

Synopses

Episode One



Penniless and powerless, after nearly a decade in exile from Republican England, Charles II's oldest and dearest friend, the Duke of Buckingham, abandons him and returns home to make his peace with Cromwell. But when loyal minister Sir Edward Hyde brings news of Cromwell's sudden death, the prospect of Charles regaining the Crown seems within his grasp.

General Monck picks up on the nation's growing discontent and persuades Parliament to invite Charles Stuart back to take up his Throne. Charles makes his triumphant ride into London on his 30th birthday, following another victory with the long-anticipated seduction of the beautiful and tantalising Barbara Villiers.

With the virile Charles spawning illegitimate children, the need for a Queen and an heir becomes paramount. Barbara is confident enough of her charms not to be threatened by the arrival

of the devout and mousy Catharine from Portugal, and she insists on being chief among the ladies-in-waiting. Barbara has her own agenda and is prepared to stoop to any level to achieve her ends.

Episode Two

With no sign of a Royal pregnancy, the succession is a thorny issue. Charles's impetuous brother and heir to the Throne, James, Duke of York, complicates matters with his conversion to Catholicism. With the prospect of a Catholic King an anathema to the Protestant English, Barbara is busy priming Charles's eldest son, Monmouth, for greatness: he might be a bastard, but he's a Protestant bastard.

When Catharine becomes pregnant, Barbara's scheming seems to have been for nothing but, tragically, the Queen miscarries. With the lack of a viable Protestant heir to the Throne, Charles is under pressure to divorce Catharine and remarry. The beautiful Lady Frances Stewart is groomed by Barbara as a potential future Queen but, just when Charles seems tempted to propose, she elopes and flees the Court.

Episode Three



As fire blazes through London, destroying whole swathes of the city, Charles and James fight valiantly

to contain it. Many see the fire as God's judgement on Charles and his licentious Court and, as awareness of Barbara's depravity grows, the Monarch's popularity wanes. But Barbara is about to be eclipsed in Charles's heart as he falls under the spell of sparky, streetwise actress Nell Gwynn.

Minette, Charles's beloved little sister, is sent from France as Louis XIV's envoy. The endless wrangling with Parliament makes Charles desperate to appropriate money from another source, and France is prepared to grant him a subsidy in return for support against the Dutch. Charles also negotiates a second, covert treaty, whereby the French King will provide unlimited funds, should he convert to Catholicism.

Minette, having concealed a debilitating sickness from her cherished brother, dies on return to France. Charles is devastated by her death. Comfort comes from Louise de K roualle, Minette's beautiful lady-in-waiting who, alongside Nell, becomes another devoted Royal mistress.

Under pressure to enforce the Test Act, Charles avenges his frustration by sacking Lord Shaftesbury from the Privy Council. Shaftesbury quickly enlists Buckingham in the Protestant cause and plans to champion Monmouth over James as heir to the throne. Charles seems vulnerable on all fronts when news of a plot to murder him is revealed.

Episode Four

The trail leads to the squalid but charismatic Titus Oates, whose accusations take in every eminent Catholic, including James and Queen Catharine herself. In the atmosphere of panic, a witch-hunt ensues and Charles is powerless to save the many innocent people whose lives are blighted by Oates's lies. Charles's position is further weakened when Parliament obtains letters alluding to the treaties with France.

As Shaftesbury pushes for the exclusion of James as Charles's heir, Charles responds by sending Monmouth, the Protestant candidate, abroad. Charles dissolves Parliament to rule as an absolute Monarch and asserts James's right to the Throne, exiling Monmouth permanently.



Charles lives out the final years of his reign in relative peace, yet he is profoundly conscious of the chaos that will ensue after his death. In a prescient moment, he advises William of Orange to prepare himself; both Monmouth and James will try and fail to rule England. In a final, ironic gesture, Charles repays Catharine for her devotion by converting to Catholicism on his deathbed.