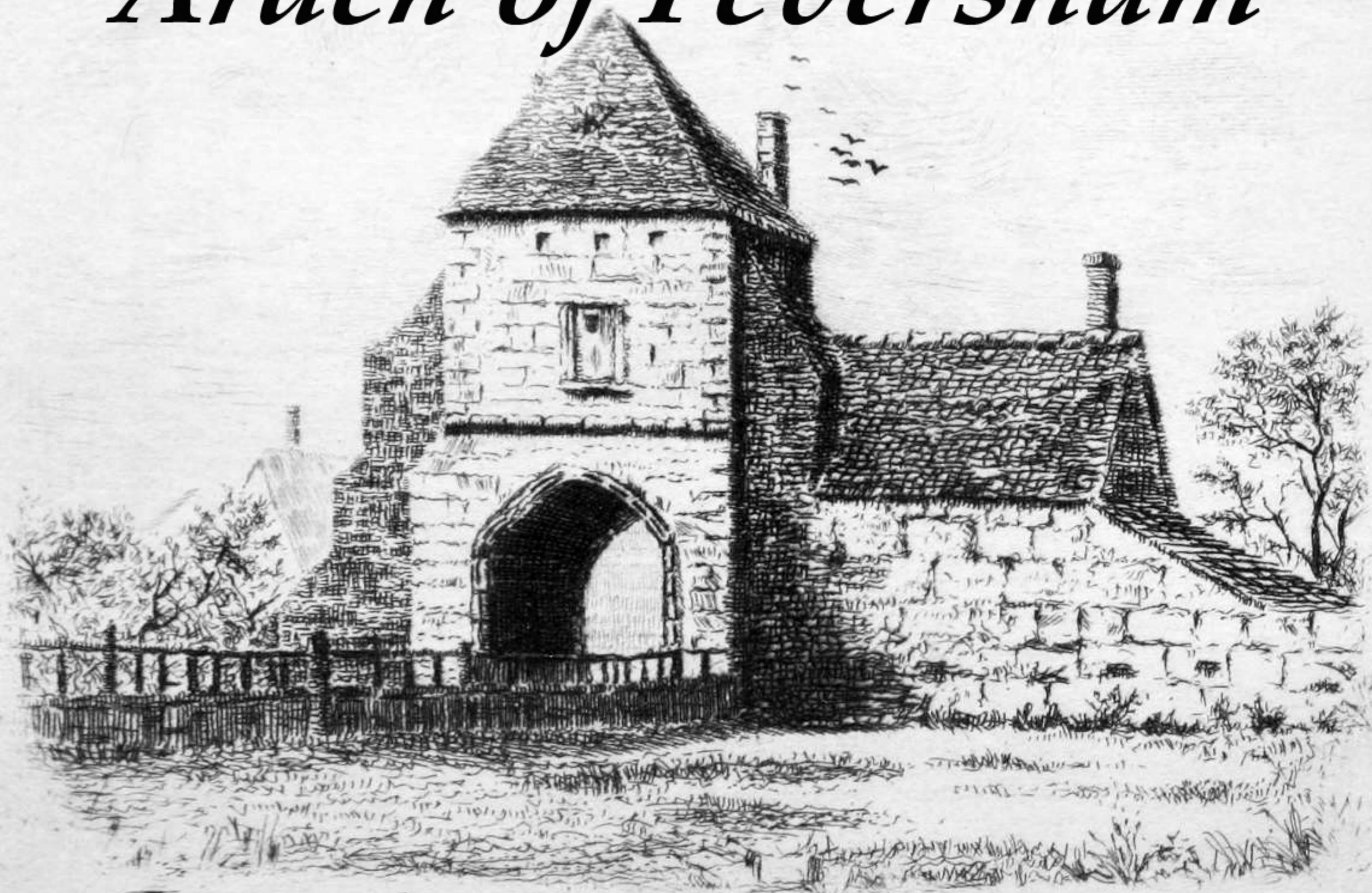


# *Arden of Feversham*



*Feversham Abbey.*

# *Arden of Feversham*

Social-realistic renaissance drama from Canterbury

translated from English to Swedish, and then translated again into English  
in revised versions by Christian Lanciai (2001 and 2018)

## *Dramatis Personae :*

Arden  
Alice, his wife  
Franklin, his friend  
Mosbie, Alice's lover  
Adam Fowl, host at the Golden Lily  
Michael, groom  
Clarke, painter  
Susan, his love, Mosbie's sister  
Dick Greene, ruined farmer  
Bradshaw  
Black Will  
Shakebag  
An apprentice  
Lord Cheiny  
a ferryman  
Dick Reede  
a sailor  
Mayor of Feversham  
A guard

The action is at Feversham, in London and in between, in the year 1550.

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*Arden of Feversham*

Act I scene 1. The House of Arden.

*Franklin* But what have you to complain of, Arden? The estate is yours! The duke has given you all the estates that belonged to the Feversham monastery with the king's own consent! Thank the old king and his plunder of the church for that! Now your family has something to live on forever!

*Arden* That's not what worries me, Franklin. My wife is betraying me.

*Franklin* With whom?

*Arden* With that fellow Mosbie. I have seen on his own finger the wedding ring that Alice had from me by the priest.

*Franklin* But that is not very honest.

*Arden* That's exactly what it isn't.

*Franklin* Then I understand your downcast state. How could an honest Christian behave in that way? But be comforted, my friend. It's hardly uncommon that women are deceitful and false. That's actually rather commonly the case. A faithful wife is a rare exception which the world refuses to believe in.

*Arden* But how could she fall for such a cheap nobody? I don't understand it.

*Franklin* What is he then?

*Arden* A simple patching tailor!

*Franklin* But how could he get at your wife?

*Arden* That slimy eel has sneaked into the favours of lord Clifford and now dresses up in silk and thinks he can fool the world.

*Franklin* That's outrageous not to say impertinent.

*Arden* Yes, that's exactly what it is.

*Franklin* What will you do about it?

*Arden* Hang him, of course! I will tie him to my wife's bed and there flog him until his bones are laid bare and then cut him into a hundred thousand pieces, so that he may sigh to death all naked in his own soaking blood! I will then prolong his death struggle as long as possible!

*Franklin* You must really love her then.

*Arden* The devil knows I do!

*Franklin* But believe me, my friend, the best weapon against women is mildness and leniency. Pretend that you know nothing and come with me to London. Then she will miss you in no time, and thus you will get her back.

*Arden* Do you really think so?

*Franklin* I think it's worth a try. The contrary will only make it worse. If you reproach her for her dishonesty, she will only feel provoked to go even further. Whatever you do, never show your jealousy.

*Arden* I think I know what you mean. I will dare it. (*calls*) Alice!

*Alice (enters)* Yes, my husband? Up so early? You left my bed before I woke up.

*Arden* You called for Mosbie in your sleep. Why do you dream about Mosbie?

*Alice* Can you help what you dream of? Can you decide your dreams yourself?

*Arden* But you hugged me in your sleep while you all the time repeated 'Mosbie' with obvious desire. Was it then only Mosbie you desired when you embraced me?

*Alice* You must have dreamt yourself. In our dreams we are all victims to uncontrollable fantasies.

*Franklin* Don't push it further, Arden. No one can be held responsible for what she dreams.

*Arden* No, I expect not.

*Alice* Now I know! We talked about Mosbie the other night! Of course, that's what caused the dream!

*Franklin* Of course, that's how it was. I remember myself how Mosbie was mentioned the other night.

*Arden* That's most probably how it was. My dearest wife, I know how much you love me. That's enough for me. Whatever you may dream doesn't matter.

*Alice* Of course.

*Arden* But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. I have to go to London.

*Alice* To London! For how long?

*Arden* Only for as long as my business will take.

*Franklin* A month at most.

*Alice* A month? That long! You kill me! I pray, for your own sake! Postpone your journey a day or two!

*Arden* It's not possible.

*Alice* Or else you kill me!

*Arden* I will be back as soon as I can. You know I can't be away from you for long. Now get me my breakfast, and then we'll leave. Come, Franklin, let's go to the harbour and check that my goods are brought ashore as they should.

*(gets up and leaves with Franklin)*

*Alice (alone)* A whole month of freedom! What a lovely message! O, ye gods, throw my husband off his horse, let him be attacked by heinous bandits and buried deeper under the earth than anyone can find him! Mosbie! I only love you, and you are all in life that I desire! Marriage is just words and a superficial connection. *(enter Adam from the Golden Lily)* Here is Adam from The Golden Lily! I hope indeed that he brings news for me from my darling. – How is it, Adam? Any message for me? You can speak quite openly. My husband is not at home.

*Adam* I have greetings to you from Mosbie, who is in town.

*Alice* Dear me, what does he say?

*Adam* You must under no circumstances visit him.

*Alice* But what does he mean?

*Adam* And not show any sign of his arrival.

*Alice* Good God! Is he then angry with me?

*Adam* I can't tell. But he seems dejected.

*Alice* But I must see him. It's impossible to live without it. You can't forbid me!

*Adam* I have delivered my message. If you get cross I had better leave.

*Alice* No, wait! Ask him why he is cross with me. Look, here is a gift for him from me. It's two dice in silver. We often played with them about kisses, so that whoever lost made us both win. – Ask him to come by tomorrow. My husband is in London, so there is no danger. He can just stop for some exchange of courtesy.

*Adam* I shall tell him what you said. (*takes the dice and leaves*)

*Alice* Yes, please do. I know that he only fears my husband and the gossip of our neighbours, but he won't have to any more from now on, for my husband will die, if even I have to settle it myself. (*Michael passes by.*) Michael, what are you doing here?

*Michael* I came to fetch my master's horse.

*Alice* Of course. You won't forget your promise?

*Michael* He will be dead within a week.

*Alice* That's the spirit! Here is my hand. As soon as he is dead, you will have Mosbie's sister.

*Michael* But I heard that the painter is also eager for her. He has even boasted that she belongs to him.

*Alice* Just idle gossip!

*Michael* They say he wrote verses to her that filled her heart with fancies. But I will send her a letter from London that will make her heart burn!

*Alice* Yes, do so, but don't overdo it! Susan is yours anyway beforehand.

*Michael* If only you keep your promise you can trust me for disposing of your husband. I will then obey you whatever you say.

*Alice* That's all I ask for. But don't do anything foolish.

*Michael* Even if I get caught, I shall never confess that you ordered it, and Susan could then as a virgin plead my release from the gallows.

*Alice* You shall never get caught! I promise you that!

*Michael* But tell Susan, madam, that I am worth at least ten master painters! And if I then get rid of my elder brother also I will take over Bocton's farm, and then our whole life will be well provided for. Such prospects are worth waging any risks! (*enter Mosbie*)

*Alice* Here is Mosbie. Go to it, Michael. Do your duty, and remember that my orders are strictly private and most secret.

*Michael* Of course. (*leaves*)

*Alice* Mosbie! My love!

*Mosbie* We can't talk now.

*Alice* What's wrong? You have nothing to fear.

*Mosbie* Where is your husband?

*Alice* Down by the river to check his cargo.

*Mosbie* I hope he will stay away. And I must ask you never more to come near me.

*Alice* Is this the love you pledged to me? Have I then forfeited my honour for nothing? Have you forgotten how we intimately in the darkness of the night planned my husband's death for the sake of our love? Are you so heartless in your breach of trust? Then get lost, and never come near me again!

*Mosbie* Alas, so it is true what everybody says. A woman's love is like the flame of the moth's approach to the candle, passing as a lightning in the same moment it was lit. I just wanted to probe you. Alas, why could you not stand my test?

*Alice* When was I ever deceitful? What did I do to make you probe me?

*Mosbie* Forgive me, my dear. When you love you are jealous.

*Alice* Everything is forgiven, for I love you and listen gladly to the song of the siren, which I well know will lead me to perdition.

*Mosbie* Don't paint the devil on the wall, Alice. The world may perish, but I will see to it that we don't.

*Alice* Now I recognize you. You are a man, in contrast to my husband, who only thinks of his gold and to nourish his greed. Now he is unloading his cargo in the harbour, with all those riches that will be yours, but then he will go off to London together with that stupid nincompoop Franklin.

*Mosbie* If you just do as I say, he will not return from there.

*Alice* If only that could be true!

*Mosbie* Listen now! I know a painter who can mix colours without leaving a trace.

*Alice* What painter is that?

*Mosbie* His name is Clarke and lives nearby. Well, there he is! Hello, Clarke! Come in!

*Clarke (enters)* What is it?

*Mosbie* We can trust you?

*Clarke* Of course, but on a condition. You have a sister, Mosbie, whom I love. I'll do anything for you, if only she will be mine.

*Mosbie* That's not a difficult deal. You are a man as good as any man. Here is my hand on the agreement.

*Clarke* Then my art, my life and all I have is at your service. *(They shake hands on it.)*

*Alice* But most important of all is for you to keep quiet!

*Mosbie* I know him. He is well informed about the problem.

*Clarke* Yes, I know it very well. You have a husband you wish to get rid of. I call that the bravest nobility, since you rather risk your life for a man you love than live with a husband who is a burden to you. I call that true love. I would do the same for my Susan, if it was needed.

*Alice* I am only doing it because I have no choice. I would let my husband live on indeed if he would only let me have my Mosbie, but since he is jealous and interferes in my private affairs it doesn't work any longer. He will lie as he makes his own bed.

*Mosbie* What poison do you suggest? I know you have something of a rich repertoire.

*Clarke* Indeed. *(shows a small bottle)* A drop of this in something he eats or drinks, and he is stone dead within the hour.

*Mosbie* That sounds like it.

*Alice* That's what I call a party. And then we will have a celebration for you and your Susan.

*Mosbie* I shall generously bestow my sister's dowry.

*Clarke* It's all arranged, then. But I see your husband. I had better leave.  
(*Arden and Franklin return.*)

*Alice* But here is my husband like on demand! Then you can ask him yourself, Mr Mosbie.

*Mosbie* Sir, when I was in London I was offered, I know not by what right, the monastery estate which the king appears to have given you. The man who offered me the estate was Mr Greene in the service of Tony Ager. That is why I ask you now: does anybody else have any right to the property, or is it all yours?

*Arden* It belongs only to me, for I have the king's own warrant thereof. But I need also a warrant for my wife. But how does that concern you? Alice, my breakfast! I am in a hurry now and must leave at once. And what are you doing here alone with my wife? She must not associate with such lowborn commoners as you.

*Mosbie* I was not looking for her but for you and renounce your insinuating insults.

*Arden* Are you looking for a fight, you deceitful scumbag?

*Franklin* Gentlemen, no quarrel, please! You are in the company of a lady!

*Arden* You conceited upstart! You are only a tailor and are not allowed to carry a sword, according to law. I will relieve you of it. (*takes care of Mosbie's rapier*) Get you gone now to your needles and scissors! Next time I see you here, you blasted seducer, I shall cut off both your legs and include your throat!

*Mosbie* I call God for witness, Sir, that you here have insulted me!

*Arden* Yes, just make a fool of yourself in public from my house! They will laugh at it, you boasting fool of a blasted miscreant!

*Mosbie* I never desired your wife, Arden, I assure you! I showed my weakness to her once, yes, I admit it, but it passed, and if I visit you again it will only be for my sister's sake, since she will be her maid at the wedding. I wish her welfare and happiness, and also yours, and may God punish me with eternal torments if I even come near to the possibility to violate her honour or yours.

*Arden* My friend, forgive me. Your eloquence has convinced me, and I retract everything. Forget everything I told you, and let's be friends.

*Franklin* This I like: reconciliation and diplomacy, good will across all borders! That's how all relationships should be handled. But I pray you, Mosbie, just for security, avoid this house in the future, so that wicked tongues may not find nourishment for lies and slander.

*Arden* No, on the contrary, my dear Mosbie! Come here as often as you please and feel at home! I will be gone for London now for a month, so why don't you come here and live here in the meanwhile?

*Alice (bringing in the food)* Your breakfast gets cold, dear husband. Eat your fill now.

*Arden* Mr Mosbie, won't you sit down and share this meal with me?

*Mosbie* I'll be glad to keep you company but no more than that. I am not hungry.

*Arden* Please yourself. (*tastes the soup*) Have you seen Michael, wife? Did he manage the horses?

*Alice* Of course. But why will you not eat? Is the soup not tasty enough?

*Arden* There is some odious extra taste to it that doesn't fit. Did you make the soup yourself?

*Alice* Of course, and that's the only reason why you don't like it. (*pours it in the drain*) I can never make you anything that pleases you! You must always complain and quarrel, criticize, be gloomy and negative! You might as well have accused me of mixing poison in your soup! Whatever I do you get suspicious and think only the worst of me! Accuse me then thoroughly at once! Have you ever seen me giving Mosbie a kiss of any other kind than just for greeting? Present the evidence, if you have any!

*Mosbie* Lady Alice, you wrong both him and me by such unreasonable outburst! Your husband is not jealous!

*Arden* Dear wife, just because I don't have an appetite you don't have to go berserk in senseless hysteria! My good Franklin, give me some mithridate to alleviate my small pain.

*Franklin* Here you are. And then let's promptly sit up on horseback and get away at last!

*Arden* Exactly!

*Alice* Let me taste the soup myself! Let me prove to you that I never had a thought of putting poison in it! I really wish it was replenished with all possible kinds of poisons, so that I could die! That you could torture a poor wife with such a horrible suspicion!

*Arden* But, my dearest wife, whatever gave you that idea? I never suspected you for anything one bit! And you poured away the good soup down the drain.

*Alice* So it's good now, when you no longer can have it!

*Arden* Don't start all that again!

*Alice* And if you dare mistrust me, God will punish you, for never did a wife love her husband as faithfully as I have been true to you.

*Arden* I believe you. Stop it now, or else you will make me cry.

*Franklin* But what's the meaning of these preposterous scenes? Come, let's be off!

*Alice* Let me follow, so that he can travel in my arms.

*Arden* It pains me, dearest, but I am sorry to say that I will have to go without you.

*Alice* Alas, you go away and leave me alone! Stay, if you love me! But if you have such important business, then go, stay away, and I will bewail you like dead. At least write me some letters, every week, yes, every day, if you don't want me to die from grief.

*Arden* What did I do to deserve such an ideal wife? Yes, my heart, I will write every day to you, so that you drown in the floods of correspondance that I will send you.

*Alice* Goodbye then precious husband. Take well care of him, Franklin, and look to it that you bring him home again in a perfect condition. (*kisses him*)

*Franklin* But if he loiters it's not my fault. Remember your promise, Mosbie! Behave yourself!

*Mosbie* Of course. He has no reason for any jealous mistrust.

*Arden* Hey, my friend, you have my fullest confidence and trust forever. Come now, Michael. Let's go. And Mosbie, always think of me as your best friend. (*leaves with Franklin and Michael*)

*Alice (sighs)* At last! I thought he would never leave! But did you mark how well I acted my part?

*Mosbie* You almost did it too well. But what a fumbling idiot and failure of a fake that painter was! What was the poison he gave us? Sugar pills?

*Alice* What a bluff of a worthless deceiver! His poison should have been tasteless and unnoticeable! But my crook of a husband got a bitter taste at once and refused to taste any more of it, while he remained completely untouched by that so expressly guaranteed deadly decoction!

*Mosbie* Yes, it was a thorough fiasco indeed.

*Alice* But my husband is gone now and we are here.

*Mosbie* But I have now sworn never more to strive for your grace as long as he remains alive.

*Alice* What are sworn oaths? Only loose words! I swore a pledge of faith at the altar to my unhangd husband, and nothing has grown so worthless and ridiculous to me as that oath. Promises are winds and whims of weather blowing one direction one day only to the following day blow everything away.

*Mosbie* Still I intend to keep my promise.

*Alice* Do so then! Which means, that you are free to love me as soon as he is dead. That soup and its poison was just trash going down the drain. But there are other means and methods, aren't there? How many a day are not struck down or clubbed down in the pubs of London? We could arrange some convenient accident in a dark corner of some pub that we made him visit... (*enter Greene*)

*Mosbie* Who is that? Do you know him?

*Alice* Yes, I think he could be the right instrument for us. Leave me alone with him. I will arrange something. (*Mosbie leaves.*)

*Greene* I heard that your husband unfortunately has left for some business.

*Alice* Perhaps I could help you instead?

*Greene* Perhaps. I am only looking for some information.

*Alice* Then I am sure to be of help.

*Greene* I heard that your lawful wedded husband some time ago by royal grant obtained some property that earlier belonged to the Feversham monastery. But others had the right of property before him. He has stolen it and under public eyes. Tell me, madam, did he obtain a royal legal confirmation of the property?

*Alice* Yes, he did. All other certificates of that property have no legal validity any more.

*Greene* If that is the case he robs me of my livelihood, for I waged all I had in those grounds when I held the lease. If he with such ruthlessness cultivates his morbid greed, forcing honest working people to be beggars, I must ask you to forward to him that we intend to avenge ourselves in such a manner that he will regret this foulest deed of his life to his death!

*Alice* I know nothing about this but convey my sincerest regrets. If he acts like that against others, you might well imagine how he treats me.

*Greene* You don't mean to say that he mistreats you, his own wife, who is of such a good family, of highest reputation and respect all over Kent!

*Alice* I must ask you not to spread the word any further, but if I could confess myself to you, you would have insights in the tyranny of a brutal rake. If he doesn't scorn me, accuse me of unheard of and absurd crimes and thinks the worst of me, he beats me to exhaustion to then party around London among prostitutes and other doubtful people while he tries to engage lewd killers to visit me in private to do away with me...

*Greene* But that is outrageous! How is such a bully allowed to carry on? Every year he lives is one year too long! I thought that villain guilty of many things but never of such atrocious baseness! Imagine! And he goes around with such an impeccable image and reputation! He makes business earning him more respect than any nobleman in Kent! That blasted villain! And such a fellow is allowed to go free without being hanged! It's not fair! But we are a number who have reason enough to salt some bills for him. He has fooled many and not only maltreated you. I believe, my lady, that God has sent me to you to release you from this hell and marriage with this cruel monster of a husband. I shall have the deed of gift to that property, and my price shall be no more than what he deserves!

*Alice* You seem quite serious.

*Greene* God knows that I would rather part with my life than with my life's work in that property!

*Alice* But you can't take the law arbitrarily into your own hands just like that. It's too risky. Let me present a safer suggestion. Here are ten pounds for you. For that you could probably find a willing underground murderer to do the job for you. Then when my husband is safely dead, I promise you twenty pounds more plus the property that was stolen from you.

*Greene* That sounds too good to be completely convincing. What security do you offer me? How can I be sure?

*Alice* I can give you no more than my word of honour. Here is my hand, and with the other (*raising it*) I swear to stand by my word.

*Greene* Then I willingly accept your word and hand. (*accepts her hand*) I will go to London at once. When I return he shall be dead.

*Alice* I will thank you for that. My gratitude is without limits.

*Greene* You may already regard the mission as accomplished. (*leaves*)

*Alice* Whoever accomplishes the deed, I wish him luck. May God keep that murderer's hand steady when he strikes! – But here is Clarke and Mosbie. We will probably hear about how that failure of a painter was mistaken and blundered on his sacred mission.

*Mosbie* How did it go, Alice?

*Alice* Good news. We have a man on his way to London.

*Mosbie* We'll deal with that later. But our friend the painter here wishes to know at once how you persuaded my sister to marry him.

*Alice* He hasn't fulfilled his obligations. And he had better propose himself.

*Clarke* I gave you the poison! Did you not use it?

*Alice* My husband refused to eat of the bitter medicine.

*Clarke* We'll just have to try again, then. But I take you on your word and go at once to secure Susan by proposing to her myself. (*leaves*)

*Mosbie* Well, how did it go?

*Alice* The man was Dick Greene, you know, whom Arden cheated of the monastery property. He if anyone has reason enough to revenge himself on Arden, and I succeeded in boosting his reasons! I gave him ten pounds to hire some cheap murderer to efficiently transport Arden into a better world, and promised our angel twenty pounds extra except that propoerty when the mission was accomplished. He has already left for London.

*Mosbie* That's careless! You give any groom and angry amateur in London ten pounds to blunder away with and expose us to the world! Couldn't you have managed it a bit more discreetly?

*Alice* He seemed absolutely honest.

*Mosbie* Yes, what you have done cannot be undone. We'll just have to wish him luck and hope that he doesn't immediately drink it all up in the pubs of London and forget all about it.

*Alice* But I know him. He is pious and highly praised for his saintliness.

*Mosbie* I just hope you are right. Or else there are alternatives.

(*enter Clarke and Susan*)

*Alice* Well, Clarke? Have I managed to put a good word for you to Susan Chastity?

*Clarke* Yes, thank you, you have succeeded well.

*Mosbie* So there will be nuptials?

*Clarke* Yes, to be sure! She said yes!

*Alice* Look how she blushes!

*Clarke* She is only shy.

*Mosbie* So, sister, it pleases you to have your painter for a husband?

*Susan* It's up to you. If you agree to it I will not protest.

*Mosbie* I agree, but then the painter also must accomplish his task.

*Clarke* I'll do whatever you wish. Just tell me what to do.

*Mosbie* I know that you know the art of preparing a crucifix, so that who gets it in his hand immediately gets sorted out and dies. I ask you to produce and deliver such a holy crucifix.

*Clarke* And who will be the recipient?

*Mosbie* That's our business.

*Clarke* It could take some time.

*Mosbie* How long?

*Clarke* About ten days.

*Mosbie* Ten days' delivery?  
*Alice* Just have it done securely, so that the results are guaranteed not to fail.  
*Clarke* I know my art well enough to make a more sacred cross than anyone else.  
*Mosbie* Go to your honest craft then, and we'll go to ours.  
*(Clarke leaves with Susan.)*

I think we can consider your husband as dead with calm assurance.  
*Alice* You mean, that you could already tonight forget all about your oath and use me as you please to replace that husband that is to be murdered?  
*Mosbie* Our cards are safe now. For every day that Arden lives on, there are more and more deadly traps triggering more murderers against him.  
*Alice* Then use me as my husband. The lord of my heart is also lord of my house. *(They leave.)*

Act II scene 1. A dark pub in London.  
*(Greene and Bradshaw by a table, each with a pint of beer.)*

*Bradshaw* It's easy to get people killed in these days. You could practically hire anybody.  
*Greene* Well, it can't really be as easy as that.  
*Bradshaw* Naturally, if you want to be sure of the outcome, you can't exactly engage any virgin. *(enter Will and Shakebag into the pub)*  
*Greene* Of course not. But the price must be fair.  
*Bradshaw* Do you see those two?  
*Greene* Of course. They look scary. Do you know them?  
*Bradshaw* One of them is Will, one of the worst rotten eggs on earth. The other I don't know, but he should be of the same sort. Will and I were together at war in Boulogne, where he conducted such tricks that he scared all the regiment. He is called Black Will, and if you just give him the smallest coin he will kill anyone for you anywhere.  
*Greene* That sounds good. That's just the man I am looking for.  
*Will (coming up to them)* Hello, Bradshaw, you old archdevil rotten to the core! What are you doing here so early?  
*Bradshaw* Don't talk to me, Will. I denied and refused your acquaintance long ago.  
*Will* But Bradshaw, weren't we friends at Boulogne camping together? Have you forgotten all our merry war memories, happy fights and naval battles uniting comrades for life unto death! *(thumps him vigorously in the back)*  
*Bradshaw* Leave us alone, Will.  
*Will* You were not cocky then, when you were only a mercenary and I a corporal! In those days you were merry and asked to join our merry pranks! Do you remember how I stole that half ox from the canteen-keeper and shared it with all the company? Those were happy days! Now you are cocky because you have become a

goldsmith and made three silver tablets in the shop! Are you so aloof and inhuman just because you became established?

*Bradshaw* I left all dirty business behind me, Will. I am straight now.

*Will* Do you call it dirty business to work for your daily bread so that the villains go down while the merrier kind manages? You are unfair, Bradshaw! Although you are snooty I would gladly share my purse with you over a few drinks, if I wasn't in good company already. But what are you up to being busy so early, and who is your friend?

*Bradshaw* Perhaps you could help me. I have something going on in London. This is my friend Greene from Feversham.

*Will* What's your racket?

*Bradshaw* Some time ago I came across a silver piece quite cheaply, which appeared to have been stolen from a lord, who now wants to see me hanged because it was found with me. Now I must find the thief, or else I am done for.

*Will* Do you know who the thief was?

*Bradshaw* A thin villain with a crooked nose, deep wrinkles in his brow, hollow-eyed and harrowed, emaciated by liquor and abuse, long curly hair hanging down in stripes across his face with insanely angry eyes...

*Will* How was the bloke dressed?

*Bradshaw* In torn clothes with holes everywhere, threadbare trousers patched up everywhere, sticking out knees and elbows and toes in fresh holes, but with countless pockets inside. He was a wandering professional cache.

*Will* Shakebag, come here! Do you remember when we were sitting in Sittingburn and I knocked off a few bottles, we partied so that I then bashed the skull of a waiter with a cudgel when he wanted to throw us out?

*Shakebag* Of course I remember.

*Will* We had some silver we had bought with which we paid the salted bill to the last penny. (*to Bradshaw*) What do you give for the name of the man who sold us the silver?

*Bradshaw* Who was it, good Will?

*Will* I sure know who it was. It was Jack the Pussy, no one else. And he is exactly as rough as you just described your chum, who sold you your stolen silver.

*Bradshaw* And where is he now? How could I find him?

*Will* The Pussy is in jail waiting for his sentence for a stolen horse.

*Bradshaw* That's good news! Now I feel better at once. Then I report that villain to the angry lord, and the matter will be settled. I leave you, Mr Greene, for now I am in a hurry.

*Greene* Would you just leave this letter to Alice Arden when you pass Feversham?

*Bradshaw* I'll be delighted. Here, my old pal Will, a coin with thanks for your help! (*gives Will a coin*)

*Will* Thanks for that! There you see! Old veterans from the French war in the channel can not stop being friends no matter how damned honest they desperately try to become. And to your honour, Bradshaw, I shall never touch a drop of water

until this coin is used up for drinking to the last drop! Come on now, Shakebag, to business and drinking!

*Greene* No, my good gentlemen, I pray, please stay for a moment! I might have something for you, if you want to earn real money, say, twenty coins.

*Will* Twenty? That's not a bad offer. You can get your own father murdered for that sum, if you wish to inherit him! We only make clean jobs. We dispose of all witnesses in the bargain!

*Shakebag* Yes, just let us know if you would like to dispatch the mother in the same way with all your brothers and sisters and relatives!

*Greene* Indeed, you make an impression of honesty and reliability itself! I think we could reach some agreement with profits for everyone.

*Will* Let's hear the deal!

*Greene* Do you know Arden, patron of Feversham?

*Shakebag* A stupid, self-important, complacent and troublesome miser.

*Greene* He has robbed me of the entire property of the Feversham monastery, and I want revenge for it with a vengeance! Nothing less can satisfy me now than the crook's liquidation.

*Shakebag* Where is the money?

*Greene* I have it here. (*produces a pouch*) I wish to make a deposit of it in the villain's own blood!

*Will* You have already deposited it in hell. Give it over to me, and it shall be my sport to cut that idiot down when he stands pissing against a wall. You can calmly consider him dead already.

*Shakebag* Where is he?

*Greene* He is here in London now staying at Aldgate Street.

*Shakebag* He couldn't be more dead when I and Will condemned his soul in advance to eternal death in hell. He has set his last onions and is finished.

*Greene* There are ten pounds in this pouch. You shall have the rest when he is done for.

*Will* You make it tickle agreeably in my fingers. We understand each other. If only we had jobs like this all the year round! We would deserve it, since our craft is both honest and propitious – we only take care of abominable inhuman and ugly idiots who only make a nuisance of themselves in bullying their vicinity. By my soul, our profession should be made legitimate! And I would then be an exemplary leader and father to the union organization! Now I propose that we baptize the job and the contract in a jug of sack! How about it?

*Shakebag* There is no valid deal until you have drunk to it.

*Greene* Be my guests!

*Will* Cheers! Then we are agreed! Let's have a jug of sack right away if not two!

*(They are being served and start drinking.)*

Scene 2. At Arden's inn.

*Michael* Now I have indeed put together a letter that could make any seducing painter pale and crack up:

*(reads his letter)* "Alas, Miss Susan, here I go sighing and longing for you like a turtledove for his nest! Just give that shabby painter with his colour buckets of poison the boot so that he gets lost out of our lives, and everything will then be settled. Think of your faithful Michael instead, who drunk by the dregs of your love will stick to you with his fidelity like the tar plaster on the back of a saddle-broken horse, as an insurance that I will remain eternally yours, your servant Michael."

*Arden (has entered with Franklin)* What are you up to, knave? Don't know that I am in a hurry for Kent?

*Franklin* He seems to be busy writing love letters instead of attending to his duties.

*Arden* Let me see! *(snatches the letter from Michael)* But this is downright funny! The painter, the groom and the maid! An eternal-triangle drama! You mustn't waste your time on things like that in working hours, you profligate! Seduce whoever you like whenever you like, but not during work hours in my service! Understood?

*Michael* Yes, Sir. *(Greene, Will and Shakebag show up)*

*Arden* She is even Mosbie's sister, an ordinary dirty hussy! Can't you do better? She has nothing under her skirts except slimy lewdness and debauchery. She will be thrown out of my house as soon as I get home. You can chase better petticoats, Michael, off my house!

*Michael* Yes, Sir.

*Arden* We leave now but will soon be back. Get the horses ready till then!

*Michael* Yes, Sir. *(they leave)* That's for me to decide, which wench I prefer.

*Greene (to Will)* You just saw Arden leave with his best friend Franklin. That is his groom over there.

*Will* It will be easy to kill all three.

*Greene* No, gentlemen, not so fast, please! Take it easy! Don't touch the servant! He is innocent. Wait here in peace and quiet until Arden comes back, and then you can easily dispose of him. I leave you until all is done with. *(leaves)*

*Shakebag* If we don't manage this I am a deceiver.

*Will* It will be an easy match, for sure, buddy! When he comes I'll just pierce him right through, and then we vanish at once across the river.

*Shakebag* Just don't miss the target, Black Will.

*Will* How could I miss with twenty quid in sight? It's a practical impossibility!

*An apprentice (looks out from a window above them)* It's late. I had better close the window before people come out from St. Paul's. *(lets the window down, which hits Will in his head)*

*Will* God's death and hell to all cursed demons, Shakebag! Who the devil is trying to kill me?

*Shakebag* Someone let the window down.

Will I am almost dead! Here I lie with a cloven skull! How can we manage our business now?

Shakebag Did he cleave your skull, that inconsiderate peeping Tom?

Will I was punctured! I was shot under the water mark! I just can't make it any more!

*(Arden and Franklin return with Michael)*

Arden What's on? What's the racket?

Franklin Surely just an ordinary brawl arranged by hoodlums to be able to empty the pockets of people coming from church, when curiosity halts them and make them throng and bustle together to watch the row.

Arden Just ordinary rowdies. Well, that's nothing then. *(leaves with Franklin)*

Will I shall have indemnity for this!

Apprentice *(opens the window)* I know your kind! You always keep hanging around here waiting for an opportunity to empty peoples' pockets! Just get out of here!

Will What restitution will I have for my crushed skull?

Apprentice You'll have a good spanking and thrashing for nothing and then bread and breakfast free of charge in jail if you don't get lost!

Shakebag Hard times.

Will Hard windows but fortunately a harder skull. Yes, I'll leave, but next time I get a window on my head I will smash all the windows of that house and start a fire of it! I warn you, accursed blooming window hooligans! *(leaves with Shakebag)*  
Alas, Shakebag, this will ruin us for the moment. My skull doesn't matter, but that Arden got away is a total disaster.

Greene *(enters)* So there you are, you miserable blunderers! What's the matter with you? Don't you dare to do the job? I saw Arden a moment ago, as full of complacency as an intact unopened sack of marzipan.

Shakebag We were sabotaged.

Will Of course we'll dare fulfill the mission, but we didn't count on the extra charges. Murdering that man imperils our lives. We must have ten pounds more to outweigh the odds. Behold this bump! Every drop of blood of me is worth at least one French crown, and I was given ten pounds just to steal away a dog, and we didn't get any more for such an advanced murder as this! Do it yourself, if you want to risk losing your head!

Greene *(to Shakebag)* What happened?

Shakebag He had an unlucky blow from above by misfortune just as Arden came quite willingly to get dispatched.

Greene Accident at work?

Will To say the least! My bump doubles the specific weight of my head!

Shakebag We shall manage better next time, and then we'll not be in the way of dropped window bombs.

Greene Tough luck, boys! But our deal is confirmed, and it must be executed. I have your word on it, which you solemnly swore by your own blood in the holy water of sack! Just try again, some other time, some other place.

*Will* But in order to patiently carry on walking around the well the donkey must have a carrot. We managed one round, and the carrot is lost. I broke any oaths in my past, for nothing is sacred, not even a vow confirmed by sack! So taunt us, and revitalize our morals by more money, and we promise you, that no one would feel a greater urge to end Arden's tragedy in blood than we! I shall not wipe off my own blood from my brow, that keeps running down my front, until I carry in my hand the dead heart that once belonged to the wickedness of Arden the miser!

*Greene* That's the spirit! Are you with us. Shakebag?

*Shakebag* You can fail once, but you always have better chances the second time.

*Greene* That's fair reasoning, Shakebag! You learn to eliminate risks! So let's now instead decide when and where we shall shed the thick blood of Arden and drink it... (*enter Michael*)

Here is his valet, a stolid groom. That nut is enamoured with the little sister of Mrs Arden's lover Mr Mosbie, and he swore to Mosbie to take the life of his master if he would only have Mosbie's sister... We could use that idiot. – Michael, hey, where are you going?

*Michael* My master just finished his dinner, and I was going to make his bed.

*Greene* Where did he have his dinner?

*Michael* As always here in London at "The White Mare". But good day to you, Mr Shakebag! And isn't it Black Will? But my Lord how you're bleeding! What has happened?

*Will* Can't you see for yourself that it is only noseblood? It happens all the time and to anybody! Have you never seen blood before in your life? You should be hanged for your rude impertinence!

*Michael* No offence! And if you are mean without a cause I had better leave.

*Greene* No, stay! Will is only out of humour since he had a hole in his head – anyone could be for less. Michael, say, you do care for your master?

*Michael* Yes, but why do you ask?

*Greene* I thought you might perhaps care more for his wife.

*Michael* I don't think so, but if it were, what is it to you?

*Shakebag* Don't stand there talking nonsense, but get to the point! Michael, I heard you had some sweetheart in Feversham.

*Michael* So what? If I have five, how does that concern you?

*Will* Shakebag, Greene, are you then complete fools? Can't you manage a conference without getting lost in idle blind alleys of roundabouts and thus lose all bearings of the subject?

*Michael* But what is the subject?

*Will* You love Mosbie's sister, don't you? And you promised Mosbie, in order to have his sister, to help her mistress in doing away with that boor and bully Arden, the horned bastard, didn't you?

*Michael* I didn't promise anything!

*Will* You are known to be more than just a coward, you are the acclaimed worst coward in all Kent! How then is it possible that you so sacredly and solemnly swear and promise Mosbie to take the life of your master and provider?

*Michael* I was blinded by my love! Alas, Susan was on her way to let herself be seduced by a simple dauber!

*Shakebag* Yes, that explains it.

*Will* Quiet! Shut up! I am the examiner here running the case! Now, my good Michael, expert on horse farts stable cowboy and dung collector, I am the one provided by destiny to send Arden from here to eternity in hell! We know your oath and your plot with Mosbie and your sweetheart, and we'll take care of Arden himself alone! Do you get it?

*Michael* I get it, but I don't see the point.

*Will* You will help us! It's your only way of getting away yourself! So tell us, where and in what manner could he be murdered?

*Shakebag* You have everything to gain, Michael: Mosbie's friendship and his sister for your wife.

*Greene* And you will also be rewarded by your mistress, who will raise your salary and status.

*Michael* So what's your angle?

*Will* Are you slow in mind? You must help us! Tip us, give advice, make yourself a bait for him, allure him to where we can dispatch him and metamorphise him into a formidable stinking useless corpse to the joy of us all who will survive him!

*Michael* Well, I give in and admit everything. Yes, I promised to assist in accomplishing my master's death, although he was always kind to me, and I thought indeed that I could never manage such an enterprise alone. But if you will do the job, I could be of service.

*Will (to Shakebag)* At last he got it.

*Michael* Come to his lodgings at Aldersgate tonight, and I will open the gate for you. Then walk up the stairs, and his room will be the one to the left. There you can do whatever you like with him, and I need not even look upon it.

*Shakebag* That sounds fair. What do you say?

*Will* Just be reliable and keep your promise, Michael, and everything will reach a happy and profitable end.

*Michael* I promise to do everything I can and all my best.

*Will* That's good. Or else you are lost.

*Greene* Leave now! Wait for us when we arrive late at night.

*Michael* You are welcome. (*leaves*)

*Shakebag* Then everything is arranged.

*Greene* Yes, everything will work out fine, and I am at ease.

*Will* We'll need a drink to that. I always get so damned thirsty when I am annoyed and get angry.

*Shakebag* On top of that you are worked up.

*Will* Which hardly makes it any better.

*Greene* Come! To the pub! (*they leave*)

*Michael (alone)* What shall I do? I am lost in the darkness of a passion play by devils about human souls. The lamb walks in peace grazing in the meadow, and I have invited the wolves to a gruesome wallowing feast on a lonely defenseless prey. But what can I do? I am caught in the hands of a league of murderers and can only hang on and follow the course or get sacrificed myself on the altar of evil. Alas, my lord, what did you do to deserve being hated by so many, yes, by all except myself and your friend Franklin? I never suffered any harm from you, you never changed my salary but observed it carefully and even gave me gratifications. But I have no choice but to keep my vows to my mistress and Mosbie and to this cruelly perverse gang of murderers and thus by treacherous hypocrisy lead my own master and benefactor, betrayed by the powers of greed and passion, to be butchered, without even being able to warn him. All I can do is to repress all silent voices of conscience, pretending they are not there, harden myself and blindly obey the rage of blind violence. Alas, how will this end?

Act III scene 1. The White Mare.

Arden and Franklin sitting by a pint of beer each.

*Franklin* My friend, don't grieve for your wife. Women can't help being like that.

*Arden* I know that more than well, but it's not her folly that grieves me. No, I am sorry for myself, my fate and that I allowed myself to be tricked. If she at least could feel some kind of shame! In that case I would be able to feel pity and inclined for a reconciliation. But she is so stuck in her shamelessness that she rejects my warnings and are not even aware of her own tragic debasement. The whole world is witness to my wife's unfathomable shame, which stands carved in letters of fire in her front with the only name 'Mosbie', which she alone is unable to see. And whatever I try to wake her up will only goad her like an encouragement of her vice to make her proceed to worse overdrafts. Dear me, I can't think of my own case and this humiliation without my eyes getting red for flushing tears!

*Franklin* My dear good Arden, you are not alone, and there are uncountable victims in the same position with even heavier burdens and with wives behaving even more recklessly with even more lovers! She must arrive at some repentance eventually, and by her regrets your sorrow will disappear if not earlier then at least by her death. She is after all digging her own grave.

*Arden* But I can't live with her any more! My own home has grown detestable and unbearable to me!

*Franklin* Then stay in London. You can live with me for the time being.

*Arden* But then Mosbie will have free hands and can boast from my empty seat about the feats of his utter shamelessness! Alas, whatever I do, the situation will only grow worse, since I can see no other solution to it than my own miserable death!  
(*enter Michael*)

*Franklin* Here is Michael. Pull yourself together.

*Arden* What's the time, my boy?

*Michael* She is soon ten.

*Arden* Nothing is slower than time, and you think you have all the time in the world, and then she runs out and far ahead of you, and you have lost it. Come, my friend, it's time to go to bed. (*leaves with Michael*)

*Franklin* I will follow you soon. Just go ahead.

What a misery is jealousy! What noble and elevated monseigneur could not by jealous broodings be reduced to a pitiable ridiculous pathetic clown with only base despicableness left of his whole being! It is too woeful, as if he wound himself into a bloodsucking tangle of octopus arms of self torment instead of working for his liberation! But I guess that's the deplorable nature of love.

*Michael (returns)* My master asks if you are not coming.

*Franklin* I will come presently. Is he already in bed? (*leaves*)

*Michael (coils up in a sofa)* Yes, and he would like you to put out the lights.

(*to himself*) In darkness two worlds fight each other: the force of reason in league with love against my conscience and the constant acceleration of its uncontrollable worry. Shall I then sacrifice the girl and my love and betray her mistress to save my provider, his money and his life? But the heaviest weight in the scales is hopelessly Black Will, the wild and cruel villain and his accomplice Shakebag, both murderers and hooligans without a conscience, who never showed pity in their bloody business deals, which they have the impudence to call an ordinary craft. These bandits have promised to kill me if I reveal anything of the conspiracy, and the more I think of it, the worse they appear, these terrible crooks, the worst in all Kent, and the less I can sleep. I can see them in front of me how they silently steal down on me in my sleep, drivelling of wrath and with knives dripping of blood in their mouths, how they grab me by the throat and growl like starved wolves: "We might as well send him directly to the other side before he betrays us!" To them I am just a mortal parenthesis, my death is a bad joke to immediately forget and my life a trifle to bloodily disappear in dark water to tracelessly flow out to sea to be gnawed at by fish until only white bones remain that quickly disappear in the sands of the dark abyss of the sea... No! I see them coming, and in their grinning wrinkles I find only all our graves! Alas, they are able to kill just for their own pleasure! I can't stand it! Wake up the neighbours! Help! The murderers are here! They are coming! (*yells and wakes up. Arden and Franklin come down in nightcaps with lighted candles.*)

*Franklin* Who is yelling so infernally around here? Is anybody butchering someone or cutting his throat!

*Arden* It's only Michael. He has been dreaming again. What's the matter. Michael? You are filling the whole house with terror!

*Michael* Alas, my lord, I dreamt something terrible again! I dreamt that two hired murderers were coming to kill me! I am sorry that I disturbed you!

*Arden* You only woke up the whole house. Tell me, is the gate locked well enough?

*Michael* I think I locked it.

*Arden* I had better go and have a look. (*leaves*)  
*Franklin* Do you often have such terrible nightmares?  
*Michael* No, I only have them now and then, but they have returned more often lately and also grown worse.  
*Franklin* Just take it easy. You'll see that it will be all right.  
*Arden (returning)* I can't believe my eyes! Can you imagine? Nothing was closed! Any murderers or thieves could get in here by every door and window! It's inexcusable! Michael, you are responsible for this! Don't do it again! Go now back straight to bed, and sleep tight this time!  
*Michael* I will do my best.  
*Franklin* I think you will succeed, now that everything is closed and all windows and the gate thoroughly locked. Perhaps it was your instinct which protected us bringing us to awareness of the danger that maybe was actually threatening.  
*Arden* Goodnight, my boy. Sleep without dreams. (*leaves with Franklin*)  
*Michael (alone)* Without intending it I actually saved my master's life for one more night and without betraying anyone. Perhaps I could at last go to sleep now. (*goes out with the lights and the scene.*)

## Scene 2. Outside

*Shakebag* Glorious night, inviting to crime and the blackest affairs of wickedness! Tonight we shall succeed! I feel it must! Mr Greene, keep away now, but be back again in an hour. Then we shall have sent that lousedog Arden from splendid solvency to total liquidation!  
*Greene* I hope you will succeed this time, boys, or else you will soon lose all your credibility.  
*Will* Are we then not qualified as villains? An accident happens very easy, and that villainous sabotage that last time ruined our possibilities was not even intentional. We can put every villain in all London out of business, if only we get started!  
*Greene* My friends, I never doubted your good will and intentions. Now I leave you to fulfill your mission and make yourselves worthy of the entire reward. (*leaves*)  
*Will* Damn, Shakebag, I wish it was all over! My legs feel like filled with lead. That's no good portent.  
*Shakebag* Nonsense, all we have to do is to club that old man to death or smother and strangle that knave. He will not even make any resistance. He is just a flourbag full of money.  
*Will* I know. That's what's wrong. Our job is too easy. There is no challenge in it.  
*Shakebag* You almost sound like being on the verge of getting redeemed for salvation. You are not a puritan, are you? In that case we might as well go to bed.  
*Will* Surely you don't accuse me of being a coward?  
*Shakebag* No, I guess that's the last thing I'll do.

*Will* Let's not hesitate then from accomplishing our uplifting and honourable craft. We must not fail our sacred duty!

*Shakebag* That's what I mean.

*Will* So move on then! Honour demands that we fulfill this honourable mission!

*Shakebag* That's what I mean. Here is now the house we are supposed to haunt.

*Will* If it's the right house the gate should have been opened in advance by our fellow Michael.

*Shakebag (tries the gate)* Damn, it's locked!

*Will* Is it the right house?

*Shakebag* There is no other white mare in London. Michael has fooled us, that miserable cheat!

*Will* Then damn me he shall see the devil! Try the sword and beat the latch! Then perhaps he will wake up.

*Shakebag (doing so)* He is sitting in there laughing at us. I am sure of it.

*Will* He has planted his last potato! That's for sure! If I don't cut off the arms and legs of that rascalion when we next meet, Black Will doesn't live up to his reputation!

*Shakebag* You can't cheat two professional experts in the craft of assassination like that!

*Will* You don't cheat honest professional killers!

*Shakebag* No! I'll cut out his nose and trample on it for his infamous cowardice!

*Will* We must tell Mr Greene about this. He will not be happy about it.

*Shakebag* Surely not. Such a high treason could make a peasant swear himself to death from anger!

*Will* There is another pub close by. We could go and sit there and wait out Arden while we fashion new intrigues with Greene.

*Shakebag* And there we can also fortify ourselves by suitable pints and jugs of not only ale and sack but also various other liquids.

*Will* Yes, that's the best thing we can do for the moment. *(They go off.)*

### Scene 3. Arden's bedchamber.

*Arden (sleeps bad, turns around, wakes up with a cry)* Hoo! *(calls:)* Michael! Come here at once!

*Michael (enters)* What is it, master?

*Arden* Find out when the tide is coming so that we can leave immediately! But clean up first! And then we leave as soon as possible!

*Michael* Yes, Sir. *(leaves, runs into Franklin in the door)*

*Franklin* What is it, Arden? Why did you cry out?

*Arden* I had such a terrible dream!

*Franklin* Not again!

*Arden* But this time it was different. I was lost in the woods, and then there was a net for the stag. However it was, I fell asleep there by the net but was then awakened by trumpeting horns, and then there was a horrible black-browed rogue telling me: "But here is the man we are looking for! Now you are caught, you blackguard!" he growled, and I was utterly terrified.

*Franklin* Just a foolish dream, Arden.

*Arden* But I have had several of that kind, and they all bode the same thing!

*Franklin* What?

*Arden* That's what I don't know! I hope it isn't something unpleasant.

*Franklin* It surely can't be when you wake up next time. We are going back to Feversham now. There you can take it easy and rest from your dreams and terrible London ordeals.

*Arden* Yes, exactly! It will be lovely!

*Franklin* Rest now, and then we leave. And don't dream up any more wild absurd nightmares. (*leaves*)

*Arden* No, I had better not. But you never know. I just hope the dreams won't come true, for in that case I will be in a bad spot indeed. (*lies down again and tries to sleep*) Alackaday! (*yawns*)

#### Scene 4. At the pub.

*Greene* But how could you fail again?

*Shakebag* It was that blackguard Michael's fault. He locked the gate to us when he was supposed to have opened it.

*Will* I will both flay and scalp him alive!

*Greene* Surely there must have been a mistake.

*Will* You can tell that to the devil that it was a bloody mistake indeed!

*Shakebag* Don't bloody swear so damnedly. I am sure Michael does as well as he could.

*Will* Yes, he does his very best to let us down!

*Greene* Perhaps he forgot to unlock the gate or overslept it.

*Will* If only he had fallen asleep on his guard! But instead he locked up instead of opening up! It's unforgivable!

*Greene* I understand that you are upset. (*enter Michael*)

*Will* Get ready with your sword, Shakebag. Here he is.

*Greene* Don't execute him at once. Let's hear first what he has to say for his defense.

*Shakebag* Well, you worthless scoundrel, what have you to say?

*Will* Talk, but fast, and for the last time!

*Michael* Gentlemen, I am really very sorry, but I actually did all I could.

*Shakebag* Villain! The gate was locked!

*Michael* Alas, my master suddenly woke up from some nightmare and was afraid and would suddenly check all exits and windows and look for bandits under every bed! He was simply struck by panic! So he locked the gate.

*Shakebag* Accident at work.

*Will* Again.

*Michael* But I will now go to inform myself of when the tide comes, and then he will go home with Franklin. Then you can hide and wait for him at Rainham Down. It's a good place for such things.

*Greene* For what?

*Michael* Assassination.

*Will* Good, Michael. We'll meet next time at the pub "The Salute" where you will be our host when we forge our next plans.

*Greene* Tell your master when there will be a suitable tide, so that these gentlemen in good time will reach the black meadow of Rainham before him.

*Michael* It will work all right! Just trust me!

*Will* That's good, Michael. We trusted you so far, and it only went to hell all the time with a most remarkable consistence. If only it finally goes to hell with Arden we will be completely satisfied, and so will you.

*Michael* I am beginning to like your company.

*(They drink each other's health.)*

## Scene 5.

*Mosbie* People are loathsome to me as I a brooding loner prefer my own company, but how did I become like that? I only find fear everywhere; if I see human eyes watch me I immediately get the suspicion that they see through me and read my private life and my most secret thoughts. My only escape from my mental unsoundness is by liquor. Then I relax and grow calmer and more satisfied with myself and can continue planning and stealthily intriguing, as if I hadn't awoken from the nightmare but only liked and felt at ease with it. It was better before when I was poor and lacked means and only had my daily bread to struggle for. As soon as I acquired gold and found an immense fortune within reach I sank down into the bog of vice where I flounder and struggle in vain and only get more sullen while nothing can change our course. Arden's death is decided and cannot be averted. Greene weeds the field before me with his plough, and when his work is finished he must be liquidated as well, or else he might cause trouble. And Michael and the painter? They are a lesser problem. When we have won the game and rowed the boat ashore I will throw them a bone to gnaw at like to dogs to fight about forever. Then there is Alice, but she is me, and when we have been married I own everything she has got. But it is very probable that I also one day have to dispose of her... Here she is. *(enter Alice)*  
Dearest Alice, how is it?

*Alice* Dear me, I am not feeling well.

*Mosbie* No, I can see that. What ails you then?  
*Alice* Alas, my husband, with whom I lived for so many years, we did have some happiness and love together! How could I possibly murder my love?  
*Mosbie* What do you mean?  
*Alice* Only what I say. Alas, *Mosbie*, we had better not see each other any more. We should never have met. Let our immoral love fade out, that it may not grow worse and we both with time may not become a rant and exposed to scorn and slander and indescribable disgrace...  
*Mosbie* So you intend to retire and withdraw from the game?  
*Alice* I have become Mrs Arden once again, a virtuous and most honourable lady, born noble and my husband's pride, to the glory and honour of the county...  
*Mosbie* But the money!  
*Alice* But you are only a tailor, and I was stupidly weak to allow myself to be seduced by you.  
*Mosbie* You seduced by me? Who was the seducer? I let myself be bewitched by you, and now I have sacrificed my career and happiness for you, I could have married a much better lady with more money than you, for your sake I have thrown away all my life's possibilities, and then you break the covenant, you slut! Now I see who you really are! Go to your grooms and fornicate with them, if you regard yourself too noble to any more keep me as your friend!  
*Alice* And you never loved me but only saw the money behind me. Take me then for my money! I beg your pardon and want to atone for my inconstancy. I want to sacrifice everything for you, if only you are gentle and faithful.  
*Mosbie* Would I take you for your money? What nonsense is that? Could beggars associate with nobility? Not for a thousand pounds could I even walk in the shadow of you, for I am nought but a craftsman.  
*Alice* Whoever your father was, you are yourself as noble as gold, for you are what you are by yourself and not by your birth. Who I am and what I am is therefore irrelevant.  
*Mosbie* How you women can oil your way into men's hearts! I always loved you, *Alice*, but chiefly for your beauty. So let's no more argue about nothing, and don't introduce new trials.

*(enter Bradshaw)*

*Alice* Give me a kiss, so that I know you are in earnest.

*(They kiss.)*

*Bradshaw* Ahem!

*Mosbie* There is someone here! Be careful! *(separates from her)*

*Alice* Bradshaw! What news? Has the plot succeeded?

*Bradshaw* I only carry a letter to deliver to you from Greene.

*Alice* All right, my friend. Go to the kitchen and have something. *(Bradshaw leaves.)*  
*(reads)* "The plot failed in London, but we will try again on the road back and will surely succeed. Best regards, Richard Greene."

What do you think about that?

*Mosbie* I wish it had been done.  
*Alice* But it will be done, and then there will be happy days! But until then we'll have to tread carefully and worryingly through life together.  
*Mosbie* I will follow you faithfully even unto death. (*embraces her*)

Scene 6.

*Shakebag* Hey, Will, is everything in order? Is your gun working, is the powder dry enough, and is the flint striking fire?

*Will* What questions! You clodpate! You might as well ask me if I have my nose left in my face, if my tongue hasn't frozen and gone stiff in my mouth, if I had tied myself into a knot or put my thumb into my arse! Are you some interrogator in some kind of a court, you blockhead? Aren't you also going to ask me how many pistols I have fired, how many guns I've had, if I have gone allergic against gunsmoke, if I can stand hearing a gun, if I twinkle when I shoot and demand that I deliver the answers under oath, you dunderhead! Have you no other redundant questions to ask? Don't you know that I have stolen more guns in this county than you have had pistols in your hand?

*Shakebag* You could have nicked more pouches in the crowd with money in them: but if we are to brag about stolen goods my surplus would be greater than all your family and all that you're worth! You are poisonous creeps having daggers in your tongues but never honest weapons in your hands and are only good at knifing your victims in the back!

*Will* Listen to that stinker of a toad how he exalts his poisonousness so that he'll soon go over the brim with his swollen conceit and explode in vitriol fumes of marsh gas! My honour cannot stand this, Mr Greene! I did after all honestly serve my king as a brave and active soldier in Boulogne, and then he shames me as if I was a coward!

*Shakebag* You started it! You are like that crackpot Jack in Feversham, who when he was struck by an ordinary blow and was shouted in his ear went off in a faint and thought he had been shot!

*Will* Are you accusing me of losing control in exaggerated fits of bad temper?

*Shakebag* That's what you always do!

*Will* Don't provoke me! I am never the one who overreacts!

*Shakebag* You fool! Tell that to our fellows in the killers' guild, who never fight without having a glass, while you alone always do!

*Will* Enough! (*pulls his sword and starts fighting. Shakebag defends himself.*)

*Greene* My boys! Mind your business!

*Will* That's what we are fighting about!

*Shakebag* We always stick to the point!

*Greene* Cool off and calm down! While you are fighting, Arden, our target will come by and get away! (*separates them*)

*Shakebag* He started!

*Will* And I will stop! We'll save it for a better occasion. One day we'll get even!

*Shakebag* And let's never forget it!

*Will* May I sooner be dead!

*Greene* Take it easy now and mind your duties! He will pass any time now, and then you must be ready with your guns! I will come forth when I've heard your gunshots. Then it will be a sincere pleasure to plunder that scoundrel! But woe unto you if you go blundering!

*Shakebag* He will get enough lead in his arse to immediately start leaking like a drain!

*Will* You have nothing to boast of. Who is the best shot here? By me he will get his glans shot off while at the same time I'll prick his nipples!

*Shakebag* All you can fire is wind puffs!

*Will* We can take up our swords again, if that's what you want!

*Greene* Slow down, boys! You mustn't quarrel in the moment of truth! Everything depends on that you don't miss your opportunity!

*Will (to Shakebag)* Behave now, you pigfart!

*Shakebag* You are not making our job any easier. Trust us, master Greene! If Mr Arden comes by here we will surely blow him to death so that he can feel that he is alive!

*Will* You dumbbell, that's precisely what we are here for to prevent and make impossible, when we have finished our job for him!

*Greene* Shut up, aim, mind your business and do your duty! They are already on their way! (*disappears*)

*Shakebag* Shut up!

*Will* Says you! Shut your trap yourself and stop the draft before I shut you down!

*Shakebag* Here they come! Quiet! (*They take aim.*)

(*Arden, Franklin and Michael appearing.*)

*Michael* Gentlemen, I am very sorry, but my horse has a limp. Regrettably I will be obliged to return to Rochester.

*Arden* Do as you please. We are grown-ups and can manage without you. But try to catch up with us before we reach that spooky Rainham Down. If we are lucky we'll get there before dark, but we will probably not reach Feversham until the night.

*Michael (to himself)* That I know well enough that you'll never pass that meadow. That's the only reason why I have wounded my horse in his foot to get away from the scene of your murder.

*Franklin (stops)* Dear me, I can't go on any longer.

*Arden* What is it? But what's the matter, my dear friend Franklin?

*Franklin* I don't know myself. This has never happened to me before. Suddenly I feel very strange. I can't breathe, I am dizzy and have a horrible attack of giddiness...(*falters*)

*Arden* There, my friend, let me support you. If we take it a little easier the trouble will surely cease. I often felt like that myself. It's probably something you

have eaten, but it could also be the dust. But pray continue telling your murder story. It will make the journey both easier and shorter.

*Franklin* Yes, that wife was charged with infidelity no matter how much she denied it with the most shameless impertinence. But I am very sorry, this goes against me, I get a stitch, I can't understand what's the matter with me.

*Arden* We have almost reached Rainham Down. If you could just go on a little further and finish your exciting account from real life...

*Franklin* It was exactly by Rainham Down that the disaster occurred...

*Shakebag* Just a little more, and we have them both!

*Will* Shut up! We must neither be heard and least of all seen! We must firmly stick to only stealth and quiet!

*Shakebag* But I am as quiet and stealing as a worm!

*Will* Yes, yes, but shut up, and be quiet as well! Or else we will be blown and not he!

*Shakebag* Keep still!

*Franklin* I must be allowed to stop and pant. I can't manage this travelling any more. I can't make it. (*stops and pants*)

*Arden* I thought you were in a much better condition than I.

*Franklin* I thought so too. I can't understand what's happening to me.

*Lord Cheiny* (*entering with company*) It's getting dark. We must make necessary haste before the storm comes.

*Will* Oh no! A lord! That does it!

*Shakebag* Keep still! We can still get them!

*Will* Yes, and then we get the wrong person, while our man gets away again, and then we are caught for the wrong murder, you ingenious nincompoop!

*Shakebag* Quiet!

*Cheiny* But who do we find here? It's Arden! That was indeed fortuitous, by my soul! I have been looking for you for a fortnight! It was far too long since I last saw you at home for a visit!

*Arden* I am always at your service, my lord.

*Cheiny* Have you travelled without company from London?

*Arden* My groom had problems with his horse and was obliged to turn back to Rochester. But my friend here, the good Franklin, has kept me company, but then he suddenly had problems with his condition just as he was telling a most thrilling story about infidelity and murder and other exotic and devilish things. He had both a dizzy spell, lost his breath and a bad nausea.

*Cheiny* (*to Franklin*) If I am not mistaken, you belong to the acquaintance of the Lord Protector?

*Franklin* Yes, I usually travel with him.

*Cheiny* Welcome to join my company! Come home with me, rest until the morning, and then continue in better health tomorrow! Isn't that sensible?

*Arden* What do you say, Franklin?

*Franklin* It sounds very sensible indeed.

Will           Damn!

Franklin (*hearkens*) What was that?

Arden           Just a frog croaking.

Cheiny          There are always poisonous toads around here making much noise with their croaking.

Franklin        Let's get away from this place immediately!

Shakebag       They are coming! Put down your gun immediately! They will see us!

Will            You croaker! Now you have ditched our chances! (*They quickly hide their weapons.*)

Cheiny          But who do we find here? Black Will! Do you think you could pick pockets out in the swamp? You are usually at it among throngs in London.

Will            No, we are just travelling like you.

Cheiny          Are you indeed? Then I sincerely hope it's in the opposite direction. You will hang one day, Black Will, mark my words.

Will            I honestly hope I won't, since I actually pray for you every day, your grace, that you as a sensible and honourable gentleman at least would protect me against bandits and cheats!

Cheiny          You probably never in your life even told the shortest prayer. But give the tramps each a coin, so that they might turn to better ways. For you shall know, you rascal Will, that if you one day get caught even for stealth of the smallest penny, nothing can save you from immediately getting hoist in the gallows. Come with us, Mr Arden. We can go together three or four miles.

*(All pass Will and Shakebag, who humbly stand with their caps in their hands.)*

Will (*when they are gone*) May the devil take you within those four miles, you rotten rabble! There we were ready with our guns and had those capitalists perfectly on target, and then the lord himself comes a tramping disturbance to ruin the whole party! It's a shame! You can't do like that, and least of all if you are a lord!

Shakebag       It's Arden's fault. He is persecuted by good luck. It's even outrageous how he wrongfully keeps getting away from his destiny!

Will            It's worse than outrageous! It's downright indecent!

Greene (*coming on*) Well, boys! How did it go? Is the scoundrel done with?

Shakebag       He made it and is now on his way to Feversham, that blasted crook!

Greene          What! Have you then made another failure?

Shakebag       It was not our fault. It was that Lord Ceiny who suddenly appeared getting straight in the way for us!

Will            It was like a miracle but of the wrong kind.

Greene          I understand. So our villain got away again.

Will            He is now under the lord's protection and invited to his place at Shurland.

Greene          So it's over for this time.

Will            But we'll put a bullet in his fat belly and fleshy arse and protruding navel tomorrow, when he travels on home from Shurland!

Greene          That's the spirit! I sure hope so!

Shakebag       We are not the kind of crooks that give in!

*Greene* Yes, you had better finish the business, as Mrs Alice Arden hardly will be happy when she hears about your failure.

*Will* It was not our fault! It was the lord's!

*Greene* Yes, yes, I know. You were unlucky. And that arch robber Arden is like supernaturally possessed by a luck that he isn't even aware of.

*Shakebag* We'll be sure to make it in the end!

*Will* Mr Arden is already booked and has no chance.

*Shakebag* The odds against him keep mounting every time he gets away.

*Greene* I think Mrs Arden believe you are cowards who dare not do it.

*Will* Let her believe whatever she wants. When she then will see her husband unrecognizably massacred with bullet holes all over like a trough she will be impressed enough and think otherwise.

*Greene* I think you should confer with her.

*Will* Then we'll do so.

*Shakebag* We'll look her up first thing tomorrow!

*Greene* That will probably pay off, gentlemen. After all, we have the best good will in the world and more than that, all three of us, to help our lady, haven't we, my friends?

*Shakebag* Absolutely!

*Will* If there is anything we have, it's strong intention and good morals!

*Greene* That's a good veteran speaking. Let's immediately start scheming and then initiate our employer in our plans. *(They leave.)*

Act IV scene 1. At home with Ardens.

*Arden* Time to go, Franklin. Lord Cheiny is expecting us.

*Alice* But you have hardly rested enough, darling, after your terrible journey! Please, stay with me!

*Arden* But we can't let a lord wait!

*Alice* You always have your reasons. Hardly have you come back home, and then you immediately long to get away again, as it seems, just to get away from me.

*Franklin* But can't Mrs Alice come with us? The lord will certainly have no objection against her charming company.

*Arden* Of course, Alice, you will come with us! You will cheer up the lord, he will only be happy, and all we need is a saddled horse.

*Alice* No thank you, lords are not for me, and who will mind the home and the farm in my absence? I had better stay.

*Arden* Isn't she capricious! Dear, your false shyness can't fool me. Don't be prejudiced against the poor lord! He doesn't bite, you know!

*Alice* No, I want to stay. I know my place well enough.

*Arden* She is hopeless. But my dearest, whatever your opinion may be, I will always remain faithful to you for good and for worse with all my love.

*Alice* Prove it by coming back soon.

*Arden* I will be back before the fall of darkness in the night, if I only live. See you at supper. Have my dinner ready when I come. Farewell. (*kisses her goodbye. She leaves.*)

*Franklin* Come now, Michael. The horses are waiting.

*Michael* But I am not ready. I just lost my invaluable purse when I saddled the horse for madam which she wouldn't have. There were thirty-six shillings in it.

*Franklin* Come then, Arden, and we'll ride in advance. Our groom will surely catch up with us.

*Arden* As usual. But don't loiter, Michael, but hurry in coming after us.

*Michael* Of course. (*Arden and Franklin leave.*) Good riddance to you, for hiding in front are Black Will and his Shakebag for a friend, stealing in the grass where you least of all would suspect anything such. Your journey will be longer with them for guides than you can imagine, for this time you will surely not return. (*enter the painter*) But who comes here? Is it the painter, who thinks he will get the chaste Susan?

*Clarke* How is it, Michael, my friend? And how is my beauty and the rest of the family?

*Michael* Who do you mean?

*Clarke* The lovely Susan of course!

*Michael* Has she become your lovely now as well?

*Clarke* Yes. How is she and the whole clan?

*Michael* They are all well except the one you talked about.

*Clarke* Is she ill?

*Michael* Yes, she is.

*Clarke* What's the matter with her?

*Michael* She is in bed.

*Clarke* Is she afraid?

*Michael* Yes, of you. That's why she runs a high fever.

*Clarke* How can she get fever from fear?

*Michael* She fears loose killers going around stealing in the grass.

*Clarke* Good Michael, you are pulling my leg. You just want her for yourself.

*Michael* But as an employee in the house it is my responsibility to protect that girl against importuning painters.

*Clarke* So? But she is not to be protected against dirty grooms like you?

*Michael* You are the dirty one! You just daub her down!

*Clarke* You seem to want trouble. Just tell me when and where, and I am ready.

*Michael* What do you fence with? Frayed pencils?

*Clarke* Stop it, here and now, impertinent servant! (*hits him*)

(*enter Mosbie, Greene and Alice*)

*Alice* (*her hands on her hips*) Was that why you stayed behind, Michael, to have a fight with Clarke about a girl? When so much is at stake! Clarke, did you provide what you promised?

*Clarke* I have it here. But don't try to touch it! Whoever touches it will be dead.

*Alice* Good. I will have it for a warrant of my husband's death in case everything else will fail. What has he got to do with what I am doing at home? He is just an ass with horns. "It's under my dignity that you accept other men at home than myself!" Thanks awfully! His dignity is just a slack pouch which he is saving on."My honour demands that I leave you!" Just leave me then! Leave life for your death and leave me to live my own life! He can go to hell himself. Only you, Mosbie, could give love to return to me my life. As long as we live we shall only love each other, us two, and forever.

*Mosbie* Of course, but love also needs to be based on faith, or else it must crumble to pieces like houses without mortar.

*Alice* Would I not be faithful to you? What do you think of me, Mosbie?

*Mosbie* Don't start all that again! We still have our most difficult step ahead of us which we must take before we could seriously have each other.

*Greene* Yes, Mosbie, leave the petting to later. Now it's the question of life and the plan. Shakebag and Black Will have hidden in the grass to steal on Arden to at last finish off their gracious mission.

*Alice* What kind of fools did you really hire? They seem least of all to be able to even hurt a fly.

*Greene* They are the most professional criminals of Kent. If you can't trust them, you cannot even trust the king.

*Mosbie* If there is anyone in this country you cannot trust, it's the king.

*Greene* Yes, that's another matter, and that's just what I mean. You can't trust the king, but you can trust Shakebag and Black Will!

*Alice* Yes, so they consistently proved so far again and again.

*Greene* They haven't resigned from the job.

*Alice* And they haven't done it either. They have only lifted the salary.

*Greene* What do you ask for? If you don't pay them, they will not do the job.

*Alice* They don't do the job although you pay them, and they only want more all the time.

*Greene* A murder is the most difficult of all jobs!

*Alice* If you don't do it yourself.

*Greene* But that's precisely what you didn't want to do! That's where the complications started!

*Mosbie* Let's go to the boys now hiding out there in the grass and stealing on the villains and see if perhaps they have managed to perform what they have been paid for.

*Michael* What have they paid for?

*Clarke* Nothing, stupid!

*Michael* How can they then do the job?

*Clarke* That's what I mean!

*Greene* Don't stand there drivelling nonsense! Let's go now to see if they have succeeded.

*Alice* They must, or they will be out of work!

Mosbie No, Alice, that kind is never out of work, but your work will not be working.  
Alice It must, or I am dead!  
Mosbie We'll all be dead sooner or later.  
Alice Don't remind me of it. The point is that one has to die to make us live.  
Mosbie Yes, that's what we live for, to have an end on it.  
Greene Are you coming or not! (*They all leave.*)

Scene 2. By the ferry.

Arden (*entering with Franklin*) Hallo, ferryman! Fie, what a fog! Where are they?  
Ferryman What are you standing there shouting for? I am here, am I not?  
Arden Then answer us and say so!  
Ferryman Can't you hear that's what I say?  
Franklin Sorry, ferryman, but it's so damned foggy here! You can't see anything!  
Ferryman Yes, it will be difficult to find the right course across the river.  
Arden We can't wait.  
Franklin What do you think about the bothersome fog, my good expert?  
Ferryman Yes, I can see that it is thick indeed.  
Arden We can see that as well by ourselves, Mr Expert!  
Ferryman No, that's what nobody can see, because it is too thick.  
Franklin Can we go across in it or not?  
Ferryman We'll see.  
Arden So you have at least eyes to see through the fog?  
Ferryman You can't see through it, because it is too thick. You can see that for yourselves.  
Arden But you just said that you could see how the situation is!  
Ferryman No, I only said, that we shall see.  
Arden But that's what I said!  
Ferryman I only stick to what I've said myself.  
Arden Yes, you had better!  
Franklin We don't get anywhere this way. We entrust ourselves to you, ferryman. Our lives are now in your hands on your responsibility. We trust you.  
Ferryman Come along then, so that we at last get going!  
Arden Why didn't you say so in the first place?  
Ferryman You impeded me by questioning whatever I said.  
Franklin That was not our intention. Come on now! (*They disappear. Will and Shakebag come on stealing from different directions.*)  
Shakebag Hallo, Will, where are you?  
Will We have both arrived in hell, for smoke is all there is! Can you see anything at all in these unchristian fumes?

*Shakebag* We had better keep talking so that we at least keep in touch by hearing. Here I just keep on stumbling and will soon be ditched if my feet don't see any better than my eyes.

*Will* I have never seen better weather for a man to run away with another man's wife. In this weather all people are completely misguided.

*Shakebag* Here you can play hide and seek so efficiently that you'll never find yourself again. But what horses do I hear approaching? Say, did you hear them?

*Will* Yes, of course I heard them.

*Shakebag* Have we now missed our target again?

*Will* I can wage my life on that it was Arden and his fat company. In that case we have indeed missed them completely.

*Shakebag* I almost think this is getting a bit annoyingly repetitive.

*Will* It's not our fault. This time Arden was swept into fog, as when some god carried away Ganymede in some smoke or gas that he let out.

*Shakebag* You mean that the gods can fart?

*Will* Who is it that cannot?

*Shakebag* But a god!

*Will* Take it easy. This was only Arden. And calm down. They wander about in the same thick fog as we. They are not on horseback, for not even horses can find their way in a fog. They walk beside as blind as we and go down into ditches and bogs like we.

*Shakebag (falls into a ditch)* Help! I am drowning!

*Will* That's what I mean. No one is safe here, not even Arden.

*Ferryman (in)* Who is calling for help?

*Will* There is no one here except yourself, old unknown ghost that comes a-haunting us here through the mists.

*Ferryman* I came to help whoever called for help. But here is a poor man in a ditch!

*Will* It's only Shakebag. He staggered and went wrong.

*Ferryman* Poor fellow! Blame yourself going here without a guide alone and straying from the road! Are you drunk? (*helping up Shakebag*)

*Will* Not at all. We are just out hunting.

*Ferryman* For ducks?

*Will* No, a company that rode ahead of us. You haven't by any chance ferried a couple of travellers today across the river?

*Ferryman* No, only two gentlemen going for dinner at old lord Cheiny's.

*Will* What did I tell you, Shakebag? Now we have shaken them off again!

*Ferryman* Can I leave them a message when they return?

*Will* No, just get on your own way.

*Ferryman* Tell me, have you ever seen such a fog?

*Shakebag* Who can see through such a fog at all?

*Ferryman* That's what I mean.

*Shakebag* But you said the contrary.

*Ferryman* Did I?

*Shakebag* Yes, that's exactly what you did.  
*Ferryman* I didn't. I just asked.  
*Shakebag* But it was a leading question.  
*Ferryman* You can't lead a soul in this thick fog.  
*Will* The devil could lead anyone even in a fog, and you led two old men across. They managed, for they were led by their noses by the devil.  
*Ferryman* I think I've had enough of you.  
*Will* Who do you think you could lead by the nose?  
*Ferryman (to Shakebag)* Who is he?  
*Shakebag* It's Black Will.  
*Ferryman* I hope to see him hanged one day, whether he likes it or not, the way he will lead everyone astray. (*leaves*)  
*Will* That was Charon himself, I think. He ferries the dead across, but with doomed souls like Arden and his brother of destiny he reverses the procedure and saves their lives.  
*Shakebag* I am getting tired of sneaking around here in the fog only to constantly lose track of the villains who only get away all the time.  
*Will* Quiet! I hear voices!  
*(enter Greene, Mosbie and Alice and then Michael)*  
*Mosbie* But here you are, Shakebag and Black Will! What are you doing here? Have you at last fulfilled your mission's obligations?  
*Will* What do you think we are doing here in the fog? Can't you see that every human being is reduced to blindness in this thickness!  
*Michael* We see nothing at all.  
*Will* That's what I mean! How can we take anyone's life when everyone here is blind? We just drop into the waters and tumble into ditches and are haunted by ferrymen from the other side!  
*Mosbie* But you must have heard when they passed this way.  
*Will* What's the use of hearing when you can't see?  
*Greene* So you failed again?  
*Will* Take it easy, noble gentlemen. They will come by once more when they go back.  
*Shakebag* And then perhaps the fog is gone.  
*Will* Yes, perhaps.  
*Shakebag* Damn me if I ever had so much trouble just for a small simple murder!  
*Mosbie* You look as if you came right up from the swamp.  
*Will* That's what he did. He first dropped off. A ditch that appeared suddenly was his fall.  
*Michael* How can a ditch appear suddenly? Isn't it always there under the level?  
*Will* If ditches don't suddenly appear showing up, they will have you ditched anyway. That's why the ditches are there, so that you shall go somewhere in case something shows up.

*Alice* You suffered enough. Here is a coin for a fire with a dinner and something to drink with it for you to have at the pub in Feversham. (*gives Will a coin*)

*Greene* I'll see to it. These two buddies are under me.

*Will* Dear lady, my friend and I thank you and bow to your good will. This gratuity will come to additional use some other time when we get stuck in the fog and the mud and can't even reach our targets by traction. (*Greene, Will and Shakebag leave*)

*Mosbie* Those fools will never arrive at anything. They will just go on failing as long as we go on paying them for it. We should let down the whole project.

*Alice* But listen to my new idea and suggestion! When my husband now returns with Franklin, we'll meet him here on the way quite audaciously arm in arm, so that my old man will be brought to a halt to start quarrelling. And in the middle of the quarrel we call for our boys, who then immediately finish them off. What do you think of such a plan?

*Mosbie* Perfect! Such an intrigue and so bold a design deserves a kiss! (*kisses her*)

### Scene 3.

Enter Dick Reede and a sailor.

*Sailor* No, trust me, Reede, it's no idea. His conscience is too spacious, he is too mean, he has no scruples when it comes to money. He never gives away anything if he isn't sure he will have back the double.

*Reede* I have heard that he is on his way home from Shurland. So I'll wait for him here, since I will never be let in to his home and never have anything there. My only chance is here, and if he puts me off here as well as home we'll see how a curse of mine could work.

*Sailor* You have no chance.

*Reede* Neither has he against his destiny if he persists.

*Sailor* You seem quite sure of your superstitious power.

*Reede* I know what it is all about.

*Sailor* Good luck.

(*enter Arden, Franklin and Michael*)

*Reede* Here he is, just on time!

Mr Arden, I will soon go to sea, but first I wanted to talk with you about that piece of land that you expropriated from me without right. Although it is small and inconspicuous and give very small rent it means life to my wife and my children. I therefore ask you to return it.

*Arden* Have you ever heard such insolence, Franklin? There stands that beggar demanding of me to give him a piece of land for nothing that I paid for dearly! You blackguard, if you don't stop going around spreading slander about me you have planted your last seed! I will have you imprisoned for calumny where there will be neither sunshine nor moonlight for a year for your wicked loafing! I can't bear with your foul subversive activities any more!

*Reede* You do me wrong, and then you threaten me! Then I spite you, Arden! Do your worst! I pray to God to punish you and your whole family, your house and folk and cattle! May this piece of earth, that you robbed me of by trickery, and I speak these words with the anguish of death on my mind, be your destruction and perdition! May you there be scorned by your best friend and become a disgrace to be spat and laughed at by the whole world, may everything pertaining to it go wrong for you, and may you there find your death in the most disgraceful possible manner!

*Arden* Who can listen to such a maniacal drivel?

*Franklin* Fie, you lousy groom, to speak in such a manner! Don't you know that evil curses only befall their originators?

*Reede* So let them befall me! I am not afraid! If even I meet with a mortal storm at sea I will in my moment of death not pray for my own life but for the curse to still haunt and hit the entire household of Arden and especially himself! And before I leave home I will teach my wife to always remember and repeat my curse of you! I leave you, but my curse remains! Come, my friend. Let's leave this villain alone to his vultures of fury and fate. *(leaves with the sailor)*

*Arden* He is the worst calumniator in the country, and he has chosen me specially for a target for his senseless meaningless hatred. What he says has no relevance at all. I ask you, Franklin, believe me when I tell you I am completely guiltless.

*Franklin* We all are.

*Arden* Perhaps now as we sent the horses in advance we'll be met by my wife, since she must understand by the horses that we are on our way, for that conciliation which she now displays is the opposite of her former capricious inconsistency, as if she now had fallen in love with me anew, as if she was a virtuous and holy girl.

*Franklin* If the change is real it is wonderful and good. But be careful, when you talk about lord Cheiny. Don't raise her envy but letting her know how friendly the lord was and what a nice party he gave. She should have come with us. I know that for sure.

*Arden* Let's hurry, Franklin! Perhaps we could surprise her standing in the kitchen in her cooking, for I know she is now preparing our dinner and doing all she can to provide us with a pleasant evening.

*Franklin* When a woman is in a good mood she is the most accomplished creature on earth.

*(enter Alice arm in arm with Mosbie)*

*Arden* But who comes here? You bitch, are you coming here arm in arm with that scoundrel Mosbie? Split at once! How dare you show such impudence!

*Alice* He wants us to split. Let's do so then with a kiss.

*Arden* You vicious perjurer, Mosbie, monster, shameless dogs, you behave like animals!

*Mosbie* If we are animals we have no horns, since they belong to you.

*Franklin* This is going too far. I sense some danger. Arden, let's withdraw.

*Arden* I can't do that! I am married to her! Am I not a lawfully wedded husband? I must not be a coward in this decisive moment! You son of a bitch, Mosbie! Let's settle once and for all!

*(attacks Mosbie. Will and Shakebag appear.)*

*Alice* Help! Here are some more murderers! They want to kill my husband!

*Shakebag* What? Who dares to attack Mr Mosbie? *(attacks Arden)*

*Mosbie (hurt)* Alice, I have you to thank for this!

*Shakebag (wounded by Arden)* Help, Will! He murders me!

*Will* What kind of trash is this we'll have to deal with! You miserable fumbler! *(pulls Shakebag out of the fight and disappears with him, like Mosbie in the opposite direction)*

*Alice* Alas, my husband, what have you done now! Here we came to heartily greet you and welcome you home, and next you are again possessed by blind and raving jealousy violently attacking the one who used to be your best friend, all for a kiss, a slight embrace, a sign of friendship, to see if you had some patience! It was all my own fault, for I staged the joke.

*Franklin* What joke! It could have ended badly!

*Alice* Didn't you mark how we as friendly suns beamed towards you when he gave me his arm and I just kissed him lightly on his cheek? Have I not acted lovingly and tenderly towards you lately? Didn't you hear how I called out with terror in my need: "Help! Murder! They are killing my husband!" For your sake only I called for help! Your eye was twisted by prejudice gone wild, and I never want to see that man again! I was a hussy who at all trusted that mean bloke! I want to be your slave now and forever, not just your wife but a humble servant, just to tenderly please you. That I am happy sometimes you misinterpret to looseness, if I seem sad you complain about my being depressive, and if I paint myself and add to my looks you call me vain. So I keep simple and humble just to please you, and then you call me wanton. I am always but your thing of a wife, whom you have no idea about how much you torture her with your capriciousness and wild whims.

*Arden* Is it true on your word of honour that you and Mosbie didn't misbehave on purpose?

*Alice* I call heaven as a witness of my innocence.

*Arden* Then I honestly apologise, darling. I'll never doubt you any more. Just don't be angry with me, for I couldn't bear with that.

*Alice* If you really loved me, you would have remembered what the mean Mosbie said, that it was my fault that he was wounded when you attacked him! And then you would defend me against him and even made sure to honestly reconcile yourself with him, apologised to him and dressed his wounds! I will never be happy again until you two are reconciled as truly good friends.

*Arden* Calm down, my darling. You will get everything you want. I will be reconciled with Mosbie at once. Come with us and mediate between us. All will be well again.

*Franklin* You don't mean, Arden, that you intend to fawn to that ruffian who when you were away used your wife as his mistress?

*Alice* Don't listen to your false friend. He doesn't know what he is saying and only makes himself guilty of slander. He doesn't even have the slightest evidence. If you have any case against me you must prove it, or else you have nothing to say.

*Franklin* But didn't Mosbie tell you frankly that you had horns?

*Alice* For an answer to having been insulted himself by being called an animal. If you are offended and get angry you'll say any kind of stupid things.

*Arden* You are perfectly right, my dear wife. Hasn't she, my dear friend?

*Franklin* Well, it might be interpreted that way. But if I were you I would think twice before going in to my wife's lover and fawn him.

*Alice* Franklin, you are obstinate in your prejudice. Give me a break. And what have you to gain by turning Arden against his wife? Nothing! You are only doing it from meanest baseness and menace!

*Arden* Calm down, my good Franklin. She is actually right. I know that she only means well, but your intentions in this case are more debatable. Now I will go to Mosbie with my wife and be reconciled with our friend and dress his wounds, so that he will have no reason for any hard feelings against us. That's the last thing we wish. (*leaves with Alice*)

*Franklin* You are going down the drain, poor man, as insistently as your sinning wife and can't see the trap you are walking into all by yourself, although it is more than obvious. Your own wife is the instrument of the crime, and all I can do as your friend is to sadly keep quiet and watch.

#### Act V scene 1. Arden's home.

*Will* Greene, when did ever a murderer spend so much time just to kill one man?

*Greene* We might as well give up the whole enterprise. It seems plain impossible no matter how hard we try with whatever means and methods.

*Shakebag* No, damn it, of course he must die, when we reached so far and put so much effort in it! We can't let that old crook get away now after all our trouble! He must die even if we are to perish in the effort!

*Will* You know, Greene, that during my twelve years in London, countless bastards have been furnished with wooden legs just because they happened to pass me by on the wrong side of the street. Others have acquired silver noses just for saying; "There goes Black Will", and others have got crutches and prostheses for life for having had dealings with me in the wrong way. I have broken as many sharp blades as you have cracked nuts.

*Greene* You are just letting out wind.

*Will* Shakebag can testify for me. All virgin houses have been obliged to pay me tribute. There wasn't a harlot in her time who could open her business without my permission. No one has let loose as many gaiety girls as I. And once when a beer

salesman dared to challenge me I made holes in all his barrels and held him in his ears until all his beer had flooded out. I have cracked more skulls on police sergeants with their own batons than there are jails and prison cells, and with my own sword I have forced anyone to bail me. Every morning the innkeepers used to stand outside their pubs and invite me for nothing for a drink just to avoid having their signs and shops broken up. Is there anything I haven't done and haven't succeeded with? Not even Shakebag can answer that. And still I can't get this done! This petty trifle, this minuscule child's play of a ridiculously simple assassination is impossible for me! There must be supernatural forces obstructing the play. (*enter Alice and Michael*)

*Greene* Move over, Will. Here is Mrs Arden and Michael.

*Alice (to Michael)* So you are positive they have become friends?

*Michael* I saw them shaking hands myself. Mr Mosbie was bleeding, and my master was crying for pity of him while he quarrelled with Franklin, whom he gave the whole blame for nothing. He paid the barber-surgeon himself for his services and invited both Mosbie and Franklin and Bradshaw and others home for general reconciliation and fraternisation.

*Alice* Run back, Michael, and tell Mosbie to steal home to me as soon as my husband has left for the market. You will have your Susan already tonight if you do so.

*Michael* Of course I will do it.

*Alice* Tell John the cook that we will have guests, so that he makes it grand and doesn't spare his art.

*Michael* So be it. (*leaves*)

*Will* It looks like a party. In that case we must be on. Hallo, Mrs Arden, invite me and Shakebag and Greene also. Or else we'll come anyway.

*Alice* But of course you are welcome! Just tell me why you have failed now again.

*Greene* It's Shakebag's fault who messed it all up again as usual.

*Shakebag* How could I know that Arden would be such a skilful swordsman that Mosbie should miss him and hit me instead?

*Will* It wasn't like that at all. It was that Franklin who ruined the whole show. Shakebag advances and fumbles and waves his sword like an incapacitated scarecrow, and then Franklin strikes him, like this, and disappears. Then of course that fumbler Shakebag here should have struck back immediately, but instead he just stands there wobbling and missing all his chances, completely at a loss and paralysed. Then I join the fight and stand like a solid wall and parry all attacks, but what good does it do when Arden suddenly runs Mosbie through his shoulder? Shakebag, why the devil didn't you use your sword?

*Alice* But why did both you and Greene stand still?

*Will* Everything happened so fast. No devil had time to interfere before everything was too late, and Arden was lucky as usual. He happened to hit, and we happened to miss.

*Alice* Alas, if only he had died yesterday, I would have filled all your pockets with golden coins!

*Will* It's never too late. We can trace Arden to the market and there flay him alive. (*enter Mosbie*)

*Alice* That will be difficult, but here comes the right man to give us advice. Dear Mosbie, cover your arm, I can't bear to see your wound!

*Mosbie* You if anyone should see it who caused it.

*Alice* Don't say so, my dearest friend. When I saw you wounded I could have taken the sword, when you dropped it, and attacked Arden myself; for I have promised you to never close my eyes again, which he finds so offensive, until he has ended his life. I woke up several times tonight with an irresistible lust to at last take his life myself, when all others so awkwardly and constantly have failed.

*Shakebag* Why didn't you do it then? Then we would have got rid of the trouble.

*Will* But lost our reward, you nitwit.

*Mosbie* If you had done it in the middle of the night we would all have been lost, for you would in no way have been able to get away with it.

*Alice* That's why I didn't do it. But how long will he then still go on living?

*Mosbie* Not longer than this day. Black Will and Shakebag, are you prepared to execute my new plan?

*Shakebag* Always ready!

*Will* If not, you can call me a villain.

*Greene* If they fail you I will do it myself.

*Mosbie* You, Greene, will look up Arden and keep him busy so that he will not get home until in the evening. Then I will make him company, and you two then join me and follow.

*Alice* And how will he then be murdered?

*Mosbie* Shakebag and Will hide in the adjoining room, and on a given signal they rush forth and execute the deed efficiently.

*Will* And what will the signal be?

*Mosbie* "Ha-ha, I've got you!" But don't come out too early. Then everything will be ruined again. I must be able to prepare him first.

*Greene* Five determined killers against a poor defenceless innocent should this time be odds enough even for idiots.

*Alice* He is not innocent!

*Will* We won't crush the party by breaking in too soon, but who will let us in?

*Alice* I will do it, and you shall have a key of your own.

*Mosbie* Come along, Greene, and let's go together. Look to it that everything is ready when we come.

*Alice* You can count on it. Just look to it that the rogue comes home, (*Mosbie and Greene leave*), and if he walks out again it will be my fault. Come now, Black Will, you dashing murderer and irresistibly charming professional of a criminal, next to Mosbie you appeal to me the most. I will not entertain you with pretty words and promises but please you with something more concrete. What about this? (*presents a clinging pouch of coins*) Will you do it?

*Shakebag* Do we have any choice?

*Will* My lady, our ways of thinking are the same. We think best together and can better understand each other than brother and sister. You should have become a professional killer like us. Now listen to my plan. Put Mosbie as a guest in a fine armchair and give your husband an ordinary simple chair. I will then steal on him from behind and pull him down with a towel on the floor, where I will prick him to death until his blood will gush like a fountain from a thousand red wells. Then we carry the body to the monastery church and drop it there. People will then think he was robbed and murdered.

*Alice* You are a genius! Nothing could be easier to accomplish! It's splendid! Here are twenty pounds, and when he at last is dead I will give you forty extra for the trouble. To then make it easier for you to disappear, I will let Michael saddle two extra horses for you. Then you can ride directly to Scotland and Wales, and none of us have ever seen you around here.

*Will* We are like cut and shorn for each other. On such conditions I could murder a thousand men directly. But we had better have the key at once. Where shall we hide?

*Alice* In there in the office. But you must swear to do it and not fail. You mustn't bungle your mission once too much.

*Will* What are you thinking of us, madam? Do you think we are amateurs and professional bunglers?

*Bradshaw* Don't wound their professional pride. They will do it. That's for sure this time.

*Alice* But if anything should fail, Mosbie will be here, and one eye from him would be enough for me to harden my whole being like steel for the final so long and earnestly longed for execution of my husband with my own hands!

*Will* No, madam, that hard work is too rough for the fine delicacy of a lady's hands. Leave the butchery to us who are used to it. Now we will enter the office to make ready and stay hidden there until the moment comes of the final truth. When the door opens next time Arden will die with interest.

*Shakebag* We have extra instruments, madam, if anything should miss.

*Will* Your crow-bar and your saw and your meat-axe will not be needed this time, Shakebag. Everything is already served. Our contribution will just be a minimum of exercise, like when you set a good example. Come, Shakebag! All we have to do is to stay quiet and keep still until the signal comes.

*Shakebag* I just hope we don't get bored and fall asleep.

*Will* No risk, madam. We shall stay alert.

*Shakebag* What was the signal again?

*Will* Leave it to me, you slow and imbecile buffoon. I can't misunderstand a signal to murder, and I will see to it that you won't be able to miss the opportunity again, oversleep or mess it all up. I will take care of him, madam, and take the responsibility that he behaves! (*goes out into the office with Shakebag*)

*Alice* If only Arden were here and the door could be opened now! This closed door will be the exit of my liberation and entrance to a new better life! Instead of my husband's slimy and unbearably stinking and sloppy embraces I shall enjoy Mosbie's

finer arts, a man who always succeeds and who comes home to make me feel alive. What is my fat and incompetent husband to my lover? A beast to an azure prince, and I know that for sure, that there will not be a man in the world to regret his departure. On the contrary. They will all give a sigh of relief.

*Michael (enters)* Master is soon here now, madam.

*Alice* Is he coming alone or with someone?

*Michael* He is coming with Mosbie.

*Alice* That's good, Michael. Bring out the chequers, and then stand in front of the office door.

*Michael* Why?

*Alice* Because the moment of truth will stand by the door. Shakebag and Black Will are in there, and the occasion is finally coming.

*Michael* For serious?

*Alice* Do you think I am joking?

*Michael* Tonight?

*Alice* Yes, this very night.

*Michael* But shouldn't Susan know about it?

*Alice* Of course, and she will be as quiet about it as everybody else.

*Michael* Then I'll fetch the chequers.

*Alice* Wait a moment! Listen to all my instructions. When Arden has arrived you will close the gate outside. He must die, and everything must be ready prepared before our guests arrive.

*Michael* Yes, madam. (*leaves. Arden and Mosbie are heard outside.*)

*Arden (outside)* Come in, dear Mosbie! Make yourself at home! I want everything to be just like it used to be before there was any division between us.

*Mosbie (outside)* Your goodness seems to have no limits.

*Alice* They are coming! Alice, be very present now and prepared to improvise! Truth works best if you just are in it yourself and creating it.

(*enter Arden and Mosbie*)

But what is this, my dear husband? Of course I wished you reconciled, but it was mostly for your sake and not for his. You must know that he associates openly with such rough villains as the hairy Shakebag and Black Will, bandits of the very worst kind! Therefore I wanted to see you as friends, but why exaggerate and invite him home to us? Now his mere appearance has ruined my evening.

*Mosbie* Dear Arden, I had better leave again.

*Arden* No, my dear friend, you must know that women will quarrel! That's their chief occupation in life, and intellectually they are no good for anything else. Wife, be reasonable now and welcome him as the dear friend he always was to both of us!

*Alice* You can force me, but I would rather die than welcome him. He has caused us so much trouble and mischief, that I would fain avoid his company.

*Mosbie (aside)* How marvellously she feigns!

*Arden* But now he is here, so please behave yourself!

*Alice* Don't be angry with me, my dearest husband! Sit down, Mr Mosbie, make yourself at home, and we wish you welcome indeed!

*Arden* That's the spirit! When she feels like it she is all amiability.

*Mosbie* I know how welcome I am in Arden's heart, but you, my lady, speak not of your heart.

*Alice* If I don't I have my reasons.

*Mosbie* Pardon me, dear Arden, but in that case I had better leave. (*wants to rise*)

*Arden* No, dear Mosbie, never mind that hussy! She is just capricious. Please remain seated! Now we shall have a pleasant evening, if only she would let us.

*Alice* We have guests enough anyway, Mr Mosbie, even if you leave.

*Mosbie* Now I pray you, Arden, let me go!

*Arden* Just let her haggle. It will pass. It means nothing. She is like the weather: a sudden shower now and then, and suddenly sunshine in between.

*Alice* Still the gate isn't closed out there. You may go. No one will stop you.

*Michael* No. It's a lie, because I closed it.

*Arden* Bring in some wine! We must now be friends all three of us! I have a sacred mission here today, which is to reconcile you. Mosbie will not leave this house today until my wife speaks kindly to him and means what she says. And you will do that now, you obstinate shrew! Please be cooperative now for one time's sake!

*Alice* I always mean what I say.

*Arden* That's what I mean, that you should say what you mean and speak to him with candour and friendship, like you always speak to me in the night!

*Alice* Mind your own business. Leave me alone.

*Arden* You bitch! Am I not obliged to make up for all that he suffered for your sake? Wasn't he wounded because of you? Will you not have the slightest bad conscience for his sake, for having ruined his life? Do I have to do everything alone that you should have done and make up for your crimes?

*Alice* (*pours herself a glass*) I am sorry then, Mr Mosbie, for all the harm I did to you and will do in the future also to others, but I must tell you the truth: it was unintentional. Here I drink to your health, Mr Mosbie, but let us from now on be like strangers and only have a casual friendship. They talked ill of me for your sake, and I did not deserve that. So I beg of you to never come back here again from now on. (*drinks to him*)

*Mosbie* I am visiting your husband, not you. I swear though here and now and to your husband, that this is the last time you will see me in your house. I will keep that promise, even if I will have to walk on my knees to Rome to confirm it.

*Arden* I don't like sworn oaths. It's exaggerated and unnecessary, and you always regret them afterwards and break them more easily and fain than solemn simple promises.

*Alice* Let Mosbie swear as he thinks fit. On this condition, Mosbie, I beg of you to confirm your sworn oath by also drinking to the health of me.

*Mosbie* Gladly, as willingly as I want to live.

*Arden* Alice, how about the dinner?

Alice           It's soon ready. Play your game in the meantime.

Arden           Excellent idea. What shall we play about, Mosbie?

Mosbie          A French crown. Three deals.

Arden           That sounds perfect. Let's go. A fair deal for an honest game. *(They play.)*

Will *(opens the door slightly, whispering to Michael)* He should strike now. It's the right moment.

Shakebag       Don't wreck our murder now again, you blundering scumbag!

Will            Quiet!

Michael         Be patient. Mr Mosbie knows what he is doing, I am sure.

Alice           Now they are completely lost in their game. Could he have forgotten what he was supposed to do? This constant waiting is more unbearable than any constantly extenuated process. Alas, dear Will, when will you save me?

Will *(to Michael)* I fear that he will notice us as we enter.

Michael         Sneak cautiously between my legs, and he won't notice anything.

Shakebag       Just don't mess it all up again, Will.

Will            That accounts for you as well. Look to it that you don't stumble on the carpet.

Mosbie          One, or I have lost the game.

Arden           No, it isn't that bad. You could make it with a two as well. Fill up your glass, my friend, just to clear your thoughts. *(refills his glass)*

Mosbie          Thanks, my friend. I wish I could think faster and reach the goal with less effort, but wine will undoubtedly make it easier. *(moves a pawn)* Ha-ha, my friend, I've got you!

*(Will and Shakebag immediately storm out. Will drags Arden down from his chair with a great towel around the chair.)*

Arden           Help! What's happening? What is this? Mosbie! Alice! What are you doing? Where are you, Michael?

Will            Sir, we just wanted to make the end of the game better.

Mosbie *(brings out a hidden weapon and pierces him)* There you are for always insulting me as a tailor!

Shakebag *(piercing him)* Here's for ten pounds in my pocket!

Alice *(has come forth)* He is still groaning. Can't you finish a proper job? Give me the weapon! *(takes it from Mosbie)* Here's for a lifetime of marital torture, you worthless dungload, and that you wouldn't give me to Mosbie! *(strikes and pierces him several times)*

Michael         This is too heavy!

Will            He betrays us!

Mosbie          Calm down! I'll make sure that the groom keeps quiet.

Michael         Calm down! Do you think I could brag and senselessly betray both you and me? I am part of the crime!

Shakebag       I'll go off to Southwark. There I know a widow who could hide me. If she won't have me, I'll just plunder her to her last linen!

Will            You will have to do the rest yourselves. We have done our job and are gone.

*Alice* Take away the body first. Put it in the office. (*Will and Shakebag carry out the body.*)

*Will* We already had our pay and are satisfied. I hope this business deal now has been to the satisfaction of all parties. (*looks at the body*) Only one can not complain. We thank you. Good bye. (*disappears immediately with Shakebag*)

*Mosbie* So it's done. Now life begins.

*Susan (enters)* The guests are at the gate. Shall I let them in?

*Alice* Mosbie, go and receive them. (*Mosbie leaves*)

Susan, you must now wash the floor.

*Susan* But there are stains of blood! They can never be washed away!

*Alice* Must I force you, strumpet?

*Susan* Even if you yourself scratch with your nails for weeks and months you will see that the blood simply refuses to vanish.

*Alice* Try anyway!

*Susan* I can try, but it will not work.

*Alice* I know. They say, that bloodstains will ever remain if the victim's murderer didn't blush at the crime. If there is anything I did in life which didn't make me blush, it was this.

*Mosbie (enters)* What are you standing idling and gaping for? What's wrong?

*Alice* Nothing, except that my husband has been murdered. Look at these tale-telling stains. They will never disappear.

*Mosbie* Cover them with some straw then. Or do something else. Lay the carpet on. (*to Susan*) Don't just stand there! Do something!

*Alice* It was you who cruelly seduced me to commit this heinous crime.

*Mosbie* Don't try that sort of thing. With the same right I could claim that it was you who led me to this.

*Alice* It just mustn't be discovered!

*Mosbie* It will not be discovered, if you just keep quiet.

*Alice* And how could I keep quiet, when I killed my own husband? He will haunt me now forever!

*Mosbie* You should have thought of that earlier. It's a bit late now, for I am now your husband. Forget him. He is wasted and is no more. Stand up to it, and don't make a fool of yourself. Be prepared to receive your guests. Be calm and sensible, remember our plan, and just act naturally.

(*enter Adam Fowl and Bradshaw*)

*Bradshaw* What now, my lady? What tears?

*Mosbie* She cries for worry for her too much lingering husband, who now has been late too long. Yesterday he was threatened by a couple of bandits, and now she thinks something might have happened.

*Bradshaw* Just calm yourself. He will probably be here soon.

*Greene (enters)* God's peace in here! What's up? Are you expecting guests?

*Alice* Alas, my dear Greene, have you not seen my husband?

*Greene* Yes, I just saw him by the monastery wall. (*enter Franklin*)

*Alice* There you are, Franklin! We have all been so desperately worried. Why is my husband so late? Tell me, when did you leave him?

*Franklin* I haven't seen him since this morning. He will probably turn up any moment. Your guests can sit and wait in the meantime.

*Alice* Yes, they can. Please, Bradshaw, take a seat here. And you, Mosbie, can sit in Arden's chair over there. I just hope he will come.

*Michael* Susan, shall we attend on them? If you want to we could sit down and wait as well.

*Susan* I have other things to do. Alas, Michael, what will we do if we are discovered?

*Michael* Just keep up appearances. That's the only important thing. If we celebrate our wedding tomorrow it doesn't matter if I will be hanged in the evening. And if matters come to the worst, we could each buy a can of rat poison.

*Susan* What do you mean, Michael? Taking poison after our wedding?

*Michael* No, my lady seems unreliable. If it comes to the worst we'll have to do without her.

*Susan* No, she will never squeal. She is a woman. You don't know us or her. You have nothing to be afraid of.

*Mosbie* Hey, Michael! Have some beer! We are about to drink a toast to Arden, our old benefactor and the best friend we ever had, wasn't he, Mrs Arden?

*Alice* My husband? Are we to drink to him?

*Franklin* What is the matter, Alice? Why are you crying?

*Alice* Alas, my friends and dearest neighbours, I am so afraid that something might have happened. He should have been here some time ago, and he has sent no message, which he usually does when he gets detained. Now I feel that something definitely has gone wrong.

*Mosbie* She will contaminate us all with her nervous touches of fever.

*Greene* Just calm down, Mrs Arden. He is whole and sound.

*Alice* I know it isn't like that at all! I pray you, Mr Frankin, go out and try to find out if anything has happened. Go and look for him. Perhaps you will meet him.

*Mosbie* I will come with you.

*Greene* Me too. (*Franklin leaves with Mosbie and Greene.*)

*Alice (to Michael)* How will I now get rid of the others?

*Michael* Just leave it to me. – Mr Bradshaw, it's already late, and there are many dangerous rogues moving around here in the dark.

*Bradshaw* Yes, I heard myself recently that the notorious criminals Shakebag and Black Will have been seen here.

*Michael* And we have a number of dark risky alleys to pass.

*Bradshaw* You are absolutely right. We had better leave before the dark gets thicker. Just lend us a torch to light our way.

*Alice* Follow them to the gate, but then don't tarry. You know, that I am not glad to be left here alone at this hour. (*Michael leaves with Bradshaw and Adam.*)

Susan, you can go and fetch your brother. No, wait! What would you do that for? This place is full of dangers. No, stay with me instead, help me and advise me.

*Susan* How could I advise you? I am myself mad with fear!

*Alice* Let's see if our murdered husband is still there or if he has wandered away somewhere. (*opens the door to the office and looks at Arden*)

*Susan* He is still there.

*Alice* He is your former master, Susan. Look what has become of him and all his glory! Only bloody and smeary and stiff in a lifeless, abominable and terrifying lump of meat!

*Susan* We shall all regret this.

*Alice* Help me pull him out of there. We will clean him up and put him in order for his last respectable appearance in public as a corpse in a coffin in church. (*enter Mosbie and Greene*)

*Mosbie* What now, Alice? What will you do with the body?

*Alice* At last, darling, here you are! Now I don't need to cry any more! There is nothing amiss, as long as you are here!

*Greene* We are all in mortal danger as long as the corpse is still in the house. We must remove it with the greatest caution.

*Mosbie* Yes. Franklin thinks we have killed him.

*Alice* But that's what we have done!

*Mosbie* Yes, but we must not seem to know about it. Anything but the truth!

*Alice* Yes, you are right, and dear Mr Franklin can't allege anything without evidence. Let's party all night and forget all worries and nightmares and only abandon ourselves to the happiness of the moment!

*Greene* My lady, there is no time for wantonness now. The body must immediately be got out from here.

*Michael (enters, upset)* Oh my lady, now we are done for! The guard with the mayor himself are on their way here with soldiers carrying swords, hallberds and other sharp weapons!

*Alice* Bar the gate! No one must enter!

*Mosbie* How shall I get away?

*Alice* Yes, that's right, think only of yourself. Go to the back door across the backyard, and then stay for the night at the Golden Lily.

*Mosbie* That would be giving myself away directly.

*Greene* Dear lady, if I am discovered here I will be taken as a grave suspect. You must now help me out.

*Alice* Go with Mosbie, and take the corpse with you. Then dump it at some muddy old forgotten field.

*Mosbie* Yes, your advice is probably the best. Goodbye, my dearest love, until we meet under safer circumstances. But whatever you do, keep your mouth shut and don't admit to anything, not even under pressure and torture!

*Greene* Yes, be stalwart, madam, and everything will come out well. Think of the fact, that you have only been useful, since the world has been liberated from yet another unchanged villain and by all rights!

*Alice* But he was my husband! (*Mosbie and Greene carry off the body and disappear.*)

May the law enter and do what is best. My house is now clean.

*Susan* But I recall it was snowing when we came here. They could trace our footsteps in the snow.

*Alice* But it will snow some more, and they will be covered.

*Susan* But it stopped snowing before we were ready.

*(beatings on the gate outside)*

*Alice* Michael, let the vulgar mob in with all their ignorance and stupidity! My house has nothing to offer them any more. *(enter mayor and guard)*

Lord mayor! And the guard! Any news about my husband?

*Mayor* He was seen an hour ago as he left for home.

*Alice* It couldn't have been my husband. It must have been some Londoner.

*Mayor* Mrs Arden, I am afraid I must ask you a few inconvenient questions. Are you familiar with a person who is widely known as Black Will?

*Alice* No. Who is it? I have no connections with the underworld.

*Mayor* He has been seen in the vicinity, and I have orders to arrest that villain.

*Alice* Well, do it then. It's safest to keep such people behind bars, so that they don't walk around killing people off here and there. Do you think we are harbouring notorious bandits?

*Mayor* He appears to have been visiting this house. I am sorry, but we must search the house.

*Alice* Then search it by all means, every room and every wardrobe and cupboard. But if Arden was here you would never have dared to importune like this for nothing. *(enter Franklin looking sinister)* But here is Franklin! What news? Why so sinister?

*Franklin* My friend and your husband has been found murdered.

*Alice* My God! What calamity! Do you know by whom?

*Franklin* No one knows, but he is lying badly molested and dead behind the monastery garden. I have never seen a corpse so badly desecrated.

*Alice* But that is absolutely horrible!

*Mayor* Is it then certain that it's him?

*Franklin* Alas, if only it was a mistake! But it's unfortunately all too certain. It's him all right, and it can't be anyone else.

*Alice* But where are the murderers? Search them and find them!

*Franklin* We will. But you must come with us.

*Alice* Why?

*Franklin* Have you seen this towel and knife before?

*Susan (to Michael)* Oh Michael, now you have betrayed us by your carelessness!

*Michael* Dear me! And I thought I had thrown them into the well! I must have been absent-minded!

*Alice* It's blood from a pig that we slaughtered. You must know, that even slaughtered pigs make a bloody mess. Don't stand here any more loitering, but start looking for the murderers!

*Mayor* With respect, Mrs Arden, but unfortunately we have reasons to fear that you yourself might be one of them.

*Alice* Me? What is this? Some base conspiracy? Would I butcher my own husband? This is unlike you, Mr Franklin. Your imaginative suspicion is running away with you.

*Franklin* There are traces of blood in the snow from your house to the monastery garden, which all too obviously show that your husband was dragged in his own blood from here. And we will surely find more traces of blood here in this house. What is concealed under the carpet, for example? Straws in his shoes indicate that he was murdered here in his own home and in this very room.

*Mayor* Here is the chair he used to sit in, and there is blood in it. The blood could only be his.

*Alice* It's wine, spilled by the careless Michael. Everybody knows, that stains of red wine are almost impossible to wash away.

*Michael* It's true. I am too clumsy.

*Franklin* I know you, Alice, you venal hypocrite and aduress of double standards! It's his own blood that you have shed with the assistance of professional criminals, and you shall regret it with all those who participated in the heinous godless deed! Don't you think that I long ago realized what conspiracy was being planned here against my friend Arden's unprotected life?

*Alice* You always devoted yourself to believing the worst of me. You are partial and have always been, as you tried to alienate my husband from me without reason. But I call God's heaven to witness that I always loved Arden more than anyone else. Bring me to him then, so that I may see him a last time, if he really has been murdered.

*Franklin* Bring that villain of a groom along also, and the maid, a sister of Mosbie's. And one of you must go straight to the Golden Lily, where I think Mosbie has taken in, if he still is there. He is probably the brain in the entire plot.

*Mayor* The house is perfectly clean, but what does it help when there are blood stains? Nothing is so difficult to clean up as the misdeeds people so fervently engage themselves in. Not all history accounts in the world can efface the traces of blood that man has left for eternity like marks and sores in nature. This house can never get clean again. Come, let's get out of here.

## Scene 2. London, Southwark.

*Shakebag (messed up)* When her husband lived, the widow Chambley was good to me and glad to take me in, but when her husband died she became another person, a haughty and fastidious harridan, who often betrayed friends. I hoped to stay with her in her bed like in olden times, when her husband always was gone for business, but she turned me out. Then it went too far, I went up to her and gave such a kick of precision in the bull's eye of her arse, that she tumbled down the stairs and broke

both her leg, her spine and her neck. I then cut the throat of her waiter and will now dispose of both corpses into the Thames. Here I now have all her money. I don't care if it will be discovered. I will get asylum on the other side. (*exit*)

### Scene 3.

*Mayor* Mrs Arden, here is now your husband's body. You might as well confess at once so that you then can dedicate yourself to repentance and atonement.

*Alice* Alas, my husband, what a poor state we all now are brought down to by our weakness for the conceited egoism of passion and its blindness! As I now behold you I start bleeding inside from repentance, and the tears seek to explode in hysteria in all my being! I can't understand why I did it. Yes, Arden, you were right, and I regret it now, as you usually regret something the more bitterly the more it is too late. I would fain now buy your life at the price of my own, but it's not possible. I thought I could win my life by shortening yours, but I now realize my mistake: we were one flesh, so in the bargain we both lost our lives, and no one gained anything. In all conflicts all parts will only be losers, and they can never see that in the fatal blindness of the conflict until they wake up from the nightmare of division. Take me away. I accept my crime and will confess every detail. The only hope for me, Arden, is to be able to love you in heaven more than I could in life. (*She is taken away.*)

*Mayor* Well, Mosbie, why did you lower yourself to this heinous murder?

*Franklin* Don't try to wrangle any more. We found his belt and purse by your own bed. It's no use denying it.

*Mosbie* I employed two aids, Shakebag and Black Will, to commit the practical part. I have nothing more to say. Take me away. The sooner we get it all over with, the better.

*Franklin* We shall also get the two professional murderers. They are now summoned to the court of London and will not get away.

*Mayor* Enough of this dirty and bottomless misery. Alas, when will people ever learn? Here seven murderers faltered in blindness for the folly of passion, one tailor seducing his neighbour Arden's wife, she beguiled to shameless intrigues, in which her servant was promised Mr Mosbie's sister if he assisted, so that both these were involved in the spider's web of crime and got stuck, like Mr Bradshaw, because he gave the wife a criminal letter from Greene, who engaged two villains to commit the worst part of the crime. Seven people sacrificed for nothing, for the death of Mr Arden! And Arden himself was found as a corpse in exactly that piece of land which he ages ago bereft the poor farmer Reede, who went off to sea as a ruined man and never came back. Was it all then a kind of avalanche of tragedy originated by Mr Arden's wicked ruthlessness against poor Reede? Yes, you might well ask, but you'll never get any satisfactory or even reasonable answer.

Only Shakebag and Black Will have absconded the law, but the miserable Shakebag was murdered in Southwark on his way to Greenwich. Black Will went

abroad but was in Holland burnt as a criminal at the stake. They got away from the justice of the law but not of God.

The other six were executed by English right of law, Mrs Alice Arden burnt in Canterbury, Mosbie and his sister brought to London where they faced their death sentence by Smithfield, Michael the groom and Mr Bradshaw executed in Feversham, and Greene finally hanged in Ospringe – eight dead for the slaughter of a ninth. Alas, when will humanity find detachment from their constantly more bizarre and seriously derailing hysterical madness of vanity?

Virhamn, Finland, 18-23 June 2001,  
translated in November 2018.

*Comment on 'Arden of Feversham'.*

This fantastic play is outstanding in early Elizabethan drama by its consistent and extremely vivid realism. Almost the only plays coming in the vicinity of its juicy and palpable realism are "A Yorkshire Tragedy" and "Merry Wives of Windsor". The remarkable description of actual localities like the Rainham Down, the White Mare inn in London and the Golden Lily in Feversham, the key places of Reede's field and the monastery garden of Feversham, and the characterization of the ferry in Act IV scene 2 plus the striking character descriptions of secondary persons like Dick Greene and John Reede, both victims to Arden, the tailor and his sister, the simplicity of Michael the groom and even the short episode with lord Cheiny gives the drama a genuine stamp of reality which indicates that the playwright must have experienced it all himself or at least had very live descriptions of the matter. The crime was sensational in its day in Canterbury, it was the dominating scandal of Kent at that time, and the play betrays a very convincing review of the whole thing to an almost credible exactness. Most remarkable of all though are the characterizations of the main characters, Alice Arden and the murderer Black Will. Alice's personality is rendered with an almost lyrical empathy, she represents the highest literary qualities of the drama and its most carefully carved psychological portrait. You feel with her all the way and understand her no matter how extremely she keeps alternating between shameless criminality, sensitive hesitation and true feminine sentimentality and capriciousness. Her manoeuvres are so perfectly womanish, that it's difficult to imagine her part being played by a male actor.

Black Will is the contrary: a clearcut villain of such dimensions, that he finds his honour in his villainy. But worst of all is that he is intelligent and subtle, he is funny almost all the way, and you understand his original personality from the background that he was educated to a professional murderer by real activity in the war. The honour he gained in the war he maintains as a professional murderer, as if there was no difference between killing people in war or in peace. They are irresistible as a couple.

Who is then the author of this uniquely social-realistic play about happenings in Canterbury 1550? My opinion is that it could only be Christopher Marlowe, born and bred in Canterbury, where the matter must have been continuously discussed by his parents and their generation during his adolescence, since they experienced the event during their prime, and where Alice Arden herself was burnt. Richard Greene was hanged in Ospringe which was the home place of Marlowe's father only 10 miles from Canterbury and which today is a suburb of Feversham, where the groom Michael and Bradshaw were publicly executed. The play bears evidence of having been all but personally experienced, and the closest you can get to that is childhood impressions of authentic recounts. All this would fit Marlowe but no other contemporary English dramatist.

The play also invites to other speculations. Its leading figure 'Arden' carries the same family name as William Shakespeare's mother. It's almost out of the question, though, that Shakespeare could have written the play, since he had no connections at all with Kent. There is the theory, though, that Marlowe could have been forced underground by the persecution of free-thinkers by certain governmental authorities, and could have continued his dramatic activities as a ghost writer under the cover of Shakespeare. Marlowe's personality, as we have come to know it by other plays under his name, fit almost uncannily into Black Will's personality. It's almost probable that Marlowe could have acted this figure on stage. This personality is so suggestive that it must have created a deep impression on the audience, and Marlowe himself, as its impersonator in writing and perhaps also on stage, must have identified himself with him to some degree. Since he after the crisis in May 1593 no longer could appear under his own name and could have continued writing plays under Shakespeare's, he also could have identified himself with the name 'Will' for example in the Sonnets. That would explain the sonnets 134-136 and their hints and word play with the name 'Will'.

This is just conjecture which however leads to also other realistic possibilities that can't just be shut out.

That the play is Shakespearean is undeniable. The sincere lyricism, the fantastic language, the juicy humour, the astute characterizations – everything indicates an early Shakespeare, who probably was Marlowe.

*Gothenburg February 9th, 2004,  
translated November 7th 2018.*