

THE HANGING OF MARY LEWIS

Episode One: "A Meeting in the Night"

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TEASER:

EXT. COLWYN BAY - NIGHT - WALES, 1787

The WIND rustles through the empty town of COLWYN BAY.

Pre-Lap: A woman GROANS deeply, then falls silent.

An empty cathedral LOOMS in the center of town. Stocks stand bare in front of the church.

Pre-Lap: The woman GROANS again.

The wind pushes around the small homes in the town and across fields of wheat and acres of sheep. It lingers around a HANGING TREE, complete with an eerie, swinging noose.

Pre-Lap: The woman's GROANS break into SOBS

The wind makes its way to--

EXT. PRYCE HOUSE - NIGHT

--A small cottage at the edge of town. Light comes from the windows.

INT. PRYCE HOUSE - NIGHT

MAIRWEN "MARY" LEWIS (18), the town's midwife and herbalist, pert and a little reckless, peers over the large burgeoning belly of GWEN PRYCE (20s), deep within the throws of labor.

Their hair is matted with sweat. Both women look exhausted.

MARY

One more, Gwen, one more push.

GWEN

(sobbing)

I can't.

MARY

You can and you will, come on now.

Gwen SCREAMS as the next contraction washes over her. Mary, framed between her legs, peers downward.

MARY (CONT'D)
Oh, Lord. Gwen, stop pushing.

GWEN
What is it? What's wrong? Oh,
God.

MARY
Hush up now, please.

Gwen leans back, MOANING, terrified and in pain.

GWEN
Dear God, just get it out of me.

MARY
God's no help, you hear? I am.
You listen to me. Relax. Do not
push.

GWEN
(terrified)
Alright, alright.

Gwen's back is flat on the bed; her legs in triangles upward. Mary, visible through Gwen's legs, reaches between them. One hand UP TO HER ELBOW; the other hand presses into Gwen stomach.

Gwen SCREAMS.

MARY
Baby's backward. Gwen, be still.

Mary slowly pulls out her arm, slick with blood and mucus.

Gwen stares at the ceiling, MUMBLING.

GWEN
Please, oh, please.

Mary's face knits into deep concentration.

MARY
Alright, when the next pain comes--

Gwen SEIZES with the contraction.

MARY (CONT'D)
--PUSH!

Gwen YELLS as a wet, wrinkled newborn BABY slides into Mary's waiting hands.

SILENCE.

GWEN

Why isn't it crying? Oh, Mary.

Mary covers the Baby's mouth and nose with her own mouth and SUCKS. As she pulls away the Baby CRIES.

The door of the cottage SLAMS open. IAN PRYCE (30s), husband and father, rushes in.

IAN

Well? What is it? What is it?

Mary SPITS out the mouthful of mucus at his feet. He recoils at the sight of her, blood all down her front and up her arms.

MARY

A healthy, beautiful little girl.

Mary wipes the Baby off and stands up to place her in Gwen's arms. Held in her mother's arms, the Baby stops crying. Gwen, still covered in sweat, shines with love.

IAN looks furious.

IAN

What'd you go and have another girl for? We've already got two of 'em!

He gestures angrily towards the attic.

Mary disengages from the couple. She stoops down to pick up mucus and blood stained BLANKETS from the floor around the foot of the bed.

GWEN

I-I'm sorry, IAN, I-

IAN

Oh, you're sorry, are you? Me too. Sorry I've got one more sorry mouth to feed.

Mary glances at the cowering Gwen and back to IAN again.

MARY

Mayhap this girl is a gift.

IAN

Gift?

(Gets in Mary's face)

How's it a gift?

MARY
(brightly)
God's decided one bellend is to be
enough for this family.

This sparks a LAUGH out of Gwen, who quickly stifles it under IAN's dark look.

IAN
Baby's here now. Shouldn't you
leave?

MARY
If you like.

Mary dumps the soiled blankets in IAN's arms and leaves, shutting the door behind her with a snap.

EXT. COVE - NIGHT

Mary walks barefoot. The night is still, silent. The moon hangs a tiny sliver over the horizon.

She walks away from the town, down a path that leads to a sandy cove. WAVES can be heard crashing onto shore.

It's lighter here, illuminated by a tall LIGHTHOUSE, topped with a smoking coal fire.

She continues down the shore and up a ridge, until she comes to--

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

It's darker among the trees; the moon is shrouded by the leaves.

As she walks, Mary unbuttons the back of her dress, peels it off carefully, folding the dress in on itself so that the stains are tucked inwards. Now wearing only her dingy white underclothes (shirt and shift), she uses the back skirt of her dress to wipe off her arms and face as best she can in the darkness.

Mary scans the path as she walks, her eyes darting back and forth, back and forth.

She FREEZES.

The shape of a stag, outlined on the trees.

A BREEZE rustles through, letting in moonlight and illuminating the Stag.

Mary takes a sharp BREATH.

The Stag's antlers are torn and notched from a fight, half of the left antler broken and bent, now growing inside the Stag's face. One eye has been gouged completely.

A FLY buzzes in and out of the empty socket.

The Stag lowers its antlers toward Mary.

Mary fumbles through the dress in her hands and reaches into a pocket. She pulls out a glinting KNIFE.

SNAP.

Mary turns.

Behind her stands LORD GRIFFITHS (50s), the elegant ruler of this tiny town, manipulative and debonair.

Mary darts a look back. The stag is long gone. Mary tucks the knife back into her pocket. She turns back to Lord Griffiths.

He looks down his long nose at Mary.

Mary blushes and drops into a curtsy.

MARY

My Lord Griffiths.

LORD GRIFFITHS

My dear, have you no chaperone?

Mary takes the chance to rise to her feet.

MARY

I've walked these paths all my life, my Lord. Not likely that they'll start twisting now.

Lord Griffiths chuckles appreciatively.

LORD GRIFFITHS

Be wary... the stags do turn brutal during mating season. Wouldn't want to frighten one.

Mary gives a casual shrug.

MARY

Men.

Lord Griffiths frowns slightly.

LORD GRIFFITHS
You may be on, then.

Mary nods, and hastens away.

She glances back. Lord Griffiths is closely examining the roots of the trees.

Mary shakes her head, bemused, and walks away. She reaches the edge of the forest, passing the Hanging Tree.

The empty noose swings before her.

END OF TEASER.

ACT I:

INT./EXT. MARY'S HOME - DAWN

The sun is peaking over the horizon as Mary lets herself into a small and worn cabin.

Inside is cramped, but cozy. The front kitchen consists of a fireplace and a small wooden table. Every surface is cluttered with herbs, small bottles, an assortment of sharp tools, and several loose pages of paper.

The back of the room is largely taken up by a pallet on the floor, the blankets and pillow heaped in a large mess.

Mary collapses onto the bed, soiled dress and all. She falls asleep instantly.

DYLAN (O.S.)

Mary?

Mary groans and pulls the pillow over her head, covering her ears.

DYLAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Mary, it would be a good day to be awake.

POUNING ON THE DOOR. Mary doesn't budge.

DYLAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Mary, I'm to help you whether you want it or no.

Mary tries to burrow underneath her blankets. One foot hangs out in the open.

The door opens. DYLAN PARRY (18), a poor but jolly farmer's son and Mary's oldest friend, goes straight to the back of the room. He addresses the pile of blankets.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

One more service missed and they'll put you in the stocks.

(beat)

Again.

MARY

(muffled)

I'll get some rest then!

Dylan grabs her foot and PULLS MARY OUT.

She emerges from her blankets with a GLARE and a SIGH.

MARY (CONT'D)

Or no, for the last time I was there, not five minutes gone and Master Wilson broke his leg.

DYLAN

True as that may be, it's best to be avoided. As is showing up in your underthings.

Mary goes rifling through her room, looking for a clean dress. She holds one up for inspection.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Have you need of spectacles, Mary?

MARY

It's that or this!

She pulls out the blood stained dress she wore the night before.

DYLAN

(laughing)

Were you out for a murder, Mary?

MARY

No, I had a baby, Dylan.

Mary ducks behind a curtain to pull on the dress. She emerges and attacks her hair with a brush.

DYLAN

Are you sure that it was not Gwen Pryce that had a baby?

MARY

I've now birthed six babies this month. Six! And all to grow up and be needing this or that salve, and this or that cure. I won't have a rest till the grave.

DYLAN

(mocking)

We should name you for a martyr. The martyr of sleepy maidens.

Mary grabs a shawl as they head out the door.

MARY

Vex me again about sleep and you'll
be having a drink that will put you
to bed for a week.

Dylan LAUGHS.

INT. CHURCH - NAVE - DAY

Mary SNORES softly, fast asleep, her head resting against the side of the pew. Dylan, sitting next to her, shakes his head, giving up.

At the front of the church stands PASTOR TRISTAN (early 30s), a tall, thin man who cares more for people's souls than people themselves.

TRISTAN

... For in the Lord's prayer we
say, "forgive us your trespasses AS
WE forgive those who trespass
against us. Until our forgiveness
reaches those who have done wrong,
God cannot forgive us for our own
sins.

His words wash over the TOWNSFOLK, all dutifully turning up for the Sunday church service. They are mostly FARMERS or FISHERMEN, overwhelmingly poor.

At the front of the church, in full view of the congregation, sits Lord Griffiths. By his side, his wife, the sickly and pale LADY GRIFFITHS (40s), coughs into a handkerchief.

Ian Pryce kneels in a pew, praying fiercely.

Mary isn't the only one not paying attention. On Dylan's other side sits his sister EFA (15), a bubbly socialite, writing notes with a graphite stick wrapped in string on the back of her BIBLE with a FRIEND (15).

TRISTAN (CONT'D)

Now, let us pray together.

The whole congregation rises to their feet, and Dylan elbows Mary to wake her up.

INT. CHURCH - CHANCEL - DAY

Tristan gathers his Bible and several other crumpled up bits of paper as the town leaves the church.

MARY (O.S.)

No, go, I'll be but a moment.

Tristan turns to see Mary waving off Dylan as she approaches the secluded back of the Church.

TRISTAN

Oh? The farmer has decided not to follow Mistress Mary like a lamb today?

MARY

He's a friend, not a lamb.

TRISTAN

A very good friend.

MARY

Aye, and no more.

TRISTAN

Is that your will or his?

MARY

That's not your matter. I need a chat with you.

TRISTAN

There will be no insulting my homily this week, Mary. Sleeping in a church is not the same as attending.

Tristan turns and leaves through a back door.

Mary LAUGHS and follows Tristan into-

INT. CHURCH - TRISTAN'S QUARTERS - DAY

The space is as small as Mary's home, but impeccably organized. The bed covers are tightly made, the bookshelves alphabetized, and even the dirty laundry is folded neatly in a basket.

Tristan places his belongings on a neatly organized desk, and puts a kettle on the fire for tea.

MARY
 Sorry, Tristan, I've no words for
 your lectures-

TRISTAN
 Homilies.

MARY
 -this time. Just come to say
 you'll need to prepare for a
 christening at next service.

TRISTAN
 Again? Must we have so many
 babies?

Tristan pulls the kettle off the fire and pours it into a
 mug.

MARY
 No thanks to me! I deliver them,
 true, but you are to blame.

Tristan raises an eyebrow, and pours tea leaves into his mug.

MARY (CONT'D)
 You're the one that's doing all
 this marrying!

TRISTAN
 It is in God's nature that Man
 should cleave to Woman. I am doing
 his work.

MARY
 Well, can you tell them to cleave
 in the arse?

Tristan CHOKES on his tea. Mary bursts into LAUGHTER.

TRISTAN
 Mairwen Lewis, must you insist on
 being shocking! Were anyone to
 hear you--

MARY
 I am serious, Pastor! I've not had
 a rest in days!

Tristan shakes his head, truly angry.

TRISTAN

I put up with your nonsense enough,
Mairwen. I'll not have you be so
crude--

MARY

(taunting)

Oh, he'll talk of fire and
brimstone and hell, but an arse? A
mere bum? Never, never!

Tristan opens his mouth to retort when a KNOCK at the DOOR
interrupts them.

In the doorway stands a FISHERMAN, breathing hard.

FISHERMAN

You're needed! At the cove!

MARY

Which of us?

FISHERMAN

Both. There's a terror.

Off his HAUNTED EYES.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Mary, Tristan, and the Fisherman hurry through the woods Mary
had walked the night before.

MARY

I still donna understand. If it's
dead folk, there's naught but for
the pastor to do.

TRISTAN

Thanks ever so for abandoning me.

FISHERMAN

It's not the death that is
worrisome. Hurry.

He begins walking faster.

MARY

(muttering)

Death sounds worrisome enough to
me.

She hastens to follow.

EXT. COVE - DAY

The sun is shining brightly. The ocean is clear and bright. The water laps shore steadily as birds chip overhead.

And there are SIX BODIES washed up on the shore. TWO WOMEN, THREE MEN, and ONE LITTLE BOY(6).

The Little Boy is closest to Mary. He's half-buried in the sand. The tide laps over his body.

Mary, with no regard for her clothes, crouches beside him. She closes his staring eyes, and cradles his head in her hands.

She looks up at Tristan, who stares across the shore, clutching his Bible.

MARY

Who are they?

END OF ACT I

The first act sample of this tv drama pilot ends here.
If you're interested in reading more of the THE HANGING OF MARY LEWIS,
please contact Claire Hupy through her website at www.clairehupy.com