We've all had that. But you must quell the disgust. I know that baronet's a snake; I'm not blind -

CHARLOTTE

It's not the baronet who sickens me. It's you.

Margaret smothers her dismay. Charlotte walks off.

CUT TO:

66

INT. MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. BEDROOM. NIGHT 2.

66

Howard hasn't got an erection. Lucy lies underneath him, anxiously waiting for something to happen. Howard pauses.

LUCY

Are you done, sir?

HOWARD

No I am not done! I am undone! I am as soft as rotted fruit, curse you.

LUCY

Am I doing something wrong?

Howard pins her back in a rage of frustration.

HOWARD
You stupid little virgin!

This cuts Lucy to the quick. He gets off her.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
We're going to have a little secret,
you and I. I won't tell your mother
that you bored me to a stupor. And I
won't ask her for my money back.
In return, you will say that I
impaled you, hard. And if your sister
should hear any rumour otherwise I'll
make her pay, do you understand? I'll
throw her out and kick her, 'til she
lands in Newgate jail.

Lucy nods, appalled at his aggression. Howard curls her hair
around his hand. At first a caress. Then he pulls, hard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
So when Charlotte asks what it was
like, what will you say?

LUCY
(Looking him in the eye)
It was like the opera.

This is not the answer Howard expects. But it satisfies him.

CUT TO:

67

EXT. COVENT GARDEN. AN ALLEY. NIGHT 2.

67

Nancy leaves Betsey on the street.

NANCY
Got to sing for your supper, Bets.

Cold and dismayed, Betsey starts to sing.

BETSEY
Oh, sing with me a merry catch
As summer days will come...
My love he is a soldier boy
And so I'm following the drum -

From down the street, Charlotte watches her - arrested.

MAHONEY
Do you need a ride, lady?

Charlotte turns. Mahoney at her shoulder; little more than a
proud beggar. No sedan chair. A whore, like herself.

MAHONEY (CONT'D)
My offer still stands. Our first
transaction free...

CHARLOTTE
We both know nothing comes free.

MAHONEY
You would. I guarantee.

Charlotte is amused. She gives him a coin.

CHARLOTTE
I don't want a ride; I'm walking.

MAHONEY
Then what's this for?

CHARLOTTE
Your company.

CUT TO:

68

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. NIGHT 2.

68

Margaret sees a stony-faced Howard into his carriage.

MARGARET
I tried to call her back.

HOWARD
I care not.

MARGARET
I trust you are satisfied?

HOWARD
My duty is done. Her life of
pleasure begins.

Margaret nods, thanking him. He goes. Margaret suddenly turns
and retches into the shadows.

CUT TO:

69

EXT. COVENT GARDEN PIAZZA. TAVERN. NIGHT 2.

69

Amelia Scanwell leads Florence past a rowdy tavern. Violet
Cross is on a table, lifting her skirts. Florence prays, her
attention on an inner light. But Amelia is fascinated. If she
knew the word, she'd know she was aroused.

BETSEY (V.O.)
With a patter patter tat
And a rattle and a scrap
And the beat of the marching song -

CUT TO:

70 **INT. LYDIA QUIGLEY'S HOUSE. CORRIDOR/STAIRWELL. NIGHT 2.** 70

Lydia walks down the stairs with her keys, the Arch-procuress of London. She passes Marie-Louise with her cull, the DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH. Marie-Louise curtsies to her. The Duke kisses her hand. Lydia acknowledges their deference, queen of her realm.

CUT TO:

71 **EXT. RUSSELL STREET. NIGHT 2.** 71

Betsey sings on. The shadow of a man falls across her.

BETSEY (V.O.)
I'm ragged and worn
And my clothes are torn -

Oswald is there, full of self-hatred, guilt, pity, desire.

OSWALD
I need forgiveness...

BETSEY
Eight shillings.

CUT TO:

72 **EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARGARET WELLS' HOUSE. NIGHT 2.** 72

North comes out to Margaret. She is wiping her mouth.

MARGARET
I prayed for boys, William. Every
time, I prayed for a boy.

NORTH
She's strong. Like her mother.

MARGARET
This city is made of our flesh, every
beam and brick.

NORTH
Slaves and whores...

He helps her up.

MARGARET

We will have our piece of it.

NORTH

Come in to your child.

MARGARET

We'll own it. We'll own it to keep.

Margaret is holding on to him. They walk inside.

END OF EPISODE ONE.