

KILLIGREW. Yes, Ned – she wouldn't just be convincing. She would be real. Dryden, think! You could write any sort of woman you want – not just the passive lover, the fragile beauty. If you're writing for real women, they won't need to be so feminine any more.

KYNASTON. No, no, no, no, no! You miss the point entirely. Theatre is artifice. It's make-believe. Pretend. The blood is not real blood. Othello's not a real Moor. People come to the playhouse to engage with the imaginary. For a short break from their wretched, drivel-filled lives they can escape. Who'd go to the theatre to see real people saying real things about real life? That would be preposterous! We trade in magic. And we are trained to do it. Honed, groomed, athletes of the imagination. And these women – what training have they had, eh? I want nothing to do with it. The whole thing stinks!

*He leaves in a huff and meets HART in the doorway.*

Oh, Charles, darling, have you heard the news? Everything's going to change.

HART. Yes, yes it is! Gentlemen, the Duke's might have Moll Davies, but wait till you see what I've brought you.

KYNASTON. What – some actor-ess guttersnipe you've found on the streets, ha ha!

NELL *enters*.

Oh Jesus.

HART. Fellows. I'd like you to meet Nell Gwynn.

NED. The orange seller!

HART. Nell, this is Mr Killigrew. *(To KILLIGREW.)* I think you ought to try her out.

KILLIGREW. But she's – *(Hushed.)* she's a strumpet, Charles. No disrespect, ma'am.

NELL. None taken.

HART. Listen. I watched her out there, jesting like a court wit. So we've done a little work together, and, well... I think she has something unusual.