**Hair Of The Dog:**

*The Foule Murder of Christopher Marlowe as Uncovered by William Shakespeare*

By

Constance Congdon

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**HAIR OF THE DOG: THE FOULE MURDER OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AS UNCOVERED BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

TIME: 1593, May 31 or so

PLACE: London, locales, inside and out, one of them Shakespeare’s digs in Bishopsgate, a tavern, another locale in the court of Elizabeth.

**CAST:**

{With doubling} 4 W; 4 M.

{without doubling} 4 W; 9 M.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, age 29, a promising Elizabethan playwright.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, age 29, the leading Elizabethan playwright of his time.

MARGARET MARLOWE, age 28, sister, unmarried and Christopher’s match in so many ways.

ANNE MARLOWE, age 22, sister, unmarried and trying to marry respectably. Tries to be pious and respectable.

DOROTHY MARLOWE, age 19, sister, younger, unmarried. Speaks in her own rhyme and rhythm.

SHAKESPEARE’S LANDLADY, offstage voice, could be read by one of the sisters or by “BLANCHE HERBERT.”

WILLIAM DANBY, age 51, Coroner of the Queen’s Household, presiding over Marlowe’s inquest, speaks quickly to get it over with. He doesn’t expect questions.

SHERIFF, played by actor playing DANBY, or by one of the GUARDS. Out of his depth in this intrigue, but a good guy.

INGRAM FRIZER, played by the actor playing DANBY and SHERIFF, or by one of the GUARDS. Ruthless.

GUARD #1 (BOB), a guard near Elizabeth’s court.

GUARD #2 (NED), a guard near Elizabeth’s court.

“BLANCHE HERBERT,” middle-aged, one tough broad. Historically, Blanche Herbert was Elizabeth’s nurse, from infancy.

THOMAS WALSINGHAM, age 29, cousin of the head of Queen Elizabeth’s spy network, now heir to it, and Marlowe’s lover. Attractive, spoiled. No backbone.

Pronounciation Guide: Robert Poley’s last name is “pooley.”

*The playwright would like to thank Michael Dixon for the push to write this play.*

**This play is dedicated to the memory of Alexei Devotchenko, 1965 – 2014.**

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**ACT ONE**

**SCENE ONE~**

[SHAKESPEARE is alone, in his rooms, unslept].

SHAKESPEARE

He died shrieking, stabbed over his right eye.

And where was I? Writing something, words

Resonant with my memory of his tongue in my ear.

You’re thinking, hot for Marlowe, is our Will,

At last, hot for Kit. Him with the silly face, that round-faced baby with the mouth for our liquid tongue, “Anglish,” that new wench, turning her, to her German parents’ consternation, into a craven, queenly, wretched, gold-encrusted whore-madonna Wit, wet with a reverent lust, and irreverent devotion to the holy in all men

and I do mean men.

No women for Marlowe.

But no, not hot for Christopher, my jo, just for your utterances, drunk or sober, morning or night. Your riffs, darling. Your gambols. Your jokes.

To whom am I speaking?

I will be forever lonely, lonelier because you are gone, you yeasty, ruttish, earth-vexing, rump-loving, bawdy-borne, infectious, mammering, blethering, ale-slurping, saucy, unmuzzled, wayward, ill-dreaming genius, dear to my heart and, I wish, my hearth, you strumpet, skains-mate, wag.

[A woman dressed as a man enters. This is MARGARET MARLOWE. She starts physically assaulting SHAKESPEARE]

MARGARET

He’s dead! Kit Marlowe’s dead! What do you do?

[SHAKESPEARE grabs her and holds her to protect himself]

Stay in your rooms? And write? As if you knew

he’d die--

SHAKESPEARE

A breast! I knew you were no man!

MARGARET

--and then, damn your eyes, you so quickly can

take everything he earned through genius, all—

[by this time, SHAKESPEARE has wrestled her to the ground and is sitting on her]

--the theaters that did his plays. What gall

you have! Get off of me and let me go!

SHAKESPEARE

I’ll toss you out the window, Margaret Marlowe!

MARGARET

How did you know me?

SHAKESPEARE

You look like him, a bit.

Enough to make a guess.

MARGARET

[suddenly pleased]

I look like Kit?

SHAKESPEARE

A bit.

MARGARET

You’re saying that to shut me up.

SHAKESPEARE

It’s working. Or it better be. You pup!

You stupid, credulous, self-righteous child!

MARGARET

Not *stupid!*

SHAKESPEARE

Naïve, then. You come in wild—

MARGARET

You have the theaters now, all the fame,

And all of London knows you by your name,

“Shakespeare,” the second only to Marlowe,

The one who taught you everything you know.

SHAKESPEARE

As I was saying--you barge in here, as if

You have the right. And give me a biff

Upside the head. You are lucky, son, my dagger

Wasn’t near or you’d walk with a stagger

Out the door and into oblivion.

I haven’t slept at all. I cannot write!

I can barely think. I’ve been up all night.

And if you think for one moment, I’m glad

He’s gone or knew about it? You are *mad*.

He didn’t teach me everything I know.

That’s pure excrement and you know it, so—

MARGARET

I don’t know it.

SHAKESPEARE

That was something **he** said?

MARGARET

If he did say it, would you want him dead?

SHAKESPEARE

Of course not! What is wrong with you!

MARGARET

“Killed in a bar fight?” That can’t be true.

He won every fight, and barely broke a sweat!

Did everyone conveniently forget?

And you, Will Shakescene, had the most to gain.

SHAKESPEARE

What are you saying? That is just insane!

MARGARET

I have un-sane thoughts because I am heartbroken.

SHAKESPEARE

Listen, *boy*, you leave those thoughts unspoken!

MARGARET

And, yes, I am a woman dressed as a man.

I come in to buy books, every chance I can.

I stay/*stayed* with Kit, dressed as this *boy.*

We laughed about it—such a source of joy!

SHAKESPEARE

And so those gambols have come to an end,

With thoughts of my fault in the death of my friend.

[He grabs her, threateningly]

Your idle musings could cause me real harm.

So stop them now.

MARGARET

Let go of my arm!

SHAKESPEARE

Done. You know the inquest is tomorrow.

Enough of all this bootless, painful sorrow.

Join me at the inquest.

MARGARET

It’s so shoddy.

Oh, and by the way, they’ve lost his body.

[she exits. Re-enters]

You’re good at plot. Kit always said. Think hard.

What should we do next, now and only Bard?

Or shall we leave those sleeping dogs alone?

Whoever murders poets should atone!

[She exits]

SHAKESPEARE

Her constant stream of words, like Kit! Oh, sleep. . .

Weeks of working so hard I could weep.

[SHAKESPEARE xs to his bed, lies down]

She exudes fear, but. . . what if she’s right?

If they murdered Marlowe, is it safe to write?

Burbage plays Richard Three; me, the Duchess.

On stage, I curse him--my nod to justice.

My play condemns that monarch with just a pass.

Marlowe shoved a poker up a King’s ass.

Yet Marlowe, I believe, near loves the man.

So is it ambiguity they can’t stand?

And who is “they”? Is it just Elizabeth?

Or men behind the arras she rules with?

When I was but a player, life was simple:

“What do I don for this play? Beard or wimple?”

I had to write that first play, didn’t I,

And well enough to set me up to die?

No politics in Two Gents and a Shrew

But in those Henrys that I wrote with you. . .

How can I want you back, you preening schoolboy?

You’ve killed a day of writing and my joy.

[MARLOWE staggers in, holding his head wound. He’s dressed in an oversized sports jersey, bike pants, sneakers, not much left of his Elizabethan duds.]

MARLOWE

Bollacks!! And bugger all! Oh man!

Forswear all *liquid* spirits, if I can.

SHAKESPEARE

Wait—this can’t be.

MARLOWE

I’m Christopher, your mate,

Your bully boy, your teacher—

SHAKESPEARE

You’re not dead!

Kit, my dear.

[starts to embraces him, stops]

You are something in my head.

MARLOWE

I’m here, my boy, and, yes, I’m quite alive.

When hungover, a process to revive

Was a hearty dose of that which FELLED one.

Where do you keep your *spirits*—there’s a pun.

[SHAKESPEARE won’t touch him. MARLOWE tries to check himself for body odor]

SHAKESPEARE

*What art thou?*

MARLOWE

Marlowe.

SHAKESPEARE

I feel a sudden cold.

I’ve heard that *spirits*, when they come—

MARLOWE

That’s old

Wives’ tale stuff from deep country where you’re from.

I’m from Canterbury, not some village scum!

*“Stratford-upon-Avon*,” as if that helped

Supply an address when your mother whelped,

Dropped her litter in the bush. Where am I?

This isn’t awesome--I cannot tell a lie.

SHAKESPEARE

If I am very still and just pretend

This isn’t happening, t’will end.

MARLOWE

Am I in a play? If so, it is amateur,

Yet I’m speaking in iambic pentameter.

This place I went? Most of their plays--no rhyme.

Rhythmic song/speak in the street, about crime

And love and money. Will, I ***saw*** a play!

And we sat in the dark, though it was day.

Nothing was happening on the stage. It seemed

They talked about their lives until you screamed,

And so I did. “Do you not have a tale to tell?

Then why are we here? Is this some hell?”

We aren’t allowed to speak, let alone shout.

I barely spoke a word—they threw me out.

“Turn the lights back on. Let people see

Who’s in the playhouse!” They did not agree.

Now I can’t help but make a rhyming couplet.

Look at this costume! And where is my doublet?

‘Twas soaked in blood. . .

SHAKESPEARE

It’s still talking, but it’s *dead*.

MARLOWE

Then why do I feel pain? Woa, Papa! In my head!

Could this be Hell? Then why are ***you***in it?

You’ve no doubt sinned, but I have done some *shit.*

SHAKESPEARE

Exorcism.

MARLOWE

Is this purgatory?

Catholic talk. And death. And end of story.

SHAKESPEARE

Exorcizamus omnis immundus—

MARLOWE

Church Latin? No! They will be after us!

Our heads on pikes on London Bridge, to meet

With gaping mouths, the people on the street.

Just touch me. See? I am corporeal.

Too **much** in the flesh—this pain in my skull. . .

SHAKESPEARE

I don’t understand!

MARLOWE

There’s more, my dear,

In this world, than our minds can make clear.

I have to warn you, boyo, watch your back.

They tortured Kyd, you know? On the friggin’ rack.

Mauled his fingers. How will he hold a pen?

Our Virgin Queen keeps tigers in her den,

And throws them poets. Poor Thomas Kyd

In agony, wondering what he did.

He finally told them what they longed to hear.

All those atheistic papers up his rear

Where he hid them--I wrote every word.

I’m lying about him kiestering them. A turd

Is what they should have found up there, inside,

Had they looked. I bet they wanted to abide

In Kyd’s tight ass. I know I did,

I always wanted just a piece of Kyd.

He was brave and noble, a better friend

Than I deserved, dear Will. I’ll have to rend

Up what I owe to him, somehow, someday.

SHAKESPEARE

*You’re a talking nightmare. Go away!*

MARLOWE

I look that bad? I’ll try to drop the rhyming couplets. Does that help? I spent so much of my recent life with them, it’s hard to stop. Hero and Leander, my epic poem. Unfinished. It’s about love, Will. A new discovery for me. Because of Tom. Thomas Walsingham. I must get back to him. Fuck politics, Will. Nothing ever changes. A cold bed is the world, without love.

SHAKESPEARE

Have pity on me! I have work to do! The audience is voracious. They don’t know when the theaters will be closed again. I’m on the fifth play in three years. I’ve nearly given up acting for now—had to. I’ll do soldiers, servants, messengers, ghosts, women--those with few lines. I’m talking to myself.

[Shakespeare tries to slough off what is clearly an hallucination by using his hands, the way you’d try to brush away a web you’re about to walk into]

MARLOWE

To whom are you waving?

SHAKESPEARE

I’m not acknowledging you. You’re in my head. And I need my head. I’m revising Richard Three and trying TO WRITE A BLOODY COMEDY!!!

MARLOWE

Listen to me. I have been places, Will. I have been on the road, before I fell down in it, outside your door, and I have seen some heavy, heavy shit. Like…I’m in Deptford, right? And I’m arguing with these lowlifes, Queen’s men all, this spy scum I’m pounding down the Rhenish with, flavored with some berries—not bad—piquant, as if flavor ever mattered to me. I must do something about my drinking.

SHAKESPEARE

You’re Marlowe? No.

MARLOWE

**Yes**.

So Frizer, with the black teeth, is across from me and reaches over andddd……real blackness. Pain. And then I’m falling violently into a channel of colored like laundry, man, and I’m hearing this beating of a huge heart and I’m thinking “that’s the dragon” and it’s waiting for me with an open mouth of blackened, broken teeth like Frizer’s and I’m afeared as in the Bible--don’t want to admit it. I’m thinking, fear leads to God leads to guilt leads to fear leads to God and that cycle will warp your reality until you believe all kind of crazy-ass delusional shit, like from some toothless nanny’s storytelling around the hearth, man, transformation tales, like, he’s a man, he’s a god, he’s dead, he’s not. Atheism doesn’t save you from being Christ-haunted.

SHAKESPEARE

I wished for your return! This is all my doing!

MARLOWE

Hubris. Watch it. It’s not all about you, William.

I think I might know why you’re rebuffing me!

You got a wench back there. Somewhere? Anywhere? A lad?

People talk about you, Will. You don’t get hammered. You don’t go looking for trouble. You got these children back in the sticks. So you work. I know you gotta work. My dad makes shoes and yours makes gloves. But I have more money. Been paid as a spy since I went to university. And you got no Oxford or Cambridge, bro. “Little Latin and less Greek.”

SHAKESPEARE

That’s not true. And if you weren’t a ghost, and I weren’t trying to get rid of you, I’d recite Ovid for you. In Latin. From memory.

MARLOWE

*Ghost?!* That’s harsh.

You’re too much of the countryside, too much of the deep forest glades where the fairies still frolic and a common bush can turn into a bear, to be sore afeared of a *ghost*, which you, obviously, think me now. Relax and turn on your rational mind or you will always see more devils than vast hell can hold, if that’s what you’re looking for.

SHAKESPEARE

It’s a waking dream, I’m in--

MARLOWE

Word. We all are. That’s what I’ve discovered in the last how ever long it’s been. Take the blue pill or the red, this life is all a hologram. And this hologram, Will! Such wonders! It’s a whole thing and if you shatter it, say, each of the pieces contains the original whole thing. Discrete. Entire. So a dream. Here. Or pieces of a dream, William. . . .and it just came to me as I was falling—this new world with such ideas in it. And I *understood* so much--Okay. William, willy-boy. Be here now. I need you to land. Because I am a stranger in a strange land and I know not why I still have this pain in my head and this feeling that something is not right, that the time is out of joint. Wait! That word. . .joint! Joint! I had a joint! It was just Effing Amazing! It’s like tobacco fresh from the New World but burns more going down. You smoke it. And then, everything you see pulsates and is very, very, very *significant*. And then you laugh. A lot. A lot a lot. And then the HUNGER hits. I ate some fairy food and it did NOT agree with me.

[SHAKESPEARE tries to exit. Suddenly, MARLOWE has trouble breathing].

MARLOWE

I cannot be alone. So this is death.

Aloneness. What? I cannot catch my breath!

[MARLOWE grabs SHAKESPEARE and recites a passage from SHAKESPEARE’S 1 HENRY VI (2.4), Warwick’s lines]

*“And here I prophesy: this brawl to-day,*

*Grown to this faction in the Temple-garden,*

*Shall send between the red rose and the white*

*A thousand souls to death and deadly night. “*

You wrote that scene, all by yourself, my love.

Our verses fit together, hand in glove,

Who else would know what’s yours and what is mine

In those Henrys we wrote and honed so fine.

Just as your father fashions gloves, my father, boots.

We’re stitchers and cobblers deep in our roots.

Still doubt I’m Marlowe? What are you working on?

[beat]

SHAKESPEARE

Richard Three. And Richard Burbage is playing him.

MARLOWE

Burbage is homely enough, he may as well be a hunchback.

SHAKESPEARE

That cruelty of tongue, you **must be** Marlowe, without a doubt! But—

MARLOWE

Touch me again. No, I don’t mean “that way.”

[SHAKESPEARE touches MARLOWE. MARLOWE takes his arm and pulls it towards him but SHAKEPEARE pulls away]

SHAKESPEARE

You are *cold.*

MARLOWE

I prefer the term, “objective,” but if you choose, “cold,” so be it. Listen, Will. I’ve been somewhere and I learned so much. Mostly language. They all speak like sailors. Women, too. Like harridans and sluts. And lots of stolen Africans speak their own language and play games with words, just as we do. They have battles in rhyme and rhythm--the two are inseparable, and they know that.

[Realizing]

I was captured by their language! When I was falling. I must have heard it in that time where all worlds are the same. Some see angels, family. I heard words, and turned towards the sounds of them, and *whoosh* their world sucked me up! And I orgasmed into the future. See? I wasn’t taken by bodysnatchers and just dumped. The future, and I believe that’s what it was, wanted me.

SHAKESPEARE

Kit. I now believe you’re Kit. But. Please, disappear. I never wanted fantasy or magic in my life. I just want to write about them.

[SHAKESPEARE struggles with MARLOWE]

MARLOWE

No stamina, dear Will. Why do you try?

Even with this pain over my eye,

I will catch up and capture you, in time.

And since we’re back in couplets and they rhyme,

Something of importance must be done,

And probably before the morning sun.

That’s good. I’ve still got it.

[They struggle and SHAKESPEARE escapes. He runs off into the audience. MARLOWE watches him]

MARLOWE

You’ve gone all meta on me now?

The fourth wall hasn’t been invented,

So you can’t escape it! We’re stuck in the same story—

That’s the writer’s hell. Wow, that’s deep.

I feel I’ve miles to go before I sleep. What?

[MARLOWE exits. SHAKESPEARE re-enters because he couldn’t find a door to exit]

SHAKESPEARE

I can’t get out! Am I the one who’s dead?

If reason reigns, I’ll wake up in my bed.

[end of scene two]

**SCENE THREE~**

[SHAKESPEARE is in his bed in his rooms, sleeping, at last. MARGARET, still dressed as a man, is looking at SHAKESPEARE sleep. Next to her is her sister ANNE, also watching him sleep]

ANNE

Shall we awaken him? Like a baby, he’s asleep.

He looks so innocent. It makes me weep,

Longing for a better, more innocent age.

MARGARET

No age was ever innocent! The rage

Men feel and act on kills all of it.

The most innocent of babes arrive in shit.

The midwife wraps them up. Thus, yours will come,

Its “innocence” obscured by shit and scum.

ANNE

Megs-Margaret. You always do this to me!

Turn all I do into a travesty.

MARGARET

Our brother’s dead, and all you care about

Is your respectability if it gets out

That he was killed in a tavern. And it seems he was.

ANNE

What do you expect from me, applause?

I need to marry. John’s the father, after all.

But if my brother was killed in some brawl--

John needs to think he’s not marrying down

In class. Canterbury is such a rigid town.

MARGARET

Our brother is a famous playwright, poet!

That’s *class*! They’re dumb beasts and just don’t know it.

Back into the barn with John and all his kin,

And you go with. Birth your little pig in sin.

[ANNE picks up something and whacks MARGARET with it. They begin to fight]

[SHAKESPEARE wakes up]

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, it’s you. Of course! And who is this one?

ANNE

“ONE?”

MARGARET

My sister Anne.

ANNE

I’m a lady, son.

And what makes you so fine that you address me

Like for a price I’d let you caress me

And in that bed do whatever else is in

That writhing, wretched mind, chock full of sin?

So this is where you live, you dramatists?

I wouldn’t stay here if God Himself insists.

SHAKESPEARE

[to MARGARET]

He was here.

ANNE

[about how filthy the room seems to her]

God? No, it was the Other,

Definitely Satan.

MARGARET

[to SHAKESPEARE]

Who?

SHAKESPEARE

Your brother.

MARGARET

William, you must remain sane. I need you

To see things as they are and not construe

Your grieving dreams into what’s happening now.

DOROTHY

[entering, dressed a cleric]

Forsooth, your landlady is such a cow.

MARGARET

Dorothy! What? You’re dressed as a cleric? Why?

ANNE

Two women traveling alone will die.

Cleric and lady in a horse and cart

Come to fetch their *brother* home. Our mother’s heart

Is broken and our father hasn’t spoken

Since we got the news. We’ve brought a pall

Our mother filled with pungent herbs

To forestall the smell.

Our brother will have a Christian burial—

ANNE

To save him from Hell.

MARLOWE

[stands up in the bed]

This is Hell, you harridans, you evil three!

I’m fragile and you’ll be the death of me!

MARGARET

Kit! You’re not dead!

ANNE

You look awful!

DOROTHY

It’s true?

I drove the horse and cart here, just for you.

Are you dead or--

SHAKESPEARE

Not of this world. And cold.

MARLOWE

There he goes again, insulting me. So bold

And certain in his very own assumption

That I am dead. He doesn’t have the gumption

To test it. Come, sweet Will, give us a kiss.

Wait. Where’s your pot? I really have to piss.

[WILL points. MARLOWE runs off]

DOROTHY

Is that our brother?

ANNE

That’s some vagrant loon.

SHAKESPEARE

No, it is he.

DOROTHY

Hungover.

ANNE

[Meaning he’s crazy]

Touched by the moon.

SHAKESPEARE

He’s like this. Incanting Queen Mab will follow,

Fairies, demons—

ANNE

--images made hollow—

Because he loses himself in them, alas.

DOROTHY

And when he’s drunk, he’s surly as an ass.

MARGARET

Of course, they know it’s him.

ANNE

Don’t be moronic.

MARLOWE

[re-entering]

Your weakness, Will. They’re being ironic.

Irony will rule. This other realm I went?

They said the opposite of what they really meant.

If something’s really good, then it is “bad.”

If you don’t give a damn, you say, “so sad,”

And with a fake unhappy face, they send,

Letters made of light, upon the wind.

Magic or witchcraft? I do not believe it.

It’s all in if we can or can’t perceive it.

That Latin word, “data”—I like the sound.

There’s so much unnamed *data* all around.

We call it magic, fear it, and condemn it.

And so our progress always has this limit.

Copernicus is right, of course, surprise!

The Pope can’t see it, with his own two eyes.

Into heaven Three-Day-dead Jesus rose.

He didn’t see that either, yet he *knows.*

ANNE

You! Tossing your godlessness like a ball

We’re supposed to catch.

DOROTHY

Are you dead or not?

MARLOWE

Pissed out the window. Couldn’t find the pot.

SHAKESPEARE

You’ll get me evicted!

MARLOWE

Oh, I think not.

She watched. Some women like to watch men pee.

It’s not surprising or a great mystery.

I arched it for her. She loved that and smiled.

A sonnet could not have left her more beguiled.

DOROTHY

He didn’t piss. He didn’t have the time.

MARLOWE

I couldn’t make a drop, for reason or for rhyme.

Can’t make water solveth quandary: “dead or not?”

Let’s do what must be done before I rot.

And what would that be? I have to wonder.

I fell into this world. They kicked me under

The wheels of expectations unfulfilled.

Beware of great potential. You’ll be killed

Unless you get in harness for the state,

And, even then, you can have Raleigh’s fate.

SHAKESPEARE

You say, “Raleigh’s fate?” He’s alive and well.

MARLOWE

He won’t be for long. There’s some bleak hell

Awaiting him. Oh god, I’m psychic now.

What else can befall poor Marlowe—

[ANNE pinches him] **OW!!**

ANNE

Hugging you proved nothing, so I pinched.

You feel real and, more importantly, you flinched.

DOROTHY

What are you wearing? What are these clothes?

MARLOWE

A costume I picked up somewhere, god knows.

MARGARET

From some rough trade off some rough trader’s ship?

ANNE

Your doublet and your trunk hose, did they rip?

MARLOWE

Not sure. Not certain. This fabric is quite silky.

MARGARET

Feels like chicken skin. And also milky?

ANNE

Yuck. Come home, explain.

DOROTHY

And let our sister marry.

I cannot bear another day, with “Anne of Canterbury.”

MARGARET

I pity her poor husband. What a tosser.

DOROTHY

Their love’s as sordid as a tale by Chaucer.

SHAKESPEARE

She’s read Chaucer? So they’ve all learned to read?

ANNE

Our duty.

It’s known—pious women have more beauty,

So we read the Bible, most every day.

DOROTHY

It’s supposed to keep the uglies away.

It hasn’t worked for me. So our father—

ANNE

--said to sister Dorothy not to bother.

DOROTHY

If you’re not dead, then we should go.

London’s filled with plague—didn’t you know?

MARLOWE

I think that I’m immune.

MARGARET

What’s that you said?

MARLOWE

Margaret, Megs. I am safe because I’m . . .dead.

MARGARET

You can’t be dead! That’s stupid and not true.

You’re standing right before me, looking *blue*.

DOROTHY

Oh god, he’s blue. That can’t be right. You’re ill.

ANNE

From Choleric to Phlegmatic?

MARGARET

--It’s a chill,

That’s all. Just let me hold you. Come to me.

It’s Maggie, Furry Chris, my jo.

[MARLOWE xs to her and she embraces him]

Now see?

Is that not better? A little better?

MARLOWE

No.

MARGARET

What then can I do to make it so?

MARLOWE

You were my only love, my little sis,

Until my head was turned by a boy’s kiss.

In school, in the fields, I learned to run,

Naked with boys, in the early morning sun

Into the pond, a swim, a rassle, then

Under the water, to do those things of sin,

Deep sin for which I’d ne’er repent.

Under whatever torture might be sent

By whom? The Church is filled with buggery,

And yet their way of punishment? Pure thuggery.

Call up your thugs for this employment:

Violate a body for enjoyment.

What we do for love and honest passion,

They do with swords in bloodiest fashion.

But risking this, I found Tom Walsingham,

A man of manners, bearing and aplomb,

Almost haughty. So imagine my surprise,

We meet and I was naked in his eyes.

My boy stood up, happy and awake,

And everything I was, was his to take.

And in that taking, right then and there,

I lost something, some invisible part

I never knew I had. It’s called the heart.

Not the one that beats, the one that’s written

As aching, flying, yearning. I was smitten--

Too sweet a word. I was brought down, rather.

And lifted up. I was a stone, a feather.

MARGARET

It breaks *my* heart, but that is why you’re here.

MARLOWE

Not to clear my name, so Anne can marry some git?

ANNE

God let you defy death for that, that’s it!

DOROTHY

How did you die? If, in fact, you’re dead.

MARLOWE

In a house. . .someone stabbed me in the head. . .

More memory, if I could retrieve it.

DOROTHY

Somehow you’re here and I choose to believe it.

MARGARET

I don’t understand it, but so much

Of this new world with other lands and such

Wild tales of places, people, men and beasts

And stranger things, to say the least,

Than what I’ve read in your fat volumes

From Cambridge, or behind the columns

At St. Paul’s in those book stalls I’ve haunted

Dressed as a boy, looking for the book

To change my life, until I get a look

From the bookseller who’s enough suspicious

That I lower my voice, become meretricious

To such a degree that it’s almost more fun

To pass myself off as some father’s son

Than as a too-smart daughter—

ANNE

--who won’t ever

Marry. She’ll live in her father’s house, never

To be truly touched by any man!

MARGARET

Because she is too clever, smart and can

Choose Celibacy over Domestic Servitude.

MARLOWE

You can’t be celibate. You’re much too lewd.

MARGARET

And yet, I have. You know me well, indeed.

Too well, the kind of knowing that I need.

ANNE

I am deeply shocked at your behavior.

As soon as we get home, I plan to savor

The moment when I tell all to our father—

DOROTHY

You’re with child, unmarried, so don’t bother.

MARLOWE

Will, what are you doing? Going back to bed?

Don’t you care if I’m alive or dead?

SHAKESPEARE

If I can sleep, then I can rise tonight,

And finish the first draft by morning’s light.

MARGARET

If he’s haunting you—that’s for a reason.

I think he’s telling you that art is treason,

And to—

SHAKESPEARE

--what? Stop writing? Oh, I will.

But then a creditor comes with a bill,

Followed by the Sheriff, closing our doors.

And then the players and I become whores,

In the doorways shagging for a shilling,

Doing tricks for anybody willing

To pay for services we can render,

To buy us shelter, food and tinder.

Now what about that makes a writer’s life?

I may as well go back home to my wife.

ANNE

So you’re in it for the money, foolish you.

SHAKESPEARE

It’s the only trade I am trained to do.

And now I needs, *must* return to it.

MARLOWE

Will, what are you doing? More *scribblings*?

SHAKESPEARE

While you all palaver with your siblings.

MARLOWE

Plautus mastered plot. Just follow him.

How hard can it be? You look so grim.

SHAKESPEARE

Comedy is hard, while tragedy—

MARLOWE

--is also hard, and in the apogee.

These times in which we live, just write it down.

Then put some fool in white face as a clown,

Have him recite the most upsetting shit,

Fart with his bladder. And that’s the end of it.

Of course it is. I’m babbling, I know.

I’m trapped by language. A single blow

To the head, a flood of words, and sanity

Got up and fled, leaving me and my worst vanity:

The sound of my own voice, so prevalent

That even nonsense from my mouth sounds relevant.

LANDLADY’S VOICE

[outside door]

There’s a sheriff here!

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, let him pass through.

[MARLOWE hides. MARGARET decides to hold her ground. DOROTHY and ANNE sit quietly. SHERIFF enters]

SHERIFF

Kit Marley is/was known to all of you?

SHAKESPEARE

Yes. This is Marlowe’s brother. He’s. . .

MARGARET

--bereft.

You want to pat me down and see what’s left?

A broken heart from the death of my brother.

I’m here to find the story, for my mother,

My father and my sisters, whom you see.

SHERIFF

He was brawling in some tavern. His buggery

Didn’t make him less a man, in my mind.

They say he stabbed Ing Frizer from behind.

That’s crap. But now Kit Marley’s body’s missing.

MARLOWE

[unseen]

Perhaps he’s using it.

SHAKESPEARE

For reminiscing.

Visiting old haunts, and new ones, too.

SHERIFF

Who said that?

MARGARET

I.

SHERIFF

Don’t think so.

MARLOWE

It’s me. *Boo!*

SHERIFF

He’s. . .a ghost?

SHAKESPEARE

Not really. He’s an actor

In a play we’re working on.

MARLOWE

I’ll factor

In that compliment you gave me.

SHERIFF

W-what?

MARLOWE

About my manhood and sex up the butt,

The one not diminishing the other? Yo!

Thank you for your visit. Let them know

That I died screaming in a heinous fashion.

And death does not bring wisdom nor compassion.

You’re looking peaked. . .

SHERIFF

ExoricZAMUS!

Ave Maria!

MARLOWE

I won’t make a fuss

About you being Catholic. We revert

In times of stress to Latin and we blurt

Out words declared heretical by law.

As if a *word* could be the Devil’s claw

And grasp you round your throat, or worse, your soul.

I was a writer. Words always made me whole.

They were a comfort and excitement, in control

Of my imagination, at their best,

As starving baby birds suck blood from the breast

Of their dying mother so they can sing and fly.

“He’s delirious! Just let him go and die!”

SHERIFF

Tell you what I’m going to do. I’m leaving

All of you to your respectful grieving.

I do not understand what’s happening here,

And now that I have conquered all my fear. . .

[motions to SHAKESPEARE for a private word]

So Mister Shakespeare, new to this old town,

If you don’t watch your back, she’ll bring you down.

Our Virgin Queen’s a killer. I like your plays,

And hope to see more of them in the days

To come. Resolve what’s happening here, old son.

There’s a good lad. Now I have to run.

[SHERIFF exits]

MARGARET

What will come of that?

SHAKESPEARE

Whom will he tell?

MARLOWE

It won’t matter! I wish the gates of Hell

Would open and dear Mephistopheles

Would come and fetch me—

ANNE

“Dear?” Oh, brother, please.

You address the devil with such love?

MARLOWE

I should save that for the Man Above?

He who put us here? “Dear” God, indeed.

“Thank you for this earth on which we feed

Like ravening wolves, starved in this wilderness

Of our fears and hatreds? This fine mess,

We created with your benign neglect.

If you exist, you don’t deserve respect.”

“Satan” is the Devil. Mephistopheles

Is his Lord in Waiting, if you please.

I favor him. He has real panache.

MARLOWE

I—

ANNE

. . .Waiting for the lightning bolt. . .

MARLOWE

--should wash.

It won’t do any good. I’m putrefying.

I can tell it’s happening, as we speak.

I wouldn’t get too close. I’m sure I reek.

DOROTHY

Kit, tell us what to do. I’ll do my best.

SHAKESPEARE

I think we all should go to the inquest.

As Marlowe’s friend, I’d be expected there.

MARLOWE

An inquest? I would give them a quite a scare.

ANNE

I agree. And so it might be wise,

When you attend, to come in some disguise.

SHAKESPEARE

Let’s go and witness what they’re hiding.

It’s William Danby, miscreant, presiding.

Everything’s behind the arras, in a curtain.

No truth-telling in this queen-dom, that’s for certain.

MARLOWE

Your cynicism’s so refreshing, dearest Will.

SHAKESPEARE

Rancor on the page won’t pay a bill.

My eyes are open, dearest Kit, you’ll see,

Or perhaps not where you’re going. Tragedy—

MARLOWE

--and violence, with much blood, does sell so well,

But I think that they’ll like comedy in Hell.

DOROTHY

What good is this philosophy and mocking!

MARGARET

I think I’ll scream unless you all stop talking!

SHAKESPEARE

[grabs her]

No screaming please!

[likes the physical closeness]

You’re quite the handsome lad.

MARGARET

I wouldn’t be the worst you’ve ever had.

MARLOWE

That’s my sister! What is wrong with you?

And Margaret? Stop it! You’re going to make me spew!

MARGARET

[to MARLOWE]

I’ve been celibate. You’ve lived a life of whoring.

Bedknobs were my lovers! Sad and boring!

[She gropes SHAKESPEARE and exits]

[end of scene three]

**SCENE FOUR~**

[The inquest is set up so that where WILLIAM DANBY will enter is on the stage and SHAKESPEARE, MARGARET and DOROTHY are in the audience]

DOROTHY

There are so many people here today.

MARGARET

Where’s Anne?

SHAKESPEARE

A good thing I didn’t stay away.

I should be seen in public to succeed,

As a writer of his time, in word and deed.

DOROTHY

To be a writer, is that what is expected?

SHAKESPEARE

Is it too much to want to be respected?

I had a Welsh schoolmaster. Poetry

Is what we learned and spoke, but see?

I didn’t go to Cambridge or Oxford

And despite my talent with the word—

MARGARET

Where is my brother?

SHAKESPEARE

Finding a disguise,

Something to make him hard to recognize,

I hope.

MARGARET

I know but he’s been gone too long.

I worry that something’s gone very wrong.

SHAKESPEARE

What could go wrong? He’s already dead.

MARGARET

I wish you had said something else, instead

Of that. When we heard, I mourned him then.

And now—

SHAKESPEARE

You’ll have to mourn him yet again.

Cheer up. Most of this life is filled with grief.

Embracing it can give you some relief.

I like the theater because it’s mortal.

A performance ends, the play slips through a portal

Into death and then is resurrected

By the actors. And then, unaffected

By their recent death, the characters live,

And thrive with everything again to give.

If life could be art, its immortal twin,

Who would need religion to live again?

[SHAKESPEARE takes some paper, a featherless quill from his poke and a small vial of ink. He writes, saying the last couplet under his breath]

DOROTHY

What are you doing?

MARGARET

Working ?!!

SHAKESPEARE

Leave me be.

I have another purpose. Wait and see.

DOROTHY

Can’t see our brother, anywhere. Can you?

[MARLOWE appears, dressed as an Elizabethan Jew and finds a place to sit]

MARGARET

He just entered over there, dressed as a Jew.

SHAKESPEARE

What is he doing? Forsooth, here we go!

MARGARET

Even the courtroom is a stage to Kit Marlowe.

Where’s Anne?

DOROTHY

Storming into the courtroom soon.

She’ll have them singing a different tune.

MARGARET

Oh no!

DOROTHY

Not to worry. It will be fun.

She’ll think on her feet, get justice done.

[WILLIAM DANBY enters, nods, and starts reading from a document. He reads quickly, to get it over with and doesn’t expect any conflict. It’s a pro forma empty action]

WILLIAM DANBY

[reading a document]

“Taken at Detford Strand—“

MARLOWE

I believe the word is *Deptford.*

DANBY

What? What does this Jew have to do with this? And how is it you are here in London? We banished all your tribe two hundred years ago!

MARLOWE

I’m here to see justice done. As Marlowe owed me money. And I have traveled so very far, from Venice, yes, that’s it, to retrieve the money because, as you no doubt believe, that is all Jews care about.

DANBY

It’s unlikely you’ll be paid. This inquest is into the manner of his death, not if he’s dead or alive. Take up your debt with the family. They’re not here, so—

ANNE MARLOWE

[entering]

I beg the coroner’s pardon. I’m late.

You see, I had a problem at the gate.

A woman traveling alone? Not right.

A male in disguise, a woman of the night.

I’m none of these. I am Anne Marlowe,

Sister to Christopher. And I will not go.

DANBY

How did you get in? This is not a trial.

Someone will speak to you if you wait. Outside.

What has happened? Jews and women in my courtroom!

ANNE MARLOWE

I’m here to plead my brother’s innocence.

DANBY

He’s not on trial! A case of self-defense

Is what we clearly have here, anyway.

It’s cut and dried. Now please just go away.

ANNE MARLOWE

Marlowe’s not guilty and I have the proof.

[A BAILLIFF tries to make ANNE MARLOWE leave]

SHAKESPEARE

She’s beautiful.

MARGARET

You might be more aloof,

You’d get further, ‘though that quest is moot.

Pregnancy is not unblemished fruit.

DANBY

Quiet in my courtroom! There is no trial!

Any further comment is judged hostile.

MARGARET

Isn’t that what leads a man to love?

MARLOWE

[to MARGARET]

Jealousy.

[They jump, not having seen him approach]

Who could you be jealous of?

Is there some man who’s turned your head, at last?

Could it be our William. Hmm. Eyes downcast—

DANBY

[DANBY reads very quickly, in a superior tone]

“Taken at Detford—DEPTFORD--Strand in the aforesaid County of Kent within the verge on the first day of June in the year of the reign of Elizabeth by the grace of God of England France and Ireland Queen defender of the faith, in the presence of William Danby, Gentleman, Coroner of the household of our said lady the Queen—“

[DANBY stops reading and sends BAILLIFF over to SHAKESPEARE, MARGARET, DOROTHY, MARLOWE, which then allows ANNE MARLOWE to re-enter]

MARLOWE

That’s a sure sign. I know my sister well.

Downcast eyes.

DOROTHY

She’s blushing.

MARGARET

Go to hell!

Anne can’t marry if our brother is a crook.

[SHAKESPEARE waves the BAILLIFF away as if to say, “I’ll get them to be quiet.”]

MARLOWE

I’ve been accused of most things in the book.

Sodomy, forgery, counterfeiting,

All true of course. Two in one sitting.

Making fake money’s fun, but of the three,

My all-time favorite is sweet sodomy.

[SHAKESPEARE tries shushing MARLOWE]

DANBY

Young man in front, if you speak with the Jew,

I’ll have you expelled. We’ve much to do.

MARLOWE

[As he moves away from SHAKESPEARE and MARGARET]

Burying the true events, no doubt.

DANBY

And Jew? Be quiet or I’ll have you tossed out.

[DANBY returns to reading the document]

“--upon view of the body of Christopher Morley—

ANNE MARLOWE

Marlowe.

DANBY

--there lying dead & slain, upon oath of Nicholas Draper, Gentleman, Wolstan Randall, Gentleman, William Curry, Adrian Walker, Giles Feld, George Halfepenny, Henry Awger, James Batt, Henry Bendyn, Thomas Batt senior, John Baldwyn, Alexander Burrage, Edmund Goodcheepe, and Henry Dabyns—“

MARGARET

So many men, so little time, he’d say—

SHAKESPEARE

And not a one of those a decent lay.

MARGARET

So you *have* dabbled there, may I surmise?

SHAKESPEARE

More than “dabbled,” *“lingered.”* Not a surprise.

MARLOWE

[makes a shushing sound]

I’m quieting the gallery, Chief Coroner,

Out of respect to Anne Marlowe, chief mourner.

DANBY

[continuing to read, quickly, getting it over with and not expecting any questions or comments]

“--those aforementioned men, who say upon their oath that Ingram Frisar, of London, Gentleman, and the aforesaid Christopher Morley, and Nicholas Skeres, of London, Gentleman, and Robert Poley of London, on the thirtieth of May in the aforesaid thirty fifth year, at the aforesaid DEPTford Strand in the aforesaid County of Kent within the verge about the tenth hour before noon of the same day met together in a room in the house of a certain Eleanor Bull, widow; and there passed the time together, dined, and after dinner walked in the garden belonging to the said house until the sixth hour after noon of the same day and then returned from the said garden to the room aforesaid and there together and in company supped and after supper the said Ingram and Christopher Morley—

MARLOWE and MARGARET

*Marlowe.*

DANBY

--uttered one to the other *divers malicious words* for the reason that they could not be at one nor agree about the payment of the sum of pence, that is, *le recknynge,* there, and the said Christopher Morley—

MARLOWE, ANNE, MARGARET

*Marlowe.*

[SHAKESPEARE is scribbling on a piece of paper he’s brought, with a quill with no feather. He hands MARGARET the portable ink well to hold]

DANBY

--then lying upon a bed in the room where they supped, *moved with anger* against the said Ingram Frisar upon the words aforesaid spoken between them, and the said Ingram sitting with his back towards the bed where the said Christopher Mor—MARLOWE, was then lying, sitting near the bed, and with the front part of his body towards the table and the aforesaid Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley *sitting on either side of the said Ingram in such a manner that the same Ingram Frisar in no wise could take flight*; it so befell that the said *Christopher Morley, MARLOWE with malice towards the said Ingram, then and there maliciously drew the dagger of the said Ingram* which was at his back, and with the same dagger the said Christopher Marlowe then and there maliciously gave the aforesaid Ingram two wounds on his head of the length of two inches and of the depth of a quarter of an inch; whereupon the said Ingram, *in fear of being slain, and sitting in the manner aforesaid between the said Nicholas Skeres & Robert Poley so that he could not in any wise get away, in his own defence* and for the saving of his life, then and there struggled with the said Christopher Marlowe to get back from him his dagger; in which affray the same Ingram could not get away from the said Christopher Marlowe; and so it befell in that affray that the said Ingram, *in defence of his life, with the dagger aforesaid to the value of 12 pence, gave the said Christopher then and there a mortal wound over his right eye* of the depth of two inches and of the width of one inch; of which mortal wound the aforesaid Christopher Morley—

[DANBY is so done with all of this, he doesn’t even try to correct himself]

MARLOWE, MARGARET, ANNE, DOROTHY, SHAKESPEARE

[correcting him again]

*MARLOWE.*

DANBY

--then and there instantly died.

Given the day and year above named etc. by William Danby Coroner.” Thank you.

[DANBY gets up to leave]

ANNE MARLOWE

I beg your pardon, Master Danby, sir,

But from what you’ve read, TOO quickly, I infer—

DANBY

Are you still here? Get rid of her!

ANNE MARLOWE

My brother, Kit, attacked a man, who said,

He stabbed him from the back but on the head?

Two slices on his skull, each two inches long,

A quarter of an inch in depth? I’m not wrong?

DANBY

Where is the Bailiff?

ANNE MARLOWE

Good. Now, I’m quite the cook, I have to boast,

And those marks smack of scoring on a roast.

One doesn’t want to penetrate too deep. One can,

And lose the juices to the bottom of the pan.

DANBY

Madam, be silent or I will have you arrested!

ANNE MARLOWE

My brother was a fighter, most adept.

And always had his dagger. It was kept

As close to him as his purse. Yet, this night,

He didn’t have it on him. And this fight,

At which he was an expert, he lost

Like some petty thief, and paid the cost.

DANBY

Jew! Where are you? You were policing the courtroom!

ANNE MARLOWE

The one cost he should not have had to pay,

Until years hence, until that most sad day,

He died, paid up in full, peacefully in bed.

And not, screaming in pain, stabbed in the head!

DANBY

Disturbing this court of law with this silly—

[so exasperated, he can’t finish]

Jew? Some poisoned rice to feed this filly?

MARGARET

What’s that about rice? Brother, you are gazing—

MARLOWE

[forgetting everything else]

At *him!* He’s seen *my play*! That’s amazing!

A father kills his daughter with poisoned rice

In my Jew of Malta. Isn’t that nice--

*He goes to the theater!!*

DANBY

[but DANBY only sees MARLOWE staring at him]

***Evil eye!***

And Marlowe’s sister? Give it up. Don’t try.

The trial of Frizar will go without event.

Testimony will assure he’s innocent.

I know it’s hard when a loved one has to die.

But this inquest is over. Now GOOD-BYE.

[end of scene four]

**SCENE FIVE~**

[SHAKESPEARE, MARLOWE, MARGARET, DOROTHY and ANNE are back in Shakespeare’s rooms. MARLOWE is still in his costume as an Elizabethan Jew. SHAKESPEARE is continuing to write.]

DOROTHY

You can drop the costume and the ruse.

ANNE

He always had a weakness for the Jews.

MARGARET

And who can blame him? They’re much persecuted,

More than sodomists and spies, and executed.

ANNE

You always take his side, and what’s resulted?

He thinks you love him best when he’s insulted.

MARGARET

How did I insult him? You mean, just now?

ANNE

Calling him a spy and sodomist, you cow.

MARGARET

Well, to him that’s not an insult. And take that back,

“You cow” is an ad hominem attack.

ANNE

“Ad hominem”? A cow? But you’re no *man*.

MARGARET

You want to hit me now? Where is your fan?

ANNE

Oh, that’s a manly answer! Look at these tights.

What’s in that codpiece? She always loses fights—

She’s such a girl, no matter how she tries,

She gets emotional, and then, of course, she cries.

SHAKESPEARE

Can’t you stop it? You’re their brother!

MARLOWE

See?

This is why I left home, precipitously!

SHAKESPEARE

With funds for Cambridge from the Archbishop of Canterbury!

MARLOWE

Uh-oh, resentment from the passive Will.

No more Mister Nice Guy—

SHAKESPEARE

Right. Until

I heard that Cambridge for you was paid in full

While my father went to jail for dealing wool.

And still I had to work to pay the bills,

To feed the larger family, with no frills

For my wife and child—

MARLOWE

If you factor

In the truth that you preferred “actor”

Over “husband,” “father.” I have heard these rants.

If only you had kept it in your pants.

DOROTHY

[To SHAKESPEARE]

Family fights--you’re one of us!

SHAKESPEARE

I’m thriving

On these visits, are there more arriving?

More family members, siblings? Can you promise

There’re no more?

MARGARET

There is our brother Thomas.

He’s seventeen. Works with Father in the shop.

DOROTHY

Who’s quite relieved his son is not a fop.

MARLOWE

Like me? Is that the implication?

ANNE

Can we stop bickering. We have a situation.

Satan or Mephistopheles, Kit: on the level,

Have you sold your soul to the Devil?

MARLOWE

Satan don’t exist, nor Mephistopheles,

Nor Beezelbub. My baby sisters, seize

Whatever reason you have and explain

Why I am here. I have this awful pain

Over my right eye. And yet I can see.

My temperature’s decreasing. I can’t pee.

I fear I’m dead enough to excrete ooze—

So gross and unattractive. I may lose

My wits next. Help me here. Or bury me.

SHAKESPEARE

If this were, say, a revenge tragedy,

You’d be haunting us until we killed

Them responsible for your death, fulfilled

That edict treasured since the First of Times:

That murderers be punished for their crimes

By being killed themselves. And so efficient,

If it stopped there. One revenge sufficient

Unto the day is the evil thereof.

For this, sayeth Christ, the only cure is love.

DOROTHY

Yeah. Well, that’s not happening here. For sure.

Did you hear what those pricks said?

ANNE

Pure manure.

MARGARET

Our brother killing someone over payment

Of a bill? When he’s decked out in raiment

Worthy of Elizabeth’s court? As if

He’d get it dirty in some petty tiff

Over money for a meal.

DOROTHY

[to ANNE]

Your in laws

Don’t care that he is dead, it’s just the cause.

Is that correct?

ANNE

Not being folk with—

MARGARET

hearts?

Compassion? Depth? Intelligence? Love of the arts?

ANNE

John Cranford is a fine man.

DOROTHY

He is old,

But well-established and ready to pay gold

To the family of a daughter bearing his child.

SHAKESPEARE

[to ANNE]

I have to ask and risk being reviled--

ANNE

The child is his, of course it is, I’m not

The slut our sister Margaret—

MARLOWE

Have you forgot?

Why you are here, my weird, weird sisters three?

ANNE

If you’re a murderer, my John won’t marry me!

DOROTHY

We couldn’t see your corpse in Canterbury.

ANNE

To see our parents weeping at this tragedy--

Too hard to bear, that grief, I had to flee.

MARGARET

I had to note the death of poetry.

That something trivial as politics should silence thee

Is just the height of the stupidity

Of this benighted age we live in, Kit,

My dearest brother. This Age is Shit.

MARLOWE

I’m touched, I’m tired, angry. I call “orange.”

DOROTHY

You’re giving up?

MARLOWE

Not feeling well—a tinge

Of death. Methinks dying keeps one unwell.

Some think I’ll have a visitor from Hell

To fetch me to that Lower Kingdom—

ANNE

--Worse

Than, this, the “Upper Kingdom?”

MARGARET

Where verse,

However metaphysical and rich--

DOROTHY

--Can’t hide the fact, our monarch is a bitch.

Was that humorous? Did I craft a joke?

SHAKESPEARE

It was a near-witticism.

MARGARET

[to MARLOWE]

To revoke

The title “Murderer” attached to you

Seems impossible. But let us now review—

ANNE

[crying]

--our choices? What’s that? For me no choices!

I’m pregnant with John’s child. His family’s voices

Unanimously declare. I’m a whore

And my brother’s a murderer.

MARLOWE

What’s more:

Spy, sodomist, an atheist and dead.

DOROTHY

You’re not all that, except for dead—

MARLOWE

I’ve been all of that without trying.

ANNE

[still tearful]

We have no time to save my life—

MARGARET

Who’s crying?

Oh, it’s not Margaret who “always cries,” it’s Anne.

SHAKESPEARE

Cut the bickering and think like a man!

You’re dressed as one. You heard the inquest, so--

The scene described, does it fit with what we know

Of the actions of your brother or of those

Three dogs in his company. Let’s suppose

They spoke the truth. Kit on the bed behind—

MARLOWE

I can’t recall a bed of any kind.

And would I recline even near those three?

And show them the least vulnerability?

DOROTHY

Why would you spend those hours with such men?

ANNE

His rabid need for slumming now and then.

MARLOWE

To spy well is to slum well, sister dear.

Spying pays gold for that which art can’t clear

A farthing. Sad, but true, art pays a pittance.

But all my deceits soon will be quittance.

“What’s that word? Surely he purloined it?”

Ask Will. Our *Henry’s* full of it. We coined it.

SHAKESPEARE

[Quoting from Henry VI, Part I, Act II, Scene 1]

*This happy night the Frenchmen are secure,*

*Having all day caroused and banqueted:*

*Embrace we then this opportunity*

*As fitting best to* **quittance** *their deceit*

*Contrived by art and baleful sorcery.*

MARLOWE

Life imitates art imitates life, so

I am drawn to dogs and what they know.

In this case, they knew more and won the day.

DOROTHY

They invited you to this soiree

To find out what you knew and then—

MARLOWE

--snuff.

As you would a candle: “Out! Enough!”

[mimes a candle flame being snuffed]

“We’re done with your jokes, libels and your rhymes,

Your brawls, your lads, your atheism, your crimes,

Your School of Night and its profanity,

The portrayal of the Bible as insanity,

The corrupting of our Virgin monarch’s lover,

Not to buggery, but to dark books you discover.

You’re a bad boy, Mr. Marlowe, we surmise,

You brought it on yourself, your own demise.”

SHAKESPEARE

Enough self-pity and self-congratulations.

*I’m* now concerned about the allegations.

I’m no spy, but my plays do have criticisms

Of the powers that be, even in my witticisms.

What happens to the Queen’s jester?

MARGARET

It’s you,

Or Ben Jonson, or Thomas Kyd, or—

DOROTHY

Kyd’s through.

He can’t hold a pen. My brother said

In his last letter. Might as well be dead.

MARLOWE

You pay attention, Dorothy. I like that.

DOROTHY

Looked up to you, I always have. Let’s chat.

[longgggg beat. They have nothing to say to each other]

I’m sorry you’re. . . dead.

MARLOWE

Sweet of you,

However, self-pity I needs must eschew,

According to my fellow writer, Will,

Compassion for oneself is so much swill.

He’s not listening.

SHAKESPEARE

Attention split:

If you were assassinated, Kit,

That does not bode well for me, alas,

I needs must watch my tongue—

MARLOWE

More than your ass.

How to write but not offend the powers

Who put their sisters into towers.

Your lovers? Hide in epic poems and sonnets.

Write metaphysically, use comets,

Other other-wordly things, stars, gods,

Ancient stories. Choose well, nothing at odds

With those in power. Keep it in your pants.

Avoid like the plague political rants.

ANNE

If you had followed that advice, then I,

Would be married.

DOROTHY

Are you going to cry?

Because it’s such a waste of time.

MARLOWE

Wait—how

Can my *large* piggot staying in my trou

Have anything to do with your wedding?

ANNE

Had you written—

MARGARET

I see where this is heading,

If our brother had remained a Cambridge wit,

And only written works one might submit

To simpler printers’ books found in the stalls--

Aphorisms, drivel--outside St. Paul’s.

When I first learned to read, he brought me some

To practice with. I thought they were dumb.

ANNE

You were his favorite.

MARGARET

***Am*** his favorite.

Closest in age. We’re like brace and bit.

SHAKESPEARE

When sisters, mothers, daughters start to fight,

Men need to find a corner, sit and write.

That’s what saves my life.

MARLOWE

No help for me?

SHAKESPEARE

I’m trying to write a bloody comedy!

MARLOWE

The theaters are going to close, my friend!

SHAKESPEARE

The pressures to write plays will never end!

DOROTHY

I wish we had that paper—

MARGARET

There’s no mystery.

It was ridiculous--

MARLOWE

But now it’s history.

That document will outlive me, yea, all of us.

On an exam: “Marlowe died. When? How? Discuss.”

ANNE

Barely literate was the description

Of the supposed crime. Hard to listen

To the lies.

MARGARET

Without laughing.

ANNE

Or crying.

The story reeks. It’s obvious they’re lying.

Let’s show you how they said events took place.

And see if you can manage a straight face.

MARGARET

I’ll play Marlowe. I look most like Kit.

We could be twins. If I’d been literate

A little earlier, and gone to school,

Been allowed to.

ANNE

Margaret, you’re a fool

Talking like this, in front of men? Please, hush!

If our mother heard you, she would blush.

MARGARET

Your taking on the court, howsomever,

Is a perfect feminine endeavor.

DOROTHY

Well, I’m here to rescue you, thanks to Mother,

Help Anne get married, and bury our brother.

ANNE

Our mother’s way to get what she wants done:

Make each of us think we’re the only one

She’s set on the task. Each feels the savior,

Driven by the promise of her favor.

MARGARET

She’s brilliant, cannot read nor write, and yet

We do what she wants without regret.

DOROTHY

If she were here, I know what she would say.

ANNE

Find his murderer and make him rue the day

His mother birthed him.

MARGARET

I’m Kit, on the “bed,”

Probably drunk, and—

ANNE

--wishing I were dead.

SHAKESPEARE

[points to ANNE, casting her as. . .]

Nicholas Skeres—

ANNE

[ANNE points to DOROTHY to cast her as--]

Robert whatshisname—

SHAKESPEARE

--“Pooley.”

[SHAKESPEARE casts himself as Frizer]

Ingram Frizer of black teeth fame. . .

[SHAKESPEARE looks at a piece of paper upon which he has written notes and reads]

“sits with his back towards the bed whereon

the said Christopher Marlowe lay thereupon—“

MARLOWE

You wrote it down—

SHAKESPEARE

--as soon as we got back.

I can memorize as well as any hack

Who goes back to our plays many times

To steal the stories, lines, even the rhymes,

To perform, for money—

DOROTHY

So you lied

When you said, “I am writing.”

MARLOWE

I’ll confide

In you, a secret, sister dear. This man,

This William, cannot seem to stop his hand.

Instead of Shakespeare, his name should be “Shakes Pen,”

Because the quill’s always moving, a nervous hen

Gathering her brood would/could not be as assiduous.

He’s honorificabilitudinitatibus.

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, dear God, shut up, Kit—

DOROTHY

What does that mean?

MARGARET

Worthy of receiving honors—

ANNE

Sounds obscene.

MARGARET

It’s in the margin of his Latin grammar.

MARLOWE

It’s just a masters’ joke to make us stammer

When we’re reciting. . .Margaret, you read that?

MARGARET

I read everything you had, you twat.

Back to the testimony—

SHAKESPEARE

[Getting everyone on the bench, including himself]

Frizer’s here.

Skeres. Poley.

MARGARET

[on the bed, behind the bench]

Supine. At the rear,

Marlowe. Their backs to him, like a great wall.

ANNE

From this position, who started the brawl?

And what does “supine” mean?

MARLOWE

“Lie on your back.”

[hearing the line as an instruction, DOROTHY reclines]

Dorothy, what are you doing?!

DOROTHY

It’s hard to track

this story.

MARGARET

[to ANNE, about how they’ll never figure anything out]

Wedding hopeless. You’re now a whore.

Another bastard child adorns the floor

Of a pauper’s cottage. Better yet,

Give the baby up, that’s your best bet,

And get thee to a nunnery, a nunnery go,

Except that they’ve been banned!

SHAKESPEARE

[trying to get MARLOWE to intervene]

Marlowe!

MARGARET

[using the anger from her attack on ANNE, MARGARET grabs SHAKESPEARE around the neck and begins “stabbing” him on the head]

And thus the first ridiculous detail—

Both of you just sit there while I flail

Away with his own dagger on Frizer’s head—

DOROTHY

And I sit here, not caring if you’re dead.

Frizer, I mean.

ANNE

On this side, sits Poley,

SHAKESPEARE

Trapping him in such a manner that he—

[reading]

“Ingram Frizer no wise could take flight.”

Three times, to be sure we get it right.

ANNE

It seems strange that these two so-called friends,

Could wedge this Frizer in, like two book-ends,

Through a knife attack by my dear brother.

DOROTHY

A struggle for the knife and another—

MARGARET

--attack by Black Teeth and a final thrust

That murdered Marlowe! Oh, it’s so unjust!

MARLOWE

I was murdered! Yes! I knew I was!

ANNE

They should be hanged! That’s why we have laws!

SHAKESPEARE

What do we do? What is our evidence?

MARGARET

Strange details like, “The dagger cost twelve pence?”

SHAKESPEARE

I marked it. Danby read it with such strength.

ANNE

Why would they mention price instead of length?

DOROTHY

Twelve pence is a quite good price for some shoes.

MARLOWE

How is this information we can use?

MARGARET

Where’s your sense of justice? Where’s your rage?

MARLOWE

I think I should have left it on the stage.

I fought with Bradley on Hog’s Lane and Tom,

I mean Tom Watson, and with such aplomb,

Went under my arm and pierced the braggart’s heart

With one rapier thrust, and with such art--

None of Tom’s verses, plays were as precise

As that one sharp, steel blade, as cold as ice.

[Honorificabilitudinitatibus](http://en.wikipedia.or):

Thomas Watson’s life: summarize, discuss.

His “*De Remedio amoris*”?, “Sweet and merry month of May?”

Killed a man, saved Marlowe’s life one day.

My Toms--Kyd, Watson, Walsingham, the latter

Being the only Tom amongst them in the matter

Of my heart. Tom Walsingham, my love, the boss

Of spies. I’m dead now, will he feel the loss?

SHAKESPEARE

I have memorized most of what was said.

The scene described you lying on a bed.

[remembering]

“Christopher Marlowe lying upon a bed moved with anger against Ingram Frizer upon words spoken between them, and Ingram then and there, sitting in the room with his back towards the bed where Christopher Marlowe was lying, sitting near the bed, and with the front part of his body towards the table—

[SHAKESPEARE gets into position, as Ingram Frizer]

--Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley sitting on either side of Ingram in a manner that Ingram Frizer *in no way could take flight*—

[ANNE and DOROTHY wedge in SHAKESPEARE]

So Christopher Marlowe maliciously drew the dagger of Ingram which was at his back—

Margaret, grab the dagger tucked into my belt. Imagine it.

--and with the same dagger Christopher gave Ingram Frizer two wounds on his head two inches long and a quarter of an inch deep.”

ANNE

SO there is my theory. I have a right to boast!

That is exactly like carving up a roast.

And if Margaret cooked it, it would be hard as stone,

Like this villain’s head.

MARGARET

Leave me alone!

Some are born to cook, some are born to. . .

ANNE

Wife?

MARGARET

And you know that I hate domestic life.

ANNE

You are twenty-eight and still won’t marry.

DOROTHY

And that’s a burden for our dad to carry.

SHAKESPEARE

[Continuing with the inquest document]

Try to set your minds on this. And act?

Margaret? Yes, you have my dagger.

And now I’m going to try to get it back.

“Ingram, in fear of being slain, and sitting between Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley so that he could not get away, in his own defense and for the saving of his life, *struggled with Christopher Marlowe to get back from him his dagger—“*

ANNE

What do we do?

DOROTHY

Don’t we help?

SHAKESPEARE

[continuing with the reciting of the document]

“--in which affray Ingram could not get away from Christopher Marlowe; and so Ingram, in defense of his life, with the dagger to the value of—“

ALL:

Twelve pence.

SHAKESPEARE

“--gave Christopher a mortal wound over the right eye two inches deep and one inch wide.”

MARLOWE

“--Of which mortal wound the aforesaid Christopher Marlowe then and there instantly died.”

SHAKESPEARE

If I were a contortionist, right? who

Spent his life contorting, I couldn’t do

What this document requires of me

To stab above the eye, “aforesaid, Christopher Marley.”

DOROTHY

How can a dagger of *whatever* pence

**Not** pierce a skull with no defense

Rendered by the victim?

MARGARET

And yet, thereby,

Pierce another skull above the eye?

And kill him instantly?

DOROTHY

I must surmise

That Ingram’s skull is thicker—

ANNE

It’s all lies.

And, once in a fight, Kit would not allow

Anyone to stab him, anyhow.

MARLOWE

Thank you, Anne. Now, what do we do, my friends

With this information, make amends

To those who wronged me? Take the higher ground

And sell relics from my burial mound?

I’ll be Saint Christopher, the one who carried

Jesus on his back, across a river, harried

By rough waves. One has to wonder why

God couldn’t have, this once, let his son fly?

Too many questions, too many words, yes,

No doubt that’s been my downfall, nonetheless…

SHAKESPEARE

Twelve pence indicates a dagger of some strength. . .

MARLOWE

Mine’s made of flesh, about a foot in length.

ANNE

You’re dying!

MARLOWE

--dead—

ANNE

--and still the witticisms?

MARLOWE

You’d think being dead would spare me criticisms.

Not from this family. Nothing spares you—

MARGARET Truth?

Not “witty,” just a cock joke of a youth.

ANNE

And callow, from an aging pederast.

MARLOWE

Turning on me, girls? Give it a rest.

And confusing me with Lord de Vere?

He likes little boys. I’m queer.

MARGARET

“Queer”? You mean Latin, “Quah rey.”

MARLOWE

No, I mean, “queer” and also this word, “gay.”

DOROTHY

A bunch of posies? Carefree? “Gay”?

MARLOWE

Oh, *not* carefree. It means same sex sex.

This place I went to—strange, complex.

SHAKESPEARE

They have separate words for sex with men?

I don’t understand. Explain it again?

MARLOWE

They hate us, but we have more names.

DOROTHY

Is this a joke or are you playing games

With rules I’ll never understand. Of course,

Dorothy’s left out.

ANNE

What is the source

Of all this talk about some other place.

MARLOWE

You’re still angry, Megs. I see it in your face.

MARGARET

“All they that love not tobacco and boys are fools."

MARLOWE

I was poking at the pieties, crushing the jewels.

Now, is there any stone unturned before I go?

MARGARET

I’m not sending you away, Christopher Marlowe.

MARLOWE

But **I’m** growing tired and need to rest.

Give it up, my sisters, you’ve done your best.

[ANNE bursts into tears]

DOROTHY

Done our best? Crybaby can’t get married.

MARLOWE

In this vale of fears, I’ve too long tarried.

SHAKESPEARE

What are you doing? Are you just dense?

Your brother wasn’t killed in self-defense!

He was ***murdered***. Those cuts on Frizer’s head?

Made by them! They wanted Marlowe dead!

MARLOWE

[tries to usher them out]

It’s worsening, what’s happening to me.

Love to our parents. And now just let me be.

SHAKESPEARE

I call “orange!”

MARLOWE

Won’t stop me from dying.

Go to my rooms, take all my books. Stop trying.

[Sisters start to leave].

SHAKESPEARE

You’re just giving up and leaving?

We can show that he was--

ANNE

We’re grieving.

DOROTHY

It’s only family now, so please don’t try—

MARGARET

--to get involved.

ANNE

It’s time to say good-bye.

[MARGARET kisses SHAKESPEARE]

MARGARET

It’s time to let it go, dear Will, and treasure

All the memories we might have had of pleasure.

SHAKESPEARE

What? That makes no sense!

[The sisters exit]

What did she say?

Kit, you were murdered. It’s as plain as day!

Fuck the rhyming couplets, fuck the iambs,

Fuck pentameter, let’s just say it: Christopher Marlowe

was murdered! WITH INTENT! It’s no mystery!

It’s there in black and white—

MARLOWE

For history?

I should be in my grave, so get me there,

Somehow, some way. Right now, I eat the air,

A phrase you’ll write, something to do with breath,

And what happens to it after a long, drawn-out, protracted death.

[end of scene five]

**SCENE SIX~**

[in another place, right after they left SHAKESPEARE’S digs]

MARGARET

Are you thinking what I’m thinking?

ANNE and DOROTHY

Yes.

ANNE

We must get this dog Frizer to confess.

And then take it directly to the Queen.

DOROTHY

Let’s cut him from his gullet to his spleen.

MARGARET

Ingram Frizer murdered our dear brother.

ANNE

Dorothy? What about our absent mother,

What is it her heart needs the most?

DOROTHY

Revenge. She’d nail his privates to a post,

Blunt his dagger and heat it in the fire,

Then hand it to him and leave him, screaming.

ALICE

I want proof of justice done. Without the scheming.

Without more blood.

MARGARET

[to DOROTHY]

Little sis, you’re scary.

ALICE

*Justice* brings *respect so* I can marry.

[They put their right hands together in a pledge that could look like the three witches in that Scottish play yet to be written]

ALL THREE SISTERS

And so we pledge to do everything we can

To get a full confession from this man!

[end of scene six]

***[End Of Act One]*ACT TWO**

**SCENE ONE~**

[A moment later, SHAKESPEARE and MARLOWE in SHAKESPEARE’S digs at Bishopsgate]

SHAKESPEARE

I know you’re dying, but the awful way

You rushed your sisters out the door—

MARLOWE Hey.

They’re not gone.

SHAKESPEARE

Zounds! He’s delirious.

What do I do now?

MARLOWE

I’m serious.

They have not gone. Yea, verily, they abide.

[beat]

They’ve gone to find Frizer, to have his hide.

SHAKESPEARE

What?

MARLOWE

It’s the Marlowe way, my dear—that’s it.

As a family, we don’t take any shit.

We fought with Huguenots, out in the street.

In any fight, me dad would not retreat.

He throttled his apprentice in the shop,

Near killed him. My mother made him stop.

Margaret said it, “I’m here for revenge.”

Or something like that. It might be a binge

Of violence on their part. You know the need—

To just wreak havoc.

SHAKESPEARE

We have to intercede.

They could be killed or, at least, arrested.

MARLOWE

For skinning a man who’s uncontested

As a villain?

SHAKESPEARE

“Skinning?” What do you mean?

MARLOWE

What your father does. And also the Queen

Who’s as responsible as anyone

For my death.

SHAKESPEARE

What have you, Marlowe, done?

MARLOWE

Let loose the dogs of war, no, *worse*, the bitches,

To right some wrongs—

SHAKESPEARE

They’ll be burned as witches,

Worse than heretics! They’ll commit treason!

We have to stop them!

MARLOWE

Okay, what’s your reason?

SHAKESPEARE

For stopping them? You don’t care because you are—

MARLOWE Deceased?

I’ll honor your Catholicism—get a priest

To give me final rites. That’s what they’re called?

SHAKESPEARE

Your selfishness has left me quite appalled.

You only care about yourself, Sirrah.

MARLOWE

Don’t use that in your plays. Make it a law.

No use of “Sirrah” in any line or scenes.

Why? No one will know what the fuck it means.

“Sirrah” that and “Sirrah” this, it’s absurd.

And “fardel”—such a down home country word.

Your background is a fardel, as in “burden.”

They won’t let you in. You won’t get a word in

Edgewise, so, my darling Will, outlive them.

Don’t put yourself in danger, don’t give them

Any cause to murder you, no reason

To think you are capable of treason.

Tom Kyd will never write another play,

Nor will that poor sot who, one fateful day,

Wrote a treatise on the, he feared, marriage

Of the Queen to that French Duke whose carriage

Rolled too near the throne. They cut off his hand,

Staunched the blood and imprisoned him, a man

Who will never write again. His silence,

More profound than all their obscene violence.

SHAKESPEARE

So you do care—

MARLOWE

About you.

SHAKESPEARE

Not you sisters?

MARLOWE

A little. We’ll stop them short of blisters

All over Frizer’s vulnerable bits.

With cobblers’ tools and their most able wits,

They’ve devised, I’m sure, a way to capture

Some justice. By now, they’re close to rapture

With their success.

SHAKESPEARE

Will they then seek the Queen?

MARLOWE

One hopes.

SHAKESPEARE

You’re delusional and mean.

I’m going to find them. You’ve gained no insight,

Being dead. I would think it somehow right

That a walking corpse, at least, would give

Some wisdom about what it is to live.

MARLOWE

You need my special powers of the dead

To find them.

SHAKESPEARE

I stand by what I said.

MARLOWE

All right, I’m coming. I’ll accompany you.

And so I’ll wander Bankside, dressed as a Jew.

I’ll be invisible, or they’ll throw feces.

One or the other, I’m another species.

Just so you know the future isn’t better,

They have laws that suture, trying to fetter

All the hatred, fear—

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, just stop talking!

Show me where we’re going. Let’s start walking!

MARLOWE

From my own sister, this abuse I heard,

And now from you, my brother of the Word.

[end of scene one]

**SCENE TWO~**

[ANNE is cuddling up to INGRAM FRIZER, plying him with alcohol]

FRIZER

You’re a delicious little bit, you truly are,

Came directly at me, in the bar.

You knew then, and I knew, what you wanted.

ANNE

I’m afraid these upper rooms are haunted.

I see apparitions here and there,

And there’s something putrid in the air.

FRIZER

That’s just London. You can’t be surprised.

Have some more wine. I’m usually despised.

You girls hate me black teeth.

ANNE

Poor little boy.

Women are so frivolous and take joy

In being cruel to men instead of tender.

Don’t they know who is the better gender?

FRIZER

You’re well-spoken for a saucy wench.

Come over here. Let’s do it on the bench.

Let me unsheathe myself, so you can see

What glory here awaits you.

ANNE

I have to pee.

I’m modest, after all. But don’t neglect

The wine. I’ll see it as a lack of respect

For all we’re to experience, very soon.

[whispers in his ear]

I want you to fuck me till I swoon.

[She exits. FRIZER smiles and drinks more wine. He’s getting wooooozy]

[end of Scene Two]

**SCENE THREE**~

[ANNE and DOROTHY are conferring outside the room where FRIZER is drinking]

ANNE

Oh, he’s so disgusting and the *smell*.

DOROTHY

We’ll have to use more sulphur for our Hell,

Or he won’t believe that—

[MARGARET enters, looking even more like Christopher Marlowe. She is decked out with his trunk hose, etc.]

ANNE

[impressed with MARGARET’s disguise]

Nevermind.

I think our Ingram Frizer just might find

There’s some retribution for his sins.

Mainly, our own sweet revenge begins.

MARGARET

I went to Kit’s room and found these clothes.

The doublet is too big and these trunk hose

Are so uncomfortable. How do men wear them?

There’s lots of room for balls, so they can air them?

Is that what they’re for? Do I need a wound

Over my right eye? Will he be attuned

To ghostly laws? Is there more to show?

ANNE

You need the wound, and blood. I have to go.

He’ll be surly, or, much worse, suspicious.

MARGARET

Pretending to be Kit is just delicious.

ANNE

And I enjoy playing a filthy whore.

It’s very satisfying.

DOROTHY

And what’s more,

I have to say you’re being very brave.

ANNE

I’ll feel better when Frizer’s in his grave.

MARGARET

We’re going to scare his heart out of his chest,

Where, like an injured bird, it falls to rest—

DOROTHY

[getting into it, altho’ not the poet that MARGARET is]

--upon the ground and throbs and bleeds and twitches

Until it stops. Because it’s dead.

MARGARET

Like witches

Behind the door, on the ceiling, creaking a hinge,

DOROTHY

We three sisters will have our revenge!

[DOROTHY makes them to do hands-in-center]

[end of scene three]

**SCENE FOUR~**

SHAKESPEARE

Why are we here? What is this place, Sir--

MARLOWE

--rah? You stopped yourself. So you must concur

It is a useless word. Good job. Now, here.

We’ll listen, but don’t want to get too near.

This place is where our plot, our story turns

Into a not nice tale of no one learns

From their mistakes. You’ve written bloody scenes--

SHAKESPEARE

I’ve seen my share in life, Kit, by all means.

Live embers poured by men into a hole

That contained a priest, a little mole

With his prayer book, praying for his life.

Never to have children or a wife.

He survived. We fed him with a spoon,

Until he died, naked, blessing the moon.

He couldn’t bear clothing on his burned skin,

My father sat with him outside, until the end.

The priest said moonlight soothed him, even.

And so he died with no god to believe in.

MARLOWE

To have sweet freedom dying, free of fear.

No heaven, hell, awaits you, Will Shakespeare,

Remember that and you’ll remember me.

Don’t write it down. You want to remain free.

By that, I mean, “free,” as in, not in the Tower,

A consummation closer by the hour.

[FRIZER hollers. They hear it]

MARLOWE

I think that’s Frizer crying from upstairs.

I suspect they’ve got him by his short hairs.

SHAKESPEARE

Ugh!

MARLOWE

I warned you, you can’t be squeamish now.

SHAKESPEARE

Lead on, Kit. Squeamishness I disavow.

[FRIZER hollering continues into the next scene]

[end of scene four]

**SCENE FIVE**~

[FRIZER is tied to the bench with ANNE holding a cobbler tool about to lock it onto FRIZER’S balls]

FRIZER

[trying to reason with her]

Although I liked being tied to the bench,

And you are a most attractive, lusty wench,

The leather has grown taut and what you hold

Looks to be quite painful. I’ve much gold

In my pocket. If you put down the--

ANNE

--clamp?

It’s a cobbler’s tool. You want to revamp

Our assignation? Change the ways and rules

We’ve made to have fun?

FRIZER

Only in the tools

You seem to have so very many of.

ANNE

I use accountrements to show my love.

They’re all *cobbler’s* tools. Does that ring a bell?

MARGARET

[as Marlowe’s ghost]

And are you ready for a trip to Hell?

MARGARET and ANNE

We mean, a trip of pain before you pass,

MARGARET

[as MARLOWE’S ghost]

Bleeding from your groin and from your ass.

ANNE

Handpress, hole punch, and some cobbler’s pliers.

MARGARET

[as MARLOWE’S ghost]

My sister uses them on flagrant liars,

Like you, Ingram Frizer, who murdered me.

FRIZER

Who are you? Sorry if I murdered thee.

MARGARET

[as MARLOWE’S ghost]

I am Kit Marlowe. Once alive, now dead.

FRIZER

Where is the stabbing wound upon your head?

MARGARET

[as MARLOWE’S ghost]

It is here.

FRIZER

Looks like it’s healed. And your size

Is different.

ANNE

Do you think it is wise

To question us, your captors, when your balls

Are in a vise? And no one can hear your calls?

[She applies pressure. FRIZER yells]

FRIZER

What do you want? What do you want? Forsooth,

I’ll give you anything.

MARLOWE

[enters]

We want the truth,

You dog. You scurvy cur, you worse than slime.

FRIZER

Yes! I stabbed you, but mine’s not the worst crime!

They set me up! They wedged me in between!

They made you angry, counted on that spleen

Of yours, that famous anger, surely you know.

They wanted *me* to die: “Death by Marlowe.”

But I wrenched free and stabbed you in the head,

They stood up, smiling, knowing you were dead.

You never trapped two spiders as a boy

Thrown them together just for the joy

Of seeing which will live and which will die?

Be thankful I stabbed you over the eye,

So death was quick.

SHAKESPEARE

[entering, breathless]

So here you are! Oh no!

Who is that? Untie him, and let him go!

You want to lose your heads? This is treason!

MARGARET

You mean chopping block or loss of reason?

We don’t care. This stinking beast must die.

ANNE

But, first, more pain.

MARLOWE

At the very least.

DOROTHY

[emerging from wherever she was waiting]

And for your confession, I’m a priest.

MARGARET

He’s confessed already.

ANNE

We don’t need you.

DOROTHY

But I’ve been back there, waiting for my cue.

INGRAM FRIZER

I need a priest! I need someone!

[sees that she’s female]

You’re a wench!

*Witches!!*

DOROTHY

Leave him, tied to the bench.

Let him explain that. Let him live that down.

He won’t get free until we’re out of town.

[to FRIZER]

We *are* witches!

SHAKESPEARE

No, they’re not. They’re Marlowes.

That is all. We’re leaving. Don’t disclose

What happened here. And I won’t, either, Sirrah!

Do we have a deal for life?

[INGRAM FRIZER nods “yes”]

MARLOWE

[in INGRAM FRIZER’S face]

Now gnaw

Through the rawhide, you lower than a dog,

You mangy, smelly, dinner for a hog.

In fact, calling you a dog, gives that beast

Such a bad name, who, at the very least,

Just tries to survive, as best he can.

You had so many choices, as a man,

And you chose this. I wish you long life,

Alone, without a wife, or with a wife

Who nags you constantly.

I wish you long, long days of living misery

Until that time you die, and just can’t wait

To leave this too-long life you’ve grown to hate.

SHAKESPEARE

We have to go. The girls are gone again.

Where can they be?

INGRAM FRIZER

No doubt, to inflict pain

On Poley and Nick Skeres! At least, I hope!

MARLOWE

And people ask why I’m a misanthrope.

SHAKESPEARE

You don’t look good. Go to my rooms and wait.

MARLOWE

You think my sisters’ are at Bishopsgate?

Really, Will, you think they’ve given up?

SHAKESPEARE

Will you just take an order and shut up?

Shut up, Marlowe! For once in your sad life?

Your blathering’s undone you, you ale wife!

MARLOWE

My life’s not sad, nor has it ever been.

I stand by my life, even at its end.

And language, Will, has saved *your* sanity:

You speak from need, my dear, not vanity.

Am I an ale wife? Then I’m proud of it:

I serve up pleasure.

SHAKESPEARE

I concede, dear Kit.

MARLOWE

I’ll go to your rooms because I don’t feel well.

Also because I know I look like Hell.

Another vanity is my appearance.

In my dying, it’s lost coherence.

My nose is loose, so also is my ear.

Would you keep them for me, Will, my dear?

Ha! Made you look! Your gullibility

Amazes me. It’s your Actor Credibility.

You’re a good actor, and, Will, you believe.

Your best talent may be—you’re naïve.

SHAKESPEARE

I’ve been close to Hell and have the blisters

To show for it, thanks, Kit.

MARLOWE

Just find my sisters.

[MARLOWE exits one way. SHAKESPEARE watches him go, then is hit over the head and dragged away}

[End of Scene Five]

**SCENE SIX~**

[MARGARET (still dressed as her brother), DOROTHY (still dressed as a cleric), and ANNE (in her dress) have been captured by a couple of GUARDS.]

GUARD 1 (Ned)

So you are players, come to entertain?

GUARD 2 (Bob)

Yet you have no papers. Can you explain?

[The SISTERS launch into a song. It’s a drinking song they sort of know and make up. ANNE knows it best]

SISTERS

Back and side go bare, go bare;

Both hand and foot go cold;

But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,

Whether it be new or old.

But if that I may have, truly,

Good ale my belly full,

I shall look like one by sweet Saint John

Were shorn against the wool.

Though I go bare, take ye no care,

I am nothing cold.

I stuff my skin so full within

Of jolly good ale and old.

GUARD #2 (Ned)

But that’s not a play. It’s but a song.

Prove yourselves as players or be gone.

[SISTERS look at each other. DOROTHY starts into a scene from a Mystery Play they would have seen in Canterbury]

DOROTHY

I’m Noah.

GUARD #1 (Bob)

[to DOROTHY]

You’re a cleric.

ANNE

Costume change--

No time. I’m Noah’s wife, pretend?

GUARD #1 (Bob)

It’s strange.

You’re dressed like my wife, but finer.

GUARD #2 (Ned) So?

Mistress Noah has the best!

MARGARET

It’s a show.

I’m God.

GUARD #1 (Ned)

Now that’s a stretch. You look like Marlowe.

MARGARET

Do I? Many have said so. I’m flattered.

[GUARDS are waiting for “the play” to start. MARGARET plunges in, making it up as she goes. ANNE and DOROTHY also make it up, playing off each other, trying to not get arrested and trying to find out what they came for]

MARGARET

Noah? Good morning. As if that mattered,

For you and all the world. I have bad news.

A flood has come. Gather everything by twos.

ANNE

Oh no. What bad news to tell a mother.

But I can’t leave until I find my brother.

DOROTHY

Oh, Wife. I’m very sorry, but he’s dead.

Who sent what cur to stab him in the head?

MARGARET

I’m omniscient, and yet I cannot tell

Who ordered the deed, but a place in Hell

Is reserved for them and for those who know.

They’d better tell or I know where they’ll go.

DOROTHY

I’m Mephistopheles.

GUARD #1 (Ned)

You’re Noah. You need to straighten--

ANNE

He’s transformed. And so have I. I’m Satan.

GUARD #2 (Ned)

Satan as a woman?

MARGARET

Do you doubt it?

ANNE

Tell us the truth. And be quick about it.

GUARD #1 (Bob)

What is going on? You’re frauds, you bitches!

GUARD #2 (Ned)

No, Ned, it’s something worse. They’re witches!

This one is a woman.

DOROTHY

[revealing her crotch]

Me, too--look!

MARGARET

[revealing a book she’s been carrying. It’s Ovid]

And we will cast a spell from this dark book!

[begins to “read”—the other sisters join in]

“In nova fert animus mutates—“

GUARD #2 (Ned)

Animals? Mutations?

GUARD #1 (Bob)

They’ve cast some spell!

ANNE

Tell us what we want or end up in Hell!

DOROTHY

The wizard of our coven, murdered, and you know—

GUARD#2 (Ned)

They’re talking about Christopher Marlowe.

DOROTHY

--who ordered it.

GUARD #1 (Bob)

Ned, why keep up the sham?

GUARD #2 (Ned)

Your wizard’s death was ordered by--

[whispers(sotte voce) the name] “Tom Walsingham”

MARGARET

Where is he?

GUARD#1 (Bob)

That’s all we know. Now, go away!

ANNE

Best be truth.

DOROTHY

‘Cause we’ll be back one day.

[end of scene 6]

**SCENE SEVEN~**

[On the floor, SHAKESPEARE is still unconscious. He is bound and gagged. Someone enters. It’s FRIZER and he’s limping and can’t really close his legs, still in bad shape from the cobbler’s tools on his balls]

FRIZER

You’re awake? Wakey, wakey, it’s the morn,

Boys and girls, don’t be forlorn,

Jesus died so you may play,

[kicks SHAKESPEARE with every other word]

But **you’ll** get **whupped** on **Judgment** Day.

[But all the kicking causes him great pain. He cradles his balls to relieve this pain]

SHAKESPEARE

[still gagged, so the words are garbled]

What time is it. How long have I been out?

FRIZER

I can’t hear you. Why don’t you try and shout?

Why don’t I cut your throat? I could, you know.

A dramatist who cannot speak.

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

[offstage, before she enters]

Dog? GO.

[FRIZER exits. “BLANCHE HERBERT,” an older woman, enters, dressed in a shift, and carrying a goblet of wine. She has a skull cap on and seems to be nearly bald. She throws the wine in SHAKESPEARE’S face.]

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

Your acting troupe was here. They scared two guards

To death, quite literally. In regards

To talking too much, it certainly can

Result, for some, in a shortened life span.

Your three doxies were thrown out the door.

I hope, for your sake, there aren’t any more.

I saw you in a play. You’re quite the ham.

I’m My Lady’s nurse. Just call me “ma’am.”

I had them bring you here—to give you pause,

Or smallish hands. A joke.

[She moves a chair next to him, but keeps him bound and gagged]

All this is gauze

Covering a power, bred in the bone,

Ruthless, unbeatable, hard as a stone.

The fact she’s cloven doesn’t make her weak.

It’s of her untouched cunny that I speak.

I embarrassed you? Playwrights are all spies.

Like your friend Marlowe. Too many lies,

Too many monarchs, always on the lam,

Unless protected by a Walsingham.

You know that name. I see it in your face.

You think that you have secrets in this place?

[She undoes his gag]

SHAKESPEARE

Men, hired by this court, have **murdered** Marlowe,

No fight in a bar, no “reconying”, so

This story of a fight over a bill,

Is just this: excremental swill.

Malice aforethought, planned. So tell your queen,

Shakespeare will be heard **and** will be seen.

I know the truth and I write history!

Writers have such power—

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

There’s no mystery

Here, no big surprise or revelation.

BUT fixation on investigation

Will lead to an emasculation,

Or worse, flirtation with castration.

Frustration with foundation

Of no planation of judiation.

No initiation of legislation

For this nation and location

Of a cessation of migration.

In spite of vocalization and oration,

Libation and quotation,

No placation or salvation.

Litigation a temptation,

A vexation, a predation,

A hint of abdication,

Leads to accusation, amputation,

Defamation, denigration,

Deprivation, desolation, detestation,

Herniation, immolation, infestation,

Destination: defenestration,

Amputation.

[She climbs onto SHAKESPEARE. This becomes a sort of rape]

Do I feel a palpitation? Or the least bit perspiration?

I’d do a penetration, a fine sodomization,

But I’ve only vagination, with a steady undulation,

A bastardization of masturbation,

To you, excruciation,

As profound as a castration.

You are mine in orgasmation!!

[orgasaming]

Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Ohhhhhh. Ohhhhhhhh. OH.

[She stands, overcome by a vision]

It’s Transubstantiation!

My proper approbation!

Into blood and body of a nation

Where ultraviolet radiation

Kills all echo location

And the federal bureau of investigation

Of another civilization.

Uses me as inspiration

For a brutal colonization.

Was this hallucination?

[Blackout]

[end of Scene Seven]

**SCENE EIGHT**~

[Everything returns to a normal scene, as if what happened, didn’t happen]

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

You’ve something to say? Why are you here?

SHAKESPEARE

We need our poets. Right next to our ear.

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

And why is that? To tell us how to live?

We live well. Look around. No roof like a sieve

To let the rain in. Fireplaces, warm,

Food, good, and guards to keep us from all harm,

Even poets who know too much and talk

To audiences and warned, still balk

At the idea that they could be in danger,

Spilling gossip like cheap wine upon a stranger.

SHAKESPEARE

I never knew that Marlowe was a spy.

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

I’ve got you now. Who said he was? Not I.

SHAKESPEARE

I came to see Her Majesty, the Queen—

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

She’s resting and in no state to be seen.

SHAKESPEARE

--about the death of—

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

[She puts gag back on SHAKESPEARE]

--You and I both know,

What killed your friend Christopher Marlowe.

His words, his life, the books he read and spying.

Stay out of politics unless you’re fond of dying,

Is my advice. He was murdered, yes, of course.

By the Queen’s killers, and without remorse.

Just be careful, Will, of knowing too much.

Stories are delicious. They’re fun to tell and such.

But in the wrong ear can serve as ammunition,

Stronger than explosives in their powers of demolition.

In your play of Richard Three, we hear,

He murders princely boys without a tear.

It pleases us, this Richard. He’s uncouth,

Brutal, scheming. Of course, that is the truth.

And a good story. We like a good story.

Intrigues, battles, a touch of something gory.

We hear you use the blood of sheep and cow

And entrails for when you disembowel

An enemy or a traitorist friend

Whom, you may love, but whose life you must end.

We should like a love story with lightness,

Where, in the end, all comes back to rightness.

Art should be whole because the world is not.

Now you may speak.

[As she removes his gag and unties him].

Have you given some thought

To what you might say to her, our Queen?

Who’s not certain writers should heard or seen.

[Beat, as Shakespeare considers championing freedom of expression or just trying to survive].

Come on, speak your speech. I know you have one.

You came here for justice and there is none.

So what can you say to her, and can you rid

This image: the shattered hands of Thomas Kyd.

SHAKESPEARE

I’d ask her to remember that a play

Is merely that. A trifle for the day,

To make it better. It’s a source of joy,

For the players and audience, a toy

For all to play with. With no treason

Meant or said. And certainly no reason

To want the writers or the players. . .dead.

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

I shall pass on to her what you have said.

Does it seem, Shakespeare, at all strange to you,

That those of us who fear most what you do

Have more faith in the power of your art

Than you do? We see its power to impart

Ideas and deliver them with feeling

That strengthens their importance, while appealing

To everyone who is in attendance:

The questioning of power, independence,

Showing the impermanence of the throne.

I’d say there’s much for writers to atone.

That morning Spanish ships darkened our beach?

What value, then, was your freedom of speech?

So, you are here for what reason?

SHAKESPEARE

Observing

And noting for a play, a most deserving

Portrait of the court and of our Queen,

So that I might write portrayals, never seen

Portrayed on stage, in manner portrayed true.

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

Those lines? The very best that you can do?

If so, I’m sorry Marlowe was. . .put down.

SHAKESPEARE

A dog’s death? As if Marlowe were some hound?

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

A mouthy atheist and spy? A cur?

A **dog** sent out on errands to deter

Some act of violence, or what’s worse

The loss of funds or lands, blows to the purse

Of the dog’s master. You Understand?

You want to know who killed him, by whose hand

He was *put down*. Surmise, then, who I am,

And then find one Thomas Walsingham.

Among other duties, he was Marlowe’s lover--

Fucking spies is fucking undercover.

Another play on words! But I’m too clever

To want a life of art, some soul’s endeavor.

If you reveal that, no one will believe you.

I’m an atheist, like Marlowe, true!

I don’t fear Hell. There is no afterlife.

I’m free since I became nobody’s wife.

And no man, even God, will dare chain me.

No court on earth try to arraign me.

I am full protected until my death.

I claim to be the nurse of Queen Elizabeth,

Who raised her from a babe because her mother

Was murdered by her father. No man above her,

Even in the bedroom. I’ve said too much.

There’s something about you. You have the touch

Of the necromancer with the dead,

You make me speak whatever’s in my head.

Get out of here or I’ll call a guard

And you’ll be hoisted on someone’s petard!

SHAKESPEARE

I’m just a scribbler. Better heard than seen.

And if you would. . .my regards to your Queen.

[SHAKESPEARE exits]

“BLANCHE HERBERT”

Good dog, Shakespeare, go. You’ve learned your place!

And now the task of putting on my face.

[to the audience, while she puts clown white and then her red wig, revealing that she *is* **Queen Elizabeth I]**

At my old friend’s house Marlowe met his fate.

They strolled in her garden, drank and ate,

Trying not to kill him, to find a reason

To let him live. But that would have been treason.

So many had so much up their sleeves.

There is no honor, even among thieves.

That poet lied to me. And so it goes

With everyone. Afraid of me? Who knows.

Can Never Trust: This burden I have carried.

And people wonder why I never married.

[end of scene eight]

**SCENE NINE~**

[Back in Will’s rooms, in Bishopsgate. MARLOWE, looking worse, is talking to SHAKESPEARE, who has just come in]

SHAKESPEARE

Hello, Kit?

MARLOWE

Here, in the dark. You look shaken.

SHAKESPEARE

In my opinion of myself, I’ve been mistaken.

I’m not honest, noble, in my eyes

I’m a miscreant, full of lies,

I’m a beggar in a bog, after a purse,

Flailing around, making everything worse.

I was there and backed off from the truth

That you were murdered!

MARLOWE

Aye, yea, verily forsooth,

What good would it do? Don’t you think she knows?

SHAKESPEARE

I talked to her nurse.

MARLOWE

Bald and scary?

SHAKESPEARE

Yes.

MARLOWE

Sweet William, that was her, sans wig and dress.

SHAKESPEARE

Instead of mounting me on someone’s petard,

I swear she mounted me and rode me, hard.

Spouting words, and threats until she climaxed.

And had some apotheosis.

MARLOWE

We relaxed

And thought we are safe from criticism,

And wouldn’t be in danger for some witticism

We tossed out because we thought, “It’s funny.”

Excuse me, Will, but you do smell of cunny.

Not an odor I know well, nevertheless,

It’s very strong when present—

SHAKESPEARE

I confess.

To being violated by a queen.

Whatever happened, Christopher, she scared me.

I have a family. I’m thankful that she spared me.

MARLOWE

Fucked or no, my dear, you just keep writing!

And let the power-hungry do the fighting.

Now back to me. I’m here and yet I’m dead.

I know I died, screaming, stabbed in the head.

I heard the screams, I know now it was me.

Yet, for some reason, I cannot be free.

I fell into this other world, and, yes,

I saw the future, I was in it. It’s a mess.

Just like today: Plagues, massacres, and more

Ways to kill each other, than we could ask for,

If we had a mind to ask. And we did.

Down that slippery slope of death, we slid

With inventions of destruction. “Wow,”

I brought that word from there. It’s apt and how.

I looked around and just kept saying it.

“Wow” this and that and “isn’t that some shit?”

Wondrous things I saw. And, yet, the clothing,

The feel of the fabrics filled me with loathing.

Oily, greasy. And most of the smells--

Like everything’s on fire. Many Hells

Opening up from below my very feet,

Wherever I walked: Hell and beauty, sweet

It was. So puzzling! The mixture

Of hope and doom—dichotomy the fixture

Of that place. Your face. . .is fading a bit.

Wow. This may be it. Isn’t that some shit?

I think I’m going, I’m going to be released!

Whatever I may ask for, don’t get me a priest.

I may ask for one in panic. Saint Augustine:

“Give me a boy until he’s seven,” even a queen.

Oh, that’s another word, for us, my dear.

You swing both ways. But I’m forever queer.

Forever queer, for all my days on earth,

Forever queer, yes, queer, yes, from my birth.

They have words for us. When you have a name

You are nailed for life. It’s much like fame.

Maybe best to be unknown, it may be safer.

Or end up wine for blood, and flesh--a wafer,

Nailed to a cross for just speaking your mind.

Oh, the world is awful, and so unkind.

I’m getting maudlin, I must be dying.

Where are my sisters?

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, they’re out trying

To find the one responsible.

MARLOWE

Oh, damn.

They should bring my dear Tom Walsingham.

If I could see him one last time, before I go. . .

[The sisters enter, carrying a man encased in the pall they brought with them from Canterbury, the one for Christopher’s body that their mother made]

DOROTHY

We’ve got the culprit!

MARGARET

[to the body in the bag]

Stop struggling!

ANNE

Here you go!

[They throw the man encased in the pall on the floor. He struggles in the pall, trying to get out]

SHAKESPEARE

Which one is it? Poley? Skeres? Not the. . .Queen?

DOROTHY

We did try to see her. Those guards are mean!

ANNE

All that velvet—

MARGARET

All those pearls and lace—

DOROTHY

Anyone could be behind her white face.

[Man in bag struggles some more]

ANNE

I sewed up the bag.

MARGARET

[hitting the bag with the man in it, until he’s silent]

He’s still.

Maybe, I killed him. Check on him, Will?

If I killed him, Kit, should I even care?

SHAKESPEARE

Into the Thames.

[SHAKESPEARE opens the bag with his dagger]

MARLOWE

I recognize the hair.

God I don’t believe in, let it not be

The man I think this is. Oh my, Tommy!

My Tom! My dear! Please, wake up! Don’t be dead!

What happened to you? Oh, look where he bled!

Look at this blood!

[to his sisters]

What did you do?

MARGARET

This man is your enemy!

MARLOWE

That’s not true!

This man loves me with all his heart and soul!

MARGARET

[Not believing he could “sell out” like this]

There is no *soul*, my brother, no control,

No god, no Heaven, no one at the helm.

This is what you taught about this realm,

This world we live in. I have lived my life,

Believing this. I have been the wife

To these ideas. I have followed you,

Into dark books, ideas to unglue

The tightest joints, undo boot seams in water.

I have been your student and a daughter

Of: There is no God and we are free and whole.

And now you say this clotpole has your soul?

MARLOWE

I only meant he loves with all his heart,

Me.

ANNE

Is he dead?

DOROTHY

I just heard him fart.

SHAKESPEARE

The dead are known to flatulate, I think.

MARLOWE

[shoving MARGARET aside to get to TOM]

Tom!

DOROTHY

Whatever happened, he’s begun to stink.

ANNE

We talked to those two men and they both said,

It was Tom Walsingham who wanted you dead.

You knew too much. He had to end your life.

MARLOWE

[pulling TOM free of them]

*Tom!!*

MARGARET

And there’s this--he’s *married* with a *wife.*

TOM WALSINGHAM

What? What’s happened? Where am I? Oh, my head.

Where are those witches three? I want them dead.

There you are, you harpies! Where’s my knife?

I’ll have you on your knees, begging for life.

You think you can ambush me, without penalty?

I’m your superior, physically and mentally.

And I work for the Queen. I’ll take my leave

Right now and see you later—

MARLOWE

Don’t you grieve

For my death? I don’t see any sorrow,

Tom. Well, it’s late today. You’ll grieve tomorrow,

Won’t you? Do you have anything to say?

TOM WALSINGHAM

You’re dead! No, you’re a spirit! Go awayyyyy!

[TOM extricates himself, with violence, from MARLOWE’S hold of him]

MARLOWE

I’d love to, but I can’t. I don’t know why.

I’ve seen you as you are and *want* to die.

I want to disappear, be wind and rain,

Take off from Dover and escape the pain,

Fly from the white cliffs near my parents’ home,

I’ll be a happy Icarus, into the sea, the foam

Closing over my peaceful face. I surrender

All this life of riot and of splendor,

Let the bastards have without a fight,

You and this bad world I loved at first sight.

TOM WALSINGHAM

If you’re not dead, then how could all those men,

Respectable, reliable, swear then

They saw your corpse, and it was you?

MARLOWE

You didn’t see my corpse?

TOM WALSINGHAM

I didn’t want to.

MARLOWE

Did you order my death?

TOM WALSINGHAM

It was decided.

MARLOWE

With the passive voice, you think you hide it.

“It was decided. Can’t be sure who said,

I want the poet, Marlowe, to be dead.”

So you ‘scape whipping, Tom, and sent your cur,

To do whatever deed he might infer

From some vague statement you pull from your hat,

Like, “Rid me of this priest!” Remember that?

I’m from Canterbury where a King killed a saint,

Or had him killed by uttering a complaint,

In front of thugs, in front of canines who

Were hot to do what he wanted them to do.

And so you’re innocent. Meanwhile, your drones

Go do your work, thus sparing you the bones

Of whatever corpses you create.

You never have to face those whom you hate,

Again. They disappear.

TOM WALSINGHAM

I don’t hate you,

Dear Christopher, my Kit.

MARLOWE

Then I’ll pull through.

William? Sisters? I’m not dead! I live!

If I can find it in my head: Forgive

My Murderers, They Who Misunderstood—

MARGARET

--What you did for poetry’s own good.

MARLOWE

What I did for truth. And my own pleasure.

TOM WALSIINGHAM

Kit, I remember times that I will treasure.

MARLOWE

A well-worn keepsake. Never understood by you.

MARGARET

I understand you, Christopher, I do.

ANNE

I try to understand.

DOROTHY

And I do, too.

WILLIAM

I understand so much from you, I’ll steal

Everything I can—

MARLOWE

We have a deal.

TOM WALSINGHAM

Kit, I—

MARLOWE

What, Tom?

TOM WALSINGHAM

I had to have a wife,

And have to have a respectable life.

I can’t live on the margin anymore.

MARLOWE

So you’ve become the Queen’s killer and whore.

You’re good at that, at last, something to do

That makes you a man, instead of someone who

Lives a life of ordinary lies, mundane,

Dying with an angry wife in pain,

Filled by longing, instead of filled by you,

Except the pokes that net a child or two.

She’ll never know that lusty Tom I knew,

Wild, hot Walsingham, in rooms, in groves,

On horseback, in a barn, the smell of cloves

In that open field, under that sky and moon,

So fulgent, steamy, wet, you made me swoon

With ardent knowing of what’s valuable in life.

She’ll never know that, at least with *you*, your wife.

TOM WALSINGHAM

You’re saying she’ll betray me?

MARLOWE

I hope so.

For her sake, anyway. You’re free to go.

TOM WALSINGHAM

I say when I’m free to go. I’m going. Now.

[TOM WALSINGHAM exits]

[Beat. Everyone waits to see how MARLOWE is taking all of this]

MARLOWE

To think I used to really love him. Wow.

DOROTHY

But you’re psychic, why didn’t you know—

ALICE and MARGARET

Hush.

[MARLOWE embraces DOROTHY]

MARLOWE

When love strikes, keep your head, Dot Marlowe.

On second thought, lose your head, both of them.

It’s worth the wonder.

MARGARET

Love is a dream.

ALICE

[referencing her pregnant belly]

Nightmare.

MARLOWE

Here’s something from the future I can share.

*Things base and vile, folding no quantity,*

*Love can transpose to form and dignity:*

*Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;*

*And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.*

SHAKESPEARE

That verse is very good. What is it from?

MARLOWE

Something you will write in times to come.

SHAKESPEARE

How do you know?

MARLOWE

Don’t give up, Will. Good-bye.

[long beat. MARLOWE waits to “die”]

I also know I’m dead. Why can’t I die?

MARGARET

I think it’s immortality, dear Kit.

MARLOWE

But, do I have to be here for it?

Because I feel no joy, no anger, lust,

No irritation, boredom, even—just

A rhythm from a heartbeat in my chest,

Getting lighter, as I speak. Can I rest?

No angels come for me, sweet Catholic Will

But if one shows, you shall see me kill

An angel and devour its heart.

Of religion, I still want no part.

If spirit exists, mine will reside

Holding up each iamb from inside.

My head is hurting from the violence.

Read some Ovid over me, then silence.

[MARLOWE collapses and SHAKESPEARE catches him].

SHAKESPEARE

He’s so heavy. Help me.

[MARGARET helps SHAKESPEARE lay MARLOWE down. Then she puts her cheek on his mouth]

MARGARET

I feel no breath.

SHAKESPEARE

Neither do I.

ANNE

He’s gone. He’s silent.

DOROTHY

Death.

That’s how we know. No words.

MARGARET

Wake up, Kit!

SHAKESPEARE

You know he won’t, dear Maggie. That was it.

MARGARET

And now the empty, stupid world comes back,

The one I’ve lived in, with this awful fact:

The love of my life, my own brother,

Whose like I’ll never see in any other,

Is gone. His words live on, of course, blah, blah.

Whatever people say to mask the raw,

Unpalatable fact that someone they knew,

Unbridled, weird, specific, more than true,

Is gone, will come no more. Even if I’m screaming

For him.

ANNE

Meg—

DOROTHY

[still innocent]

Maybe he’ll come when you’re dreaming.

ANNE

Dorothy, Will, let’s put him in this pall

Our mother made.

MARGARET

I’ll help. You need us all.

Fold his arms. I’ll cradle his head,

Even though he’s--

[Long beat. They look at Margaret]

DOROTHY

Finish the couplet.

MARGARET

Dead.

[The sisters and SHAKESPEARE get MARLOWE ready to put in the pall]

DOROTHY

Something stinks.

ALICE

[pointing to MARLOWE’S body]

It’s him.

DOROTHY

[pointing to SHAKESPEARE]

No, **he** smells funny.

ALICE

If I didn’t know better, I’d say it’s. . .cunny.

[The sound of surf and seabirds, blending into the next scene. This should prevent the audience from thinking the play has ended]

**LAST SCENE**

[SOUND OF SURF AND SEABIRDS continues. Lights up and the SISTERS and SHAKESPEARE are on the white cliffs. They are holding the empty pall, which contained MARLOWE’S body and are looking over the cliffs to see if he landed in the water]

DOROTHY

The surf carried him out. Any more last looks?

[the others shake their heads]

MARGARET

[reading from OVID]

This is Ovid. I found it in his books.

*“Now since the seas great surge has swept me on,*

*All canvas spread, hear me!*

*In all creation nothing endures.*

*As wave is driven by wave and each pursued*

*Pursues the wave ahead,*

*So time flies on and follows, flies and follows,*

*Always forever new, and—“*

[She pauses, having heard what she just read]

Wow.

*“What was before is left behind, what never was, is now.”*

ANNE

He’s gone. Now we live the rest of our lives

As mothers, daughters, aunties, grandmas, wives.

DOROTHY

Honorificabilitudinitatibus, my brother, Kit Marlowe.

MARGARET

[to SHAKESPEARE]

You’re silent. Anything to say?

SHAKESPEARE

Just ditto.

*[End of Act Two]*

**[END OF PLAY]**