

# *The Marlowe Trilogy*

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## *A Case for Christopher Marlowe*

In the view of the establishment there is no mystery. There is no reason even to doubt that the Shakespeare dramatic works could not have been written by anyone but Shakespeare, since they were published in his name. The printed standard edition of his works however was not published until six years after his death and nine years after he had left the theatre for good, and this standard version, *The First Folio*, consisted almost half of it of works that never had been published earlier, some even never staged earlier, and some of the plays that had been published earlier (in bad *Quarto* editions) appeared in the final edition in altered and even very altered form, especially *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Someone must have edited and added to the plays after the official poet's death and that to a considerable degree.

The actors involved in the Shakespeare drama are mainly the following:

The earl of Oxford, 1550-1604, an acknowledged pioneer in Elizabethan drama, who owned a theatre company and wrote plays himself, among others an early version of *Romeo and Juliet*, but none of his own plays have survived.

His son-in-law William Stanley, 1561-1642, the sixth earl of Derby, who also led a theatre company and was the leader of the Catholics by his bloodline as close to the throne as Mary Stuart, mainly active in Lancashire in north England – he owned the Isle of Man.

His elder brother Ferdinando Stanley, the fifth earl of Derby, 1559-1594, known as Lord Strange, who also led and owned a theatre company that produced Marlowe's plays. He was poisoned by the Catholics when he refused to be their candidate for the throne, which prompted his younger brother to extreme caution in public life. He also resigned from all claims of the throne to rather devote himself to the theatre. He had problems in his marriage with his wife, Oxford's daughter, who deceived him and almost ruined him.

Christopher Marlowe, the actual creator of the Elizabethan drama and the *theatre of cruelty*, so called because of atrocities that could take place both on stage and in the audience during his performances – on one occasion a member of the audience was accidentally killed. The first of his plays was *Tamburlaine the Great*, produced in 1588, but almost all his plays were equally cruel – in *Edward II* the king is murdered by a hot poker pierced through his rectum. Marlowe was born two months before Shakespeare and was officially killed in a tavern brawl on May 30th 1593.

Shakespeare's name begins to appear after this date as the author of the poem *Venus and Adonis*, which already had been ready for print for some time, and which displays clear likenesses with Marlowe's poem *Hero and Leander*, as if "both poets had known the other poem by heart", according to the biographer John Bakeless.

He was married in Stratford to a six years older lady, whom he had been obliged to marry after having made her pregnant, he was the son of a skinner and had no more than hardly even an elementary education, but he was a clever businessman and died as one of the richest citizens of England, while his children seems to have been illiterate and he didn't leave one single book nor any document at all with any connection to any play after his death. When the last Shakespeare production *Henry VIII* in 1613 led to the accident that his whole theatre burnt down, he left the theatre for good. He died without raising any attention, no memorials were held and no obituaries written, while his colleagues of the same age were celebrated with processions and solemnities.

The collected works published in his name in *The First Folio* were edited and published by Ben Jonson and others of his colleagues, probably under the surveillance of Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson being his secretary, and financed by the sons of Mary Sidney, sister of the first great Elizabethan poet Philip Sidney, who invited Giordano Bruno to England and fell in battle only 32 years old in 1586. His sister carried on his literary activity and served with her home as a kind of court to the Elizabethan poets. Sir Philip Sidney was the first one of these to insist on anonymity in his writing, which example was followed by almost all the others, especially Sir Walter Raleigh, Marlowe's first patron. The first one to publish all his writings in his own name was Ben Jonson.

Marlowe was born in Canterbury and was early discovered for his talents and sent on a scholarship to Cambridge for higher education, where he soon came in touch with the leading free-thinkers of the age, especially Sir Walter Raleigh, the first Elizabethan, the only one to still uphold a position as a favourite with Queen Elizabeth at her death. The intention was to educate Marlowe to a theologian, but he turned the other way, challenged

the church, preached atheism and found his voice in the theatre. He found a rival in Thomas Kyd, who wrote the epoch-making *The Spanish Tragedy* with a play in the play for a finale, and they probably worked together on at least *Arden of Feversham*, a realistic social drama from reality in Marlowe's own vicinity, a sensational murder that resulted in a number of executions. He also collaborated with John Penry, another free-thinker who challenged and threatened the established church and who therefore was persecuted. They had been to school together, but in May 1593 he was arrested, sentenced and hanged. At the same time Marlowe was reported by a colleague in intelligence called Richard Baines to the Queen and her Privy Council, accused of "atheism, homosexuality and coining" among other things. He was then an established playwright under the protection of Ferdinando Stanley, who produced his plays, and his and William Stanley's father was in the Privy Council. Since both lived mostly for the theatre, they would both have been concerned about rescuing Marlowe.

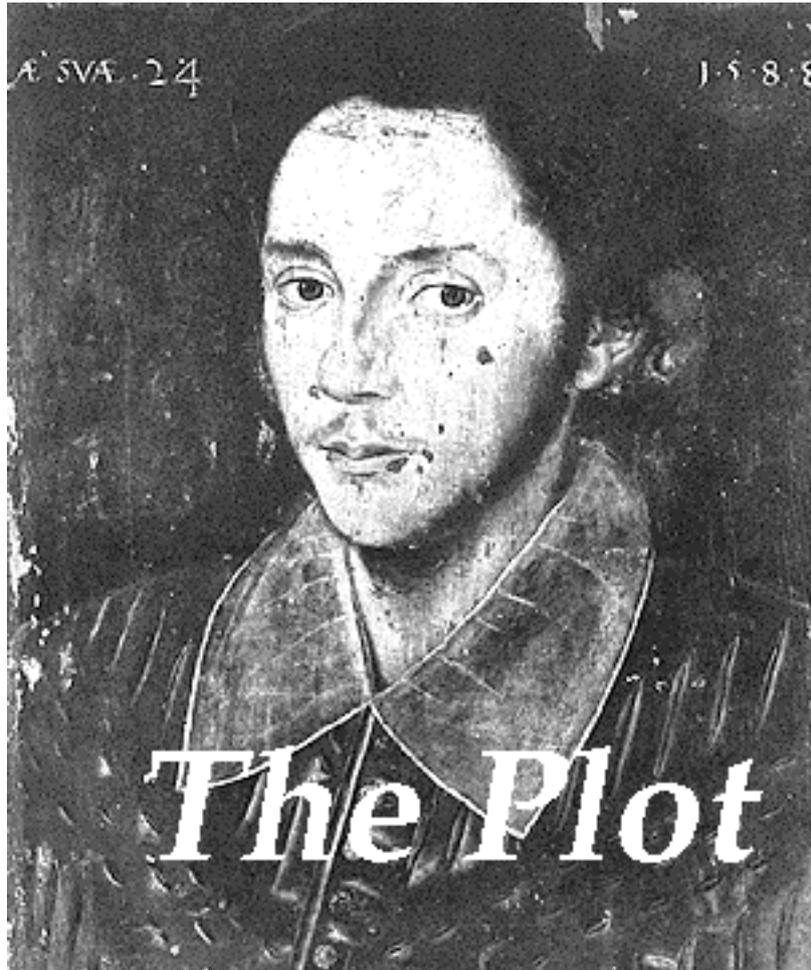
He was arrested and interrogated and ordered to remain in London, probably for a final trial and execution like his colleague John Penry, who was executed on May 29th. The following day occurs the so called Deptford incident, where Marlowe is said to have been killed in a quarrel about the payment of a bill by three of his patron's employees. The corpse quickly vanished into an unknown anonymous grave, the Queen's own coroner wrote a meticulous report about how everything had happened, where nothing is convincing or makes any sense. Thereby Marlowe was officially and legally confirmed dead, and the document disappeared for 300 years.

What follows is the fantastic Shakespeare production.

We regard it as likely that Marlowe was saved from the English inquisition by his patrons in a high position, maybe by the Queen herself, and so could continue developing the English drama under the trademark of the businessman William Shakespeare.

The following three dramas were written 1998-2008 as a consequence of our devoted research in the matter, in an effort to put things together in a very comprehensive and complex picture of how it all could have happened. "The Plot" is the central play, while the other two are complementary, both beginning with flashbacks.

*Gothenburg, February 2nd, 2019*



Elizabethan drama in five acts

*The strange case of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare,  
as it could have taken place, which is difficult to disprove,*

by Christian Lanciai (*in Swedish 1998, translated 2018*)

*Dramatis Personae:*

Nicholas Skeres  
Ingram Frizer  
Francis Archer, a sailor  
Eleanor Bull  
Sir Thomas Walsingham  
Robert Poley  
William Danby, the Queen's coroner  
A priest  
Christopher Marlowe

Toby, a servant  
William Stanley, sixth earl of Derby  
Queen Elizabeth of England  
Richard Hesketh, catholic agent  
Ferdinando Stanley, fifth earl of Derby  
William Stanley II, his cousin  
William Shakespeare  
Lady Audrey Walsingham  
Sir Walter Raleigh  
Thomas Kyd  
Thomas Thorpe  
Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton  
Robert Devereux, earl of Essex  
Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford  
Lady Elizabeth Stanley, his daughter  
Ben Jonson  
King Henry IV of France  
King James I  
His Queen  
Sir Robert Cecil  
A prison guard  
An inebriated guest  
An usher  
Sir Francis Bacon  
  
Wedding guests  
Pub customers  
Actors  
An audience

The action is in England 1593-1613  
and at Henry IV:s court in France.

The drama is a developed elucidation of the theory expressed in Calvin Hoffman's "*The Man who was Shakespeare*" published in 1955, a work of originally more than 700 pages, but only some hundred were ever published. The drama will have a sequel called "*The Ghost Writer*", which will deal further with Bacon, Oxford and Raleigh.

"Mind you, it is only a play."

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*The Plot*

Act I scene 1.

*Nicholas Skeres* What the hell are we doing here?

*Ingram Frizer* Shut up! We are here on business!

*Skeres* But what the hell for?

*Frizer* Shut up! It must be important since the old man orders it!

*Skeres* I wish he would sometime do his job himself. We are damned to be his slaves!

*Frizer* Shut up! He has influence, and he gives us money! And what he asks is never impossible! We are businessmen and want to live, don't we?

*Skeres* Yes, you'll do just anything for some daily bread!

*Frizer* There's one! What about him?

*Skeres* He looks good enough. He will do as well as another.

*Frizer* He looks like a fish out of water, hardly any family type, will probably go back to sea at once after one night's revelry ashore, don't you think?

*Skeres* Could be.

*Frizer* (*addressing the wild sailor*) Hey, chum! How is it?

*Sailor* Thanks for asking. There's nothing wrong I guess.

*Skeres* What about a drink over there at the pub?

*Sailor* Can't you drink for yourselves? I was heading elsewhere.

*Frizer* Home to wife and kids?

*Sailor* What I need is a dame for tonight.

*Skeres* No home?

*Sailor* Not yet for tonight.

*Frizer* We might get you a place for tonight, with a nice hostess. And you might even make some money on it.

*Sailor* Some work?

*Frizer* Easy work.

*Sailor* Well paid?

*Frizer* Of course!

*Sailor* Honest?

*Frizer* Of course!

*Sailor* All right then! What are we waiting for?

*Skeres* That's the spirit! Be our guest!

(*Frizer and Skeres cordially take care of the sailor and lead him on to Eleanor Bull's place.*)

*Sailor* But this is no pub.

*Frizer* No, it's even better. It's Mistress Bull's house, and she invites us for drinks.

*Sailor* You seem to know about these places.

*Skeres* Wouldn't Mrs Bull be exactly what you need after your journey?

*Sailor* (*with a twinkle*) A sailor ashore will never refuse a woman.

*Skeres* That's the spirit! (*gives him a friendly nudge in the back*)

*Sailor* But why are you so friendly? What have I done to deserve it?



Skeres We found none better.

Walsingham He will do. What is your name, my good man?

Sailor Francis Archer.

Walsingham A good name. Welcome to the club, Mr Archer.

Sailor What sort of a club is it?

Skeres It has many names. Kit has sometimes called it the School of Night.

Sailor Kit?

Frizer The fellow you will help out.

Sailor How?

Walsingham Enough talk. Get to the point.

Poley I am ready.

Skeres Shouldn't we have a drink first?

Walsingham Please yourselves. I am leaving. You know what you have to do.  
(*gets up and leaves*)

Sailor Doesn't it all seem somewhat odd?

Poley You will understand it all right when the time comes, my friend.

Bull (*arriving with a new bottle and two new mugs, fills up the others as well*)  
Where did our gentleman go?

Poley He rode home. He will not be back.

Sailor Who was the fine gentleman?

Skeres You shouldn't ask any questions, chum. The less you know, the better.

Frizer Get out now, Mrs Bull! We will get down to business.

Bull Of course. (*leaves*)

Sailor I am ready.

Poley Ready for what?

Sailor For learning my mission.

Skeres We are also ready.

Poley What are we waiting for?

Frizer Another glass. (*empties his mug*)

Skeres Are you a coward, Ingram? (*empties his mug*)

Poley You had time enough to drink before. Get going!

Frizer It's easier if our friend here first makes himself well at home. You'll need more sack, my friend. (*fills up the sailor's mug.*)

Sailor You really spoil me.

Frizer That's our intention.

Sailor I just hope I don't get too drunk to work. But that's up to your reckoning.

Frizer Yes, the moment of reckoning is approaching.

Poley Will you just go on drinking and never start acting?

Skeres He is right, Poley. We must first entertain our friend well enough, so that he will get satisfied enough with us and all eternity.

Frizer Drink, my friend! (*toasts the sailor*)

Sailor I understand less and less. (*drinks*)

*Poley* If you intend to drink him under the table, it could take all day and all night. Sailors can take any quantity.

*Sailor (somewhat muddled)* I happen to have fasted all day. I am happy drinking.

*Frizer* This is working out well. Have your fill, my friend, which will only make it easier for you later.

*Skeres* He knows what he is doing, Bob.

*Poley* I can't wait here all day. Do it now!

*Skeres* Don't press us, Bob.

*Frizer* We must take it easy, Robbie. Frank hasn't finished drinking yet.

*Poley* I had better drink myself, then. This seems to take some time.

*Skeres* That's right, Bob! Relax!

*Sailor* I had better learn what I am supposed to do before everything fades out.

*Poley* He is fading out.

*Skeres* He is happy, Ingram. Get going.

*Frizer* Just take it easy, and we'll do it swiftly without pains!

*Sailor* Imagine getting into such good company! Here I am invited to the best sack for free, to make me feel like a prince! And you haven't even told me yet what I am to do.

*Poley* Shall I tell him the story?

*Skeres* Do it, Robbie. You can make it short.

*Poley* There is a plague in London, old boy, and Kit must not leave the town.

*Sailor* Why must not Kit leave the town?

*Poley* Because he is arrested but free on bail. But he must not leave the town.

*Sailor* Tell me more.

*Poley* That means only one thing. He will be executed.

*Sailor* What did he do?

*Poley* He has been reported for atheism and coining. A friend betrayed him on the rack.

*Sailor* And what do you want me to do? Set him free?

*Poley (rising)* No, my friend. You are needed for something higher.  
(pulls his sword. The other two do the same.)

*Sailor* What is this? I don't get it. (empties his mug in alarm)

*Poley* You don't have to.

*Frizer* Yes, empty your cup, my friend. You have a long journey ahead.

*Sailor* But what is the meaning?

*Poley* We need your body.

*Sailor* My body?

*Frizer* Instead of Kit's.

*Skeres* Stop talking and start acting! (Skeres and Frizer strike at the sailor)

*Sailor (mortally wounded)* Why me?

*Poley* We have no time to answer that now. (pierces him to death. The sailor dies.)

*Frizer* At least we gave him enough to drink.

*Skeres* It's done. What do we do now?

*Poley* Now we'll just have to wait. Ingram, get yourself a few cuts in your head, and it will look better.

*Frizer* Isn't it enough with one person dead?

*Poley* Do as I say!

*Skeres* I'll fix it. Stand still, Ingram. (*gives Ingram two slight wounds in his front*) Now you have been in a brawl and was forced to defend yourself and kill our friend in self defence.

*Poley* And the body must be buried quickly, as there is a plague in town. Is the cart ready outside?

*Frizer* The grave is also dug and ready.

*Poley* All according to plans.

*Bull* (*enters with another tray*) More drinks, gentlemen?

*Skeres* That's just what we need. (*grabs a mug*)

*Frizer* Don't drink too much, Nicky. It isn't over yet.

*Bull* But what a mess you have made of it! This place hasn't looked like this since they cut up Bill Fountain.

*Frizer* Was it long ago?

*Bull* It was ages ago, last year.

*Poley* Mistress Bull is used to most things. Why do you think we chose this place?

*Bull* He is all messed up in his face!

*Poley* Let him be. It will make things easier for the coroner.

*Skeres* When will he come?

*Poley* As soon as the coast is clear. We'll just sit here and wait in the meantime.

*Bull* (*offers him a mug*) It's on the house.

*Poley* (*drinks it all up in silence*)

*Skeres* (*looking out through the window*) He is here!

*Poley* Good!

*Walsingham* (*returns*) Is it done?

*Poley* He is stone dead.

*Walsingham* (*enters, shuts the door, inspects the body with his arms crossed*)

So there you are, Kit, stone dead and insured against eternity! No one can touch you any more, for the dead may haunt the living, but no living person will freely seek a quarrel with someone dead. You've done a great job, boys! You have totally ruined his face. No one could see that this ruined carcass is not Christopher Marlowe. I couldn't have done it better myself. The thing is settled. I will go and fetch the coroner. (*leaves again in haste*)

*Bull* (*delighted*) This is the best murder to my experience!

*Poley* It will make a page in history.

*Bull* (*looks at the body*) So this is Kit Marlowe, who struck terror in all London and made all England quake and the whole establishment shiver! What a fine end product the greatest boaster on stage has made! Is it true that he wanted to abolish the whole Bible?

*Poley* No. He just wanted to rewrite it.

*Bull* He wrote better stuff himself. He could have carried on doing that instead of lying here.

*Poley* That's what he can do now. This is only a beginning. Now he can start writing real plays. But mark well: We know nothing about it. For our part, it is Kit Marlowe lying here on the table unhappily killed in self defence by our friend Ingram here, who had to defend his life when he was attacked from behind by Kit.

*Frizer* We have done a great service to the world. Now at last Kit may start working without being disturbed.

*Poley* But we know nothing about it.

*Skeres (looks out through the window)* Here they come.

*(enter Walsingham together with coroner Danby)*

*Walsingham* A most unfortunate incident, Mr Danby. And that it should happen here and in the house of a respectable lady!

*Danby* Good luck for you that I was in the vicinity. Or else there would have been a problem.

*Walsingham* You are thinking of the plague?

*Danby* Partly that, and corpses will rot easily at this time of the year. *(sees the body)* So this is the carcass. What a sorry sight!

*Frizer (reporting)* I was the one who did it. As you see, I haven't run away from the crime but plead guilty.

*Danby* Of course. Sir Thomas, I will take care of the rest myself. You have never been here. Understood?

*Walsingham* Do you understand, boys? I have never been here.

*The three assassins* Understood!

*Bull* And I have never seen you in my whole life, Sir Thomas!

*Walsingham* You will all have your rewards. *(leaves)*

*Danby* You understand that I have to write a detailed report? *(brings out documents)*

*Poley* Of course.

*Danby* So. Let's get it over with. Let's start with the names. Your names, gentlemen?

*Skeres* Nicholas Skeres.

*Poley* Robert Poley.

*Frizer* Ingram Frizer. I was the one who did it.

*Danby* I know. You were attacked from behind by Kit as you sat by the table with your backs turned on him, as he *(looking around)* lay there on the bench. I see that he has sorely wounded you, Mr Frizer. Of course you had to defend yourself, and then unfortunately you happened to strike the outstanding poet to death. Bad luck, gentlemen! Shit happens! And here is the body. I can see exactly what has happened. Here is the mortal wound that has struck him straight in the eye and entered his head by some inches. The cut is one inch in breadth and has passed two inches into the brain. That sounds good! It's all settled! Mortally wounded with instant death! It couldn't have been more perfectly arranged! You have done well, gentlemen. All we need now is sixteen witnesses.

*Bull (dismayed)* Aren't we enough?

*Danby* Don't worry, Madame! We will fix the sixteen witnesses tomorrow. Now we must get rid of the body. Or else it will start smelling and stinking, and there is a plague in town.

*Poley* There is a cart outside.

*Danby* So get the corpse to the priest at once! Saint Nicholas is only a few blocks from here. There are several empty graves. Get the corpse into one of them, and I will see to it that it gets covered up instantly. He was an atheist, so a tombstone won't be necessary.

*Priest (enters)* I heard something was going on here. Is this there where the regrettable incident took place?

*Danby* You couldn't have arrived in a better moment, reverend. We just finished the inquest.

*Priest (reaching the body)* So this is what remains of the great blasphemer! What an inhuman end to a human being! But then he was an atheist. What do we learn from this? May all atheists end up the same way, for a warning to all heretics in the world! Here we see the just punishment of haughtiness in supreme justice! Where are your proud ambitions now, Christopher Marlowe? You who thought you could conquer the world alone from a stage by a loose tongue, how much more expressive than all your life's work is now your horrible silence dressed in blood! I scorn you, miserable excrement of worms, like you dared to scorn the church and the Holy Writ! A bloody scrap of meat stinking worse than all your sweat is all that remains of your outrageous towering hubris! Behold the sum of your work, Christopher Marlowe, the end result of all your indecent vanity, your own bloodily ravished corpse! – Remove the carcass.

*Skeres* There is a cart outside.

*Priest* Good. Then I don't have to touch him. But you must carry him out for me.

*Poley* We are happy to be of service, reverend.

*Priest (to Frizer)* Are you the praiseworthy perpetrator? God bless you! Let me shake your hand! Congratulations!

*Frizer* It was a pleasure, reverend.

*Poley* Take a hold over there, and we'll carry out together the corpse of Kit Marlowe.

*Skeres* Shall I be the carrier of his head?

*Poley* Grab his shoulders, stupid. I assure you that his feet stink worse than the rest.

*Bull* A quick one for the road, reverend?

*Priest* No thank you, Madame. I will give a sermon tonight.

*Bull* Any sermon will be better with some liquor to it.

*Priest* Yes, but it will not do if I talk thick. Come on now! Let's scrap the atheistic bummer and heave him to the worms where he belongs! (*Skeres and Poley carry the corpse away, the priest following them.*)

*Poley* Easy now! Don't drop it!

*Skeres* Trust me, Bob!

*Bull* May I invite the murderer for a drink?

*Frizer* God knows I don't do this every day.

*Danby* I would suggest the contrary. It's not every day that I get such a confidential commission.

*Frizer* Isn't that the same thing?

*Danby* Only if you look to the payment.

*Frizer* You are the Queen's own coroner, aren't you?

*Danby* That's why the unfortunate incident had to happen in Deptford. It was within the verge of the Queen's own jurisdiction. An ordinary lawman would not have been as easy to instruct.

*Frizer* So my employer can influence the Queen's men but not the law's?

*Danby* Exactly. He has money, and his cousin was prime minister. Your employer is not stupid enough to let go of that influence he gained as the prime minister's cousin.

*Frizer* And that influence he can only maintain by keeping such knaves as me, Poley and Skeres in his employment.

*Danby* We are all knaves in the establishment. That's why we are established. Free minds like Kit Marlowe could never get into the establishment.

*Frizer* We were all witnesses to that.

*Bull* Cheers, my dear wicked knaves!

*Frizer* Cheers to the freedom of free minds! *(They drink.)*

*Bull* Pity only about such a good and able-bodied seaman.

*Danby* Mistress Bull, I can assure you, that that sailor made a contribution and was happy to sacrifice his life in the service of the crown and even in a most exceptional way. He will go down in history.

*Frizer* I must agree with Mrs Bull though, that it felt a little unnecessary to have to murder to produce a corpse.

*Danby* The problem was that we had to have a corpse fresh and healthy. It could not have been marked by the plague, for then it would not have been credible as Marlowe's. By presenting an authentic corpse, the matter can now in no way be brought into question, and that was the meaning of it. The Queen will be satisfied by Walsingham's efforts.

*Frizer* But couldn't we have let the hanged John Penry pass as Marlowe?

*Danby* With bruises around the neck from the rope he was hanged in? Mr Frizer! Do you think justice can be fooled by anything?

*Frizer* Mr Danby, with you as its representative I actually think so.

*Danby* I don't represent justice, Mr Frizer. I am the Queen's man, and she is also your employer's employer.

*Frizer* So we had no choice, since we had to please the Queen.

*Danby* And don't forget, that it's Kit Marlowe who is dead, no one else.

*Frizer* Cheers to the Queen. I hope she knows what she is doing.

*Danby* She always knows what she is doing. Therefore no one else needs to know.

*(They continue poculating.)*

Scene 2.

An open salon with an open fire at Scadbury Park, the Walsingham property.  
Christopher Marlowe is sitting alone by the fire.

*Marlowe* I am dead. And yet I am alive. This is no longer reality. I am executed and exist only as a shadow. The king is dead and may only go on by ghosts. And you can bet on that that's what I will do! What phantoms and ghosts and nightmares he will haunt the centuries with! The stages will forever quake before their own Tamburlaine the Great, the invincible world ruler on stage, who had to be murdered to have his power established forever, like Jesus. Yes, I have become like the crucified myself, the new age Messiah, atheist and blasphemer and follower of platonic love as the only true and lasting way of love, like another Orpheus. Orpheus and Messiah – whatever has become of you, Christopher Marlowe, the shoemaker's son who was such a natural talent that he was sent on scholarship to study at Cambridge and learn the most dangerous and heretical writings of the most forbidden authors to be able to scourge society with? And I am still young, although I am already dead. The irony of my life is greater than the world, and I have only started. But how could I ever continue now when I am dead and deprived of everything – and most of all of my own kingdom the stage? How could I endure and survive the loss of London, my entire world? No, I can't understand my own destiny. But methinks I hear my protector coming. (*noise outside. Enter Walsingham.*)

Well, brother, how did you manage the staging of my death?

*Walsingham* Everything is ready. Now it's just for you to disappear.

*Marlowe* One last night together?

*Walsingham* We can't risk it. The government is watching me. Anyone could come for a visit here at any moment. A ship is waiting for you at Dover. Here are your new documents with clearance. Your new name is Francis Archer.

*Marlowe* Profession?

*Walsingham* Sailor.

*Marlowe* Suitable enough for a wayward poet.

*Walsingham* (*taking a seat*) Your new life begins now, Kit. Take it as a challenge. Either you make it and will then really become something of the new age prophet and leader, or you will not make it, perish and vanish. You must not do that. You must make it, for both our sake and for the Queen's, who sanctioned your rescue. You must succeed in proving you were right.

*Marlowe* I see it more like a trial to my friends.

*Walsingham* How do you mean?

*Marlowe* When they will learn that I am dead, they will all speak the truth. I always wondered about the true stand of Tom Kyd, Baines and all the others. Now I will never know, since you force me away.

*Walsingham* Kit, the truth is that you have no friends. They all betrayed you and especially Baines and Thomas Kyd. This was necessary only because of them.

*Marlowe* It was Robert Greene who started it.

*Walsingham* He is dead. He is out.

*Marlowe* But what about Baines?

*Walsingham* I think he was the man who wrote your death sentence.

*Marlowe* So if I hadn't been killed at Deptford I would surely have been executed anyway?

*Walsingham* Most probably, thanks to Baines. The risk was too imminent and serious to be taken. But you drove him to it, Kit. You are yourself responsible for your own destiny.

*Marlowe (rising)* Is it my fault that Tom Kyd was arrested and babbled under torture?

*Walsingham* You know what I mean, Kit. You did everything to challenge destiny. You always boasted a lack of discretion. Already at Cambridge you started preaching atheism. You challenged the establishment everywhere except on stage. You were caught for coining in Holland. You associated with sodomites and celebrated black masses with them in the forest. You wouldn't just have been executed for atheism and coining but also for homosexuality and witchcraft, the worst crimes England knows.

*Marlowe* Thanks, my prosecutor. Let me then plead for my defence. I never tried to conceal my vices like everyone else. I was never a hypocrite. I never told a lie. I tried everything and am not ashamed of it. I knew and learned from all kinds of people without exception. I wandered in paradise with the learned in Cambridge and sunned myself in the basking light of gods like Sir Philip Sidney and Giordano Bruno, but at the same time I never objected to the company of the worst. You yourself keep people like Frizer, Nicky Skeres and Bob Poley in your service. We both tried everything from the highest and loveliest spirituality to the lowest possible vices. Yes, I associated with satanists, witches and warlocks, but only to get to know them and understand them as characters. I was your bedpartner, Tom, but also your guardian angel. You could judge me better than anyone else.

*Walsingham* You are dead, Kit. That's what saves you. You were too good to live.

*Marlowe* Our relationship was too good to be able to last.

*Walsingham* You can keep it alive as a poet and give it everlasting continuity, but only if we now part for good.

*Marlowe* Don't get sentimental, Tom. I can't stand it.

*Walsingham* The same accounts for you. We are both men, Kit. Only women are sentimental, like Socrates said.

*Marlowe* No, it was Plato.

*Walsingham* The inventor of platonic love.

*Marlowe* He meant only friendship.

*Walsingham* Friendship is stronger and lasts longer than love.

*Marlowe* Yes, than carnal love. But spiritual love is above friendship.

*Walsingham* And that's platonic love, isn't it?

*Marlowe* Like *our* love, Tom.

*(Hard knocks are heard outside.)*

*Walsingham* Who the devil dares to come visiting us with a disturbance!

*Marlowe* Should I hide? (*enter a groom*)

*Walsingham* Who is it, Toby?

*Groom* Sir Thomas, by my soul I believe it is Lord Strange.

*Walsingham* Lord Strange? What the devil does he wish from here?

*Groom* I don't know, Sir.

*Walsingham* (*vexed*) Well, show him in.

*Marlowe* Who is it?

*Walsingham* You should know. He is the owner and leader of our greatest theatre company and has produced almost all your plays.

*Marlowe* Should I hide?

*Walsingham* No, Kit, there is no need. He might even be able to solve some of our problems.

*Marlowe* Hasn't he something to do with the government?

*Walsingham* It was his father who warned us in time, Kit, so that we could take measures. It was the old earl of Derby who first sounded the alarm at the report from your friend Baines. He warned us, not the government, for his first interest, like that of his sons, was the theatre and not politics. The government knows nothing about this. But Ferdinando could be our next king, if things turn out well.

*Marlowe* A solution for us?

*Walsingham* That's what I would like to investigate.

*Groom* Lord Stanley, Sir. (*presents Stanley and leaves*)

*Walsingham* My good lord... but this is not Lord Strange. What the devil are you doing here?

*Stanley* Pardon me for intruding, Sir Thomas. I was just dropping by...

*Walsingham* Of all unexpected guests turning up at the worst possible moment!

*Marlowe* Isn't it Ferdinando?

*Walsingham* I am sorry, Kit. This is not Lord Strange but his younger brother. Nevertheless, he also leads and owns a theatre company, although a lesser one. The theatre is all the life there is for these two brothers, isn't it, Lord Stanley? But what the hell do you want here?

*Stanley* I know, Sir Thomas, that you still have some influence at court.

*Walsingham* It was my cousin.

*Stanley* But to some degree you have taken it on. The Queen trusts you. She does not trust us.

*Walsingham* With good reasons. You are leaders of the Catholics and cousins to the Queen.

*Stanley* Our father was.

*Walsingham* And you are also related with Mary Stuart. That's why the Catholics wish to make your father king after Elizabeth, which doesn't please Elizabeth.

*Stanley* It doesn't please us either. That's why I am here.

*Walsingham* Do you then wish to betray the cause of your family?

*Stanley* My father isn't interested at all in the Catholic issue. On the contrary, he is a puritan. That's why the Catholics place all their hopes in my elder brother. But

like myself, his only interest is in the theatre. I really just wanted to try to interest you in conveying that to the Queen, that if my brother is asked to become the candidate of the Catholics to the throne after our Queen, he intends to decline the offer.

*Walsingham* That's great and vital news. You surprise me, Lord Stanley. It's not your ancestry that has stirred Queen Elizabeth. It is your strong position of power in Lancashire between Scotland and England.

*Stanley* I have delivered my message. Let me not intrude any more. But isn't this our famous Kit Marlowe?

*Marlowe* It really isn't.

*Stanley* I heard a rumour that you were dead.

*Marlowe* Already?

*Stanley* There are people in London claiming that you died in the plague.

*Marlowe* Since I haven't, perhaps you, Lord Stanley, could help us with a small problem.

*Walsingham* Don't say too much, Kit. We just learned that no Stanley ever will be king.

*Marlowe* That's why I consider him reliable. I wish to have him taken into our full confidence.

*Stanley* I am good at keeping secrets.

*Marlowe* I believe so, Lord Stanley. Perhaps you have heard that I was accused of atheism and coining?

*Stanley* What I know is that our poor friend Thomas Kyd was arrested for alleged participation in the Babington conspiracy and tortured and that he under torture tried to put all the blame on you.

*Marlowe* After that there have been more allegations so serious that I am compelled to leave the country.

*Stanley* I am sorry.

*Marlowe* If I remain I am dead. If I escape I will be outlawed for life. To give me some respite and peace to continue my work, Sir Thomas has conveniently arranged my official death. Formally I am dead from this day on, Lord Stanley. I can only carry on incognito.

*Walsingham* This is a state secret, Lord William. Do you understand?

*Stanley* I understand perfectly well. Please continue and get to the point.

*Walsingham* Kit will continue working, but no one must suspect that he isn't dead. All who know about it are present in this room, his official murderers, who are all in my service, and the Queen. It is imperative that no one else ever knows about it, and that we who know bury the secret in our hearts for as long as we live and keep it buried unto our graves. Are you with us?

*Stanley* Of course.

*Walsingham* The thing is, that since Kit's voice and pen can't be silenced, we need someone neutral and reliable in whose name his poetry could be published.

*Stanley* Only his poems?

*Marlowe* Also my plays, if possible. They could be presented in some other name than mine.

*Stanley* This is curious, because I am in the same position myself. I have written some Italian comedies that I impossibly could publish in my own name, since my family has its position. There are several others in the same dilemma, like the earl of Oxford. For our part, I think we have found the solution. And I think you could be part of the same solution, if you wish.

*Walsingham* Sit down, Lord Stanley, and tell us.

*Stanley (takes a seat)* Six years ago I returned from my extensive journeys around Europe. I then stayed at our house in Chester, where my brother's theatre company frequently gave performances. In his troupe there was a young man from Stratford, who had tired of his wife and escaped to become an actor. He looks like you, master Marlowe, and is about the same age. He is a reliable and faithful theatre man whom anyone could entrust with anything. I intend to ask him if he for a certain amount could lend his name to my and Oxford's plays. If he agrees, he could also dress your poems.

*Marlowe* His name?

*Stanley* William Shakespeare.

*Marlowe* Never heard of him.

*Walsingham* Neither did I.

*Stanley* Do you wish me to ask him?

*Walsingham* Do you think it's safe? Could he keep secrets as well as you?

*Stanley* I consider it perfectly safe, as he is paid for it. He is an accomplished businessman who never gives a secret income source away.

*Walsingham* He almost sounds like our man.

*Marlowe* We hardly have any choice but to trust him and you.

*Stanley (rising)* Good. Then the matter is settled. Pardon me for disturbing you, gentlemen.

*Walsingham* I am looking forward to a possible future collaboration in literature, Lord Stanley, under the code name of William Shakespeare.

*Marlowe* But we can't let you go without having given a solemn promise.

*Stanley* Well?

*Marlowe* You have never seen me here. Understood?

*Stanley* Of course I haven't been able to see Kit Marlowe here since everybody already knows that he died today. What man is that man talking about, Tom? Who is it?

*Walsingham* It's a wayward sailor by the name of Francis Archer.

*Stanley* I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr Archer, and happy journey, wherever you are going.

*Walsingham* We will hear from him. He will write letters.

*Stanley* Many and long ones, I hope. Good evening, gentlemen! (*leaves promptly*)

*Marlowe* He got the whole picture at once.

*Walsingham* And he provided us immediately with a promising agent. It was as if he was sent here by an angel.

*Marlowe* He seems honest and reliable.

*Walsingham* He is a quiet person who never makes much of himself.

*Marlowe* In your first letter to me in France you must tell me all about this man Shakespeare.

*Walsingham* I will investigate him carefully. But he seems reliable like Lord Stanley.

*Marlowe* For the first time in many days I feel safe in good hands.

*Walsingham* You have reason to. Remember that we have committed a murder for your survival.

*Marlowe* Tom, you can't blame me for that. I was in no way accountable. What you did was entirely on your own responsibility. I wasn't even involved. I didn't even know about it. If you had shared your plans or asked me about it, I would have refused it.

*Walsingham (darkly)* That's why you were kept out of it. Nevertheless, it was a human sacrifice for your sake, to save your honour and your art and the means for you to continue working. Remember, that you yourself created the theatre of cruelty, of which this was perhaps the last risky play. And as much as we did it for you, we did it as there was no other option. It was a necessity rather than a murder.

*Marlowe* But it was wholly on your responsibility, and you reason like a satanist. Is my pen then an instrument of the devil? There is no power without corruption, and I will have absolutely nothing to do with that. Well, Tom, I give myself my punishment. If you have killed in my name for the sake of my poetry, then may my just punishment be that there may be nothing more written in Kit Marlowe's name.

*Walsingham* You are no devil, Kit. You are the divinity of the new age.

*Marlowe* Even worse. May that divinity in that case have no name.

*Walsingham* Let's satisfy ourselves with that. Happy journey, Kit. It's time for you to leave.

*Marlowe* That's how I feel also. We have reached some settlement and verdict. Farewell, my friend. No tears, no kisses. But if we meet again, we shall smile indeed.

*Walsingham* Live well, Kit, and enjoy being a poet who from now on at last may write in peace.

*Marlowe* I will miss my London stages. They were my kingdom, which I loved. I had only started. Shall I now leave all this and leave the rest of the world unconquered by my art?

*Walsingham* It's your challenge, Kit. You still have time and may succeed. The worst mishap and fate in the world can be turned to good ends.

*Marlowe* I hope you are right. Until I write, my friend, the rest between us will only be silence.

*Walsingham* Hurry on, so that you may soon be back.

*Marlowe* Thanks for still believing in me. That's all I need. Farewell

*Walsingham* Farewell, my dearest friend and most incurable and incorrigible poet. *(Kit leaves as promptly as Stanley.)*

*(When he opens the door there is a flash of lightning and immediate booming thunder. In the door there is a man in a black cloak.)*

*(Kit is taken aback and retires almost in shock. Walsingham pulls his sword.)*

*Walsingham* What kind of a trespassing importunity is this into my house?

*Marlowe (calming down and collecting himself)* Take it easy. There is no danger. It's our former guest who has returned.

*Stanley (entering)* I am sorry. I had no intention to startle you. This thunderstorm was really most unwelcome. I came back, because I got an idea.

*Walsingham* Lord Stanley?

*Stanley* Yes. Did you expect someone else, or worse, perhaps?

*Walsingham (sheathing his sword)* I expected no one at all. What idea brought you back?

*Stanley* Sir Thomas, it occurred to me, that our young playwright doesn't have to leave England at all.

*Walsingham* If he stays he will not only risk his own life but also mine and my entire future and even Sir Walter Raleigh's, whose disciple he was from the start, with all the other free-thinkers of his circle.

*Stanley* He would be as safe among the Catholics in the north as in France.

*Walsingham* Would you risk your life by taking care of him? He is the hottest controversy in England.

*Stanley* And he is England's number one dramatist. England cannot afford to lose him. Yes, I would protect him with my own life, and I know my brother would also. He could continue writing plays but exclusively for our theatre companies. We can stage his new plays in Chester and Lancashire and try them there before bringing them to London. I know that would please my brother, who would be most enthusiastic.

*Walsingham* Kit, you would then as an artist completely belong to Lord Strange's and the Lord Admiral's men.

*Stanley* What do you say, Kit?

*Walsingham* Lord Stanley, your proposition is interesting and not to be discarded or despised. It will be carefully considered by and by. But at the moment it is necessary that he disappears from England.

*Stanley* For how long?

*Walsingham* Three years at least.

*Stanley* And then?

*Marlowe* In the meanwhile and later I can write for both you and Sir Thomas.

*Stanley* In the meanwhile?

*Walsingham* His poem 'Venus and Adonis' is already finished. It can be published at once. The only problem was that it needed another signature. He also has other poems coming. And he can write plays.

*Marlowe* What kind of plays do you desire, Lord Stanley, the only one in England except Sir Thomas here who has cared for me as a human being?

*Stanley* Is there any more dramatic subject than the War of the Roses? You already started dramatising Holinshed's chronicles, Kit, by 'Edward III' and 'Edward II'.

*Marlowe* You are right. It's just for me to carry on. I could write the most diabolical drama thinkable about Richard III.

*Stanley* But no tendencies, Kit! No homosexuality on stage ever again, like in 'Edward II', and no more atheistic propaganda or attacks on the church, like in 'King John'. If you wish to continue as a dramatist although you are dead, your plays must be clinically purged from everything except what is human.

*Marlowe* And drama.

*Stanley* Of course.

*Marlowe* It's reasonable and fair. I agree.

*Stanley* You stand your best chances in the world, Kit, if you now go to France. There you can get to know women.

*Marlowe* They are all faithless, calculating and inconsistent. They have no word of honour. I have been to France.

*Stanley* Love the women anyway, Kit, even if it is only at some distance. And don't content yourself with France. Go on to Italy, get to know the Renaissance movement and culture and its writers with the modern Italian literature. There you will find the best dramatic material today. Italy is more the mother of the world today than Rome was in the Antiquity.

*Marlowe* I shall follow your advice. And I will later join you in Lancashire.

*Stanley* Do it soon. I don't think three years would be necessary, Sir Thomas. The world will soon forget all about Kit's upsetting atheistic preachings and sexual liberalism and even his murder. By the official acceptance of his murder he should be safe and immune against any kind of transgression. Since everybody knows that he is dead, it cannot be him. It's a practical impossibility that he exists, since he is confirmed dead by law. On the other hand, the world will never forget his dramatic output, and that it must never forget.

*Walsingham* I agree.

*Stanely* So let's go, Kit, out in the storm together against all future thunders and lightnings and bravely spite them together by our free spirits!

*Marlowe* I leave, Tom.

*Walsingham* You see that the world cares about you, not only I.

*Marlowe* And I suddenly feel in good hands.

*Stanley* Come, Kit! Your ship is waiting!

*(They leave, Stanley covering Marlowe with his cloak.)*

*Walsingham* He will be back with a vengeance with all his love. He is too good for the world ever to be able to lose him. Kit Marlowe is not dead. He has just been born.  
*(retires)*

### Scene 3. The Court.

*Elizabeth* What I can't understand is this homicide on that poet. He was our prime playwright. How could he associate with criminal murderers way out in Deptford, and how could he be killed by them? How could such a thing happen? We have no surplus of qualified playwrights, and too many of them already died far too young.

*Danby* Your majesty, I was not present when the incident occurred.

*Elizabeth* No, but you were conveniently handy afterwards. Was there nothing fishy about that company in that hospitable place?

*Danby* Your majesty, my only duty was to establish facts. It's all there in my report.

*Elizabeth* I have studied it. It makes a queer impression. The risk is that many will question it.

*Danby* In what way, your majesty?

*Elizabeth* In every way. The reckoning – how could it trigger a deadly brawl? Would that have been the motive for our greatest dramatist, a Cambridge philosopher who associated with Bruno and muses and gods, to draw his rapier to threaten the life of an oaf, a groom, a bum? And how could this oaf, this bum kill our poet behind his back? It says here that he couldn't turn around as he sat squeezed in between the two other dolts, who did nothing, as if they were paralyzed. In brief, Danby, the way this homicide is described in your report, makes it incredible and impossible.

*Danby* Your majesty, I was not present myself when the accidental homicide was committed. My report is founded entirely on the unfortunate killer's own confession and my investigation of the body.

*Elizabeth* In what condition was the body?

*Danby* Completely dead, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* Of course, you idiot, but what did it look like?

*Danby* All bloody.

*Elizabeth* The report describes a deep wound in his head. Could you see the face of the poet?

*Danby* No, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* You didn't wipe the blood off the dead man's face so that you could identify the body?

*Danby* Your majesty, I never saw the man in reality. Even if I had washed away the blood I could not have identified him. But they all assured me that it was Christopher Marlowe.

*Elizabeth* Even the sixteen witnesses, that could swear on it? Obviously they could all identify him much easier than you, although they were much simpler people than you and they even less than you ever had heard of the poet Christopher Marlowe.

*Danby* Your majesty, I have only done my job.

*Elizabeth* The deceased was not only our foremost poet. He was also a valuable spy for Sir Francis Walsingham, my late friend, my only consistently trustworthy servant. As an agent in his service the poet accomplished several important missions

for us in France and the Netherlands. How is it then possible that a servant of Sir Thomas Walsingham even by accident could have killed him and just for a petty bill?

*Danby* Your majesty, I am sorry if my way of handling this affair hasn't been wholly to your satisfaction.

*Elizabeth* That's not the issue, you fool. I would like to meet this murderer, this clout, this lurch who by accident happened to kill the most promising talent of our country, this – what was his name again?

*Danby* Ingram Frizer.

*Elizabeth* The poet killer Ingram Frizer.

*Walsingham* (*enters*) Your majesty, you wanted me. (*bows very deep*)

*Elizabeth* Sir Thomas, why was Christopher Marlowe murdered? I have reason to suspect your hand in this, since his death was caused by your servants. I happen to know that you are about to marry and that you had a relationship with Christopher Marlowe. What kind of a sordid scandalous bugger tale is this?

*Walsingham* Your majesty... (*indicates the presence of Danby*)

*Elizabeth* Get out, Danby. (*Danby bows and leaves.*)

Well, Sir Thomas!

*Walsingham* Your majesty, you are well familiar with the accusations against our departed friend. Thomas Kyd accused him on the rack of sodomy, atheism and coining. Two weeks ago Kit Marlowe was arrested. On May 29th we received the written accusations from Richard Baines against him of all kinds of atheism. All this should be familiar to you, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* I was willing to disregard them. And Kit Marlowe only coined foreign money, never English. There was no reason to have him dead.

*Walsingham* But he had powerful enemies that were too powerful. When he lay dead at mistress Bull's, a priest desecrated his body to scorn him after his death. And he knew himself how powerful his enemies were.

*Elizabeth* Were you one of them?

*Walsingham* Never. I was fully responsible for him as his nest friend and protector.

*Elizabeth* Still he was murdered by your closest servants. I can only understand it that they did it by your command.

*Walsingham* Your majesty, let the world think so.

*Elizabeth* What do you mean?

*Walsingham* Kit Marlowe had no friends besides me. He thought his best friend was Thomas Kyd. That man betrayed him more basely than any cursed soul could betray his benefactor, even if it was under torture. Friends don't betray each other under torture, not here in England. Even Richard Baines was a friend who betrayed him and without torture. Add two and two, your majesty. You can think. Kit Marlowe felt inexorably urged to vanish. He has obeyed the voice of his destiny and vanished.

*Elizabeth* So the dead man was – who was he?

*Walsingham* An unknown sailor without family who just wanted a slut.

*Elizabeth* His name?

*Walsingham* Francis Archer. But the lost Francis Archer has left the country.

*Elizabeth* I understand. Will he be back?

*Walsingham* In a few years at the earliest. Meanwhile his art will expand.

*Elizabeth* Sir Thomas, I misjudged you. You should be rewarded for having sensed my most secret wishes in this affair. It's only Danby who managed the matter clumsily with the affected conceit of his pedantic formalism, which produced this recklessly insane criminal report where nothing by closer scrutiny could possibly make sense. I hope this report never will be called to attention by posterity. But what can I do for you?

*Walsingham* Release and pardon my servant Ingram Frizer.

*Elizabeth* That will be easy. According to the report, he acted on self defence. Whose idea was it?

*Walsingham* His own. He learned something from the duel with William Bradley, who was killed by Thomas Watson. Watson got away with it by pleading self defence.

*Elizabeth* I remember. Our friend Kit has learned some intrigue.

*Walsingham* He will remain invaluable to England.

*Elizabeth* And that he shall be allowed to remain. But he is dead, Sir Thomas. Danby's report must never be questioned, and it's probably only we who know the truth who will be the only ones who ever saw through it. He is my own coroner. If this deceit ever is discovered, Sir Thomas, your own head will be at risk like my crown and England's. Do you see? Kit Marlowe is dead.

*Walsingham* Your majesty, I can assure you of that being the case. He is and remains dead. He has assured me of that himself.

*Elizabeth* That sounds comforting, to have his death certificate from his own mouth. You will understand that it was necessary for me to learn the whole truth?

*Walsingham* It's necessary for the welfare of the state that you know all, and I have concealed nothing of the entire intrigue.

*Elizabeth* It's good to know that he by his death is out of reach from our medieval torturers and that inquisitor Whitgift, and the circumstances around his death assure me that he really will remain so.

*Walsingham* He was himself quite clear about the necessity of that, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* Can I really trust you, Walsingham?

*Walsingham* Why couldn't you, your majesty?

*Elizabeth* You don't answer the queen of England by asking questions! How much can I trust you? Be specific!

*Walsingham* (*kneels and bends his neck*) Totally, your majesty. My life belongs to you and England without any reservations on my side.

*Elizabeth* I think you are lying. I don't think he has left England at all. Why all these lies?

*Walsingham* Your majesty knows, that you had no more reliable servant in the world than my cousin Sir Francis, whose total fidelity and discretion I have inherited.

*Elizabeth* Yes, yes, but why then do you lie?

*Walsingham (rising)* Your majesty, Sir Francis entrusted me with the poet's life when he passed away. If I can save his life I must do so, even if it makes some white lies inevitable even to the crown.

*Elizabeth* Bring the poet to me, Sir Thomas. I want to give him a mission in France.

*Walsingham* Your majesty, all my actions in this case have aimed exclusively at protecting him and saving his life.

*Elizabeth* I can see that. That's why I think I can trust you and him.

*Walsingham* I will bring him to you, your majesty, but absolutely incognito and on condition that it never happened.

*Elizabeth* Of course. We understand each other. Then I am satisfied. You may leave, Sir Thomas. *(He leaves.)*

If the world ever gets to know anything about this plot, I hope it will be long after my death.

#### Scene 4.

*Walsingham* Your majesty, I have performed my duty.

*Elizabeth* Is he here?

*Walsingham* We have brought him here.

*Elizabeth (slightly on edge)* Remember, Sir Thomas. This has never happened. Our meeting has never taken place. Christopher Marlowe is dead, and I have never met him. This is our only and last meeting.

*Walsingham* I am completely in confidence.

*Elizabeth* I hope you are. If a single word ever comes out about this, both you and Marlowe and everyone who knows anything about it are dead. This is my word, and I shall keep it.

*Walsingham* Your majesty, I have never been here today with anyone.

*Elizabeth* And only you and me and he knows that you never have been here today with anyone. Total secrecy. The secret is dead and buried with Kit Marlowe and will remain so until we are all dead.

*Walsingham* Yes, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* Bring in the poor boy. Then you will not stir one step from your place in the corridor until he comes out again. And I had better warn you: when I am finished with him, he will no longer be the same.

*Walsingham* Understood, your majesty. *(bows and leaves. Enter Marlowe.)*

*Marlowe (bows respectfully and humbly as soon as he enters,)* Your majesty.

*Elizabeth* I am not your majesty to you, Kit Marlowe. I am something much worse.

*Marlowe (dares not look up)* What could be worse than death?

*Elizabeth* There is actually something even worse than death, and under certain circumstances it is life. It is to me, and it will be to you.

*Marlowe* Your majesty speaks in riddles.

*Elizabeth* Come in here, for God's sake, boy! Is it true that you have said that you have as good a right to coin as the Queen of England?

*Marlowe* I am afraid that something like that might have slipped out of my mouth in improper company.

*Elizabeth* Very improper company! A pathetic puritan! Extremely inconsiderate and careless! That's why you are dead! And you must remain dead! Do you understand?

*Marlowe* I am aware of the conditions of my so called life but don't quite understand them.

*Elizabeth* Don't you understand anything, you bastard?

*Marlowe* What is it I don't understand?

*Elizabeth* Who was your father and mother?

*Marlowe* An honest shoemaker in Canterbury and his wife.

*Elizabeth* You were the only son among a number of sisters. Did you never feel out of place?

*Marlowe* Yes.

*Elizabeth* Were you like anyone of them?

*Marlowe* No.

*Elizabeth* Were you like your father the shoemaker or his wife?

*Marlowe* No.

*Elizabeth* Did you ever wonder why you got the best possible education?

*Marlowe* The Archbishop of Canterbury got his eyes on me and sent me to Cambridge.

*Elizabeth* You were deprived of your family for the sake of your education. And who financed your education?

*Marlowe* The Archbishop of Canterbury, I guess.

*Elizabeth* So you don't know anything about yourself. Did you never wonder who you really were?

*Marlowe* Life is full of wonders, and I always wondered about them all.

*Elizabeth* From where do you think you got your red hair? Your intelligence? Your penchant for brooding on politics? Your towering ambitions? Was your father and his wife like that?

*Marlowe* No.

*Elizabeth* Was the Archbishop of Canterbury like that?

*Marlowe* No. He wanted to make a theologian out of me. That's why I was sent to Cambridge.

*Elizabeth* That's what you thought! But you rebelled, for you wanted your life to turn your own way. That's how you became an atheist and questioned the credibility of the Bible, and your towering ambitions you gave expression by proud blasphemers like doctor Faustus and the Jew Barabas of Malta, while at the same time you associated with the boldest men of the time like Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh! Did you never wonder why you were so well taken care of and found such friends and protectors in such high positions?

*Marlowe* I considered it a course of nature.

*Elizabeth* A course of nature! All doors were opened to you, and you neither wondered why or who opened them! According to the rules you should never have made your degree at Cambridge, but you had it anyway, and you never wondered by whose grace it was given you!

*Marlowe* I assumed it was by Sir Francis Walsingham, in whose service I was already. I did carry out certain missions for him in France...

*Elizabeth* My closest associate for thirty years! And why do you think he brought you into his service?

*Marlowe* I always wondered about his good will towards me and why he employed me.

*Elizabeth* At last some wondering! Well, Christopher Marlowe, let's assume that the shoemaker of Canterbury and his wife were not your real parents. Let's assume that someone gave them a bastard to take care of, a bastard of some nobility, and that they were paid well for it. Who could then your real parents have been?

*Marlowe* Your majesty seems to know more about me than myself.

*Elizabeth* Seems! Let's assume that I know everything about you. Does that seem frightening?

*Marlowe* No, but uncomfortable. If you do know all about it, do you intend to reveal who my real parents were?

*Elizabeth* On certain conditions. If you break a single one of them, you must die together with Sir Thomas Walsingham, who took care of you after the death of Sir Francis. You are the greatest state secret of England. Do you understand?

*Marlowe* I understand and hold my tongue and wait for my sentence, that is the condition.

*Elizabeth* The conditions are: never more any politics! You took the initiative yourself for a theatrical career. Follow it! You are our greatest poet. But Christopher Marlowe is dead, and he must remain dead. The secret about that name must be buried forever.

*Marlowe* Go on, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* Stop calling me your majesty! I am your mother!

*Marlowe (is shattered, turns white and falls on his knees)* Your majesty, it must not be true! You must be mistaken! Is this some kind of a weird practical joke, played on us by others?

*Elizabeth* I never practice jokes! I am not your biological mother but the more your natural mother, since your father was the only cavalier at my court whom I always loved and who never let me down, in contrast to that miserable Robert Dudley of Leicester, who turned all my ladies in waiting into whores, and his adventures almost made all England go to hell. It was the time of the great plot, when Walsingham was compelled to execute Norfolk, Arundel and several others of the leading Catholics. It was a time of great misery, and you were the great family failure of it, born as the son I could never have myself. Your father was my dearest uncle, the only respectable man in England, who rather than risk the causing of any major

upset by taking responsibility for having made one of my ladies pregnant, like all the others did and especially Dudley and Raleigh, he placed the child discreetly among his wards in Canterbury, the persecuted exiled Huguenots, who he had taken under his wings since so many of their kin in France had been martyred. It would have been the end of my establishment if it had become known that my last mother had a nephew, since no one else in our family had any children, and to protect you and your life and also your father's, all precautions were taken. We hid you from the world and sought desperately a way to both save you and get rid of you, since you would be the only child of the family! And you graciously served and helped us by your premature birth, which only that helped us to get away with it. Only Walsingham knew about it except your father, and their secrecy was the only honest discretion in the country. They smuggled you to Canterbury and found a reliable family for you. They and I have watched you since and opened all doors and ways to you until now, when you burped the unfortunate statement that you had as good a right to coin as the Queen of England. Then you had to disappear, for England's sake. Do you understand?

*Marlowe (pale, still on his knees)* I begin to understand...

*Elizabeth* Now you are already as ruined in your soul as I, but at least you will escape becoming a king.

*Marlowe* I never wanted anything such. I was always happy to stay out of everything.

*Elizabeth* You have a twin soul in the younger son of the earl of Derby, William Stanley. He is heir to the throne but also has no wish to be king. He is your only equal in the world. You are both wise, and you have the theatre in common. Stick to it. Remain a poet, Kit Marlowe, but forget your name, forget your ancestry, and write instead the world's loveliest plays and be a king forever in the better world of the theatre! That's a happier world than any kingdom, and there you could really be something of an ideal king and remain so forever.

*Marlowe* Your majesty, you overwhelm me. I don't think this can be true. Pardon me, but I can't grasp or accept that I would be a member of the royal family. Are you certain you are not suggesting all this just symbolically and virtually?

*Elizabeth* My mother was a whore who was beheaded, and I myself have always been called a bastard. You are another such bastard, illegitimate son of my uncle William Parr and would have been baptized William like he, the most prudent and talented diplomat and reconciler in England. I know it can never be proved, we made indeed certain ourselves that it never could be, your parents never learned the origin of their child and accepted it because they were childless, they were paid for the promise to keep silent at the risk of their lives if they didn't, but they loved you, and the fact that they then only had daughters endorsed and augmented their love for their only son. But since you had no idea that you could be anyone else's son until now, you also can't be considered that until from this moment. But you are like me. You have the same poetical clear view and natural inborn sense of responsibility for the world. Your plays betray that faculty. But forget this world, its politics and

miserable failed and aborted religions, which all went wrong from the beginning. Devote yourself to people instead.

*Marlowe* I could never stop writing plays about human nature.

*Elizabeth* That's the spirit. Now I recognize you. But you must learn more about the world. And you must immediately go abroad. Henry of Navarre is already expecting you. Your only contacts here at home will be Sir Thomas Walsingham and William Stanley of Derby. You will never lack funds wherever you go. Everything will be paid for you. But you must forget all about politics. Kit Marlowe, the royal clandestine bastard, can never get as good a right to coin as the Queen of England. That arrogance has already cost you your life, Christopher Marlowe. You will have a new life. Don't ruin that as well, but use it well. Your only mistake has been committed. You will not make another.

*Marlowe* I hear and obey, Madame.

*Elizabeth* This is the only time we meet. And it has never happened.

*Marlowe* From now on I shall be like a most obedient son.

*Elizabeth* Do so, and follow your destiny, for good and for worse, like I as a slave followed my own to my own bliss and ruin. The theatre includes both masks. There's your kingdom, which I give you as a better heritage than the miserable world of politics, which ruined me. And your only fortune, Christopher Marlowe, is perhaps that you are already dead.

*Marlowe* I shall take care of it, my mother.

*Elizabeth* Do so, and manage it well. You will only have it once and never again.

*Marlowe* (*falls on his knees, bows and retires without another word, emotionally overwhelmed, while Elizabeth already has turned her back on him. As he leaves he closes the door audibly behind him, which makes Elizabeth produce a sigh.*)

*Elizabeth* The only good action of my life I have now left behind. I am already dead since long, but my love lives on, and if nowhere else, at least in the theatre. (*is tired out and leaves.*)

#### Act II scene 1. Lathom House, Chester.

*Richard Hesketh* Ferdinando, we beg you not just for our own sake. It's for the sake of England and the world.

*Ferdinando* I am still in mourning for my father.

*William Stanley II* You have taken over his responsibility, cousin. You must live up to it.

*Hesketh* All you need to do is to raise your little finger, and all the catholic world will back you up.

*Ferdinando* Against the Queen? Against England? To launch this free land into a bloody civil war with no certain end to it? To turn history two centuries back in time and drench this flourishing realm in cruelty and barbarity? And you talk about responsibility?

*W. Stanley* Ferdinando, cousin, brother, beloved friend, your father is dead with all his abominable puritanism. What did he get for all his support to the Queen? Only mistrust and suspicion. The only ones who ever believed in you and helped you are the Catholics. Now it's your turn to meet their expectations. Give them their reward for their faithfulness. Accept the crown of England.

*Ferdinando* A word of this in someone else's ear could have you hanged.

*W. Stanley* I am prepared to take that risk. Why do you hesitate?

*Hesketh* Ferdinando Stanley, earl of Derby, you can't lose. The Queen has no heir and has beheaded Mary Stuart herself.

*Ferdinando* Her son is king of Scotland.

*W. Stanley* A fool, a debile poser, an illiterate imbecile, whose father we know who it was – one of Mary Stuart's many pimps. No one wants such a fake on the throne of England.

*Ferdinando* My brother is more appropriate than I.

*W. Stanley* You refuse?

*Ferdinando* I am sorry, gentlemen, but I can't accept your offer. My father served the Queen with honour as long as he lived. He had no reward or gratitude for that, but he did it with the greater honour. I can't fail his honour, no matter how much I sympathize with the catholic cause. I can't accept the responsibility for starting another War of the Roses under religious pretexts, which would undo everything that England has accomplished for the last hundred years.

*W. Stanley* Cousin, you are an idiot. You shall never see me again. (*leaves in fury*)

*Hesketh* We should have turned to your brother directly.

*Ferdinando* Richard Hesketh, I must warn you. It is my duty to report your conspiracy to the Queen. You are no longer safe in this country. Instead of seeing my brother, I advise you to leave the country at once. Or else you will be hanged.

*Hesketh* Ferdinando, I considered you a man of honour. Now I see that your brother was right and several other nobles with him. You are not worthy of the title earl of Derby, even less king of England. If you betray me, I warrant that your own Catholics will take revenge.

*Ferdinando* A religion of revenge is no religion for me. I am a Christian who believes and trusts in peace and love. You evidently don't. Please leave my house at once.

*Hesketh* God will have his revenge on you, Ferdinando Stanley!

*Ferdinando* Go to hell!

(*Hesketh withdraws towards the exit. When he opens the door, he is met by guards with halberds.*)

*Guard* Richard Hesketh, in the name of the Queen we must arrest you.

*Hesketh (furious)* Have you had eavesdropping spies behind the tapestry all the time?

*Ferdinando* The Queen has a constant watch on me. I can't move one step or say one word without her being notified. Guards, what about cousin Stanley?

*Guard* By your request, we allowed him to slip away. He is probably now already on his way to Spain.

*Ferdinando* May he stay there and not trouble England any more. Take this man to London. The Queen is expecting him.

*Hersketh* You sold your honour and future to fawn on the sow of Westminster!

*Ferdinando* No, my friend. I saved my family, my family honour and our future. But you and my cousin wanted to sacrifice England to catholic butchers and hangmen.

*Hesketh* You will regret it!

*Ferdinando* Take him away. He is finished here. I will not inform you of what *you* will regret, Richard Hesketh.

*(The doors close on him and the guards.)*

My brother, what is your part in this? By God I hope none at all. For if you took part in this conspiracy against our free England, our family is finished, for only you can keep it going. We must have some enjoyment after this. Let's have a play tonight. Master Will!

*Shakespeare (rising from anonymity)* At your service, my lord.

*Ferdinando* What plays do you have on your program?

*Shakespeare* Comedy, tragedy, tragical comedy or comical tragedy? Or a chronicle? We can act all the classics, as you trained us to.

*Ferdinando* You worked yourself well up from nothing. I want to laugh tonight. Prepare a black comedy about all the world's misery.

*Shakespeare* Then the tragedy of Hamlet would be most suitable.

*Ferdinando* That comprehensive corruption scandal from Denmark? Yes, that will do fine. It makes mincemeat of all the world's hypocrisy and morals, as is most fitting. And it suits me well, for it might be my own death I will behold.

*Shakespeare (doesn't understand)* My lord?

*Ferdinando (claps his shoulder)* Nothing. Just act your play, and don't think of how true it could be. *(leaves the hall)*

*Shakespeare* Actors! Make ready! Quick rehearsal for tonight's performance! It's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark!

*(The actors gather around Shakespeare. Curtain.)*

## Scene 2. Like Act I scene 2: Scadbury Park.

*Walsingham* If anyone asks me what I know, I know nothing. Could I then deny what I know even to myself? I must do it in public, and thereby I must deny a part of myself, for he has hopelessly become a part of myself, the fallen poet, the doomed Lucifer, who sacrificed himself in order to survive. No, I know nothing and understand nothing, and the more I try to find my way in it, the more I get lost. He is dead, but he lives. He lives, but he is dead. What's the difference? It all comes to the same point of nothing. He has obliterated the limits of life and death, and all that is left is immortality. – Yes, what is it, my love?

*Audrey (enters)* Are you still brooding and grieving?

*Walsingham* He was my best friend.

*Audrey* I am now.

*Walsingham* No, my love. No love can outweigh true friendship. All earthly love is powerless against the love that stands above all carnal intercourse, as Kit said himself.

*Audrey* So I am only earthly love to you?

*Walsingham* You are the mother of my coming children. That also means something. At least it should mean something to you.

*Audrey* I know that you love me. I only wish that there was not someone dead standing between us.

*Walsingham* He united us.

*Audrey* You love him more than me.

*Walsingham* He loved me more than you.

*Audrey* You try to make a play of it.

*Walsingham* I try to make you see it positively.

*Audrey* That such a small man could have such a great influence on you!

*Walsingham* His soul was the greater. He was 1,67 on earth, but in his soul he is greater than all England.

*Audrey* That's why he couldn't remain here.

*(Enter a servant.)*

*Servant* My lord, you have a visitor.

*Walsingham* Who is it?

*Servant* Sir Walter Raleigh.

*Walsingham* My love, I know what he wants. Please leave me alone with him.

*Audrey* Is it about the murder?

*Walsingham* I think so.

*Audrey* Good. I leave you with your dead friend and his murder. *(leaves)*

*Walsingham* What marriage is happy? You enter it like into the most perfect delightful dream, but sooner or later you wake up with an unforgiving hangover into a hostile reality like an overwhelming reprimand. Show Sir Walter in, Toby.

*(Sir Walter is shown in.)*

*Raleigh* What is it I hear, Tom? Is it true?

*Walsingham* What is true?

*Raleigh* That Kit has been murdered?

*Walsingham* That should bring you joy and relief, if anyone. Now he will not be brought to trial and forced to reveal you and the entire circle of free-thinkers under torture.

*Raleigh* He was my finest disciple!

*Walsingham* As a satanist? Did he get his atheism from you?

*Raleigh* You know what I mean. First they said he had died in the plague. Then someone knew he had been killed at a brawl in a tavern. But no one knew anything about his grave. What sort of a plot is this, Tom? It must not be true, not him! Tell me that you saved him!

*Walsingham* He was in mortal danger. He was reported to the Queen of atheism and witchcraft, sodomy and coining. He had no chance, and he knew it. We solved the problem.

*Raleigh* Is he abroad?

*Walsingham* Sir Walter, I don't know if I can trust you.

*Raleigh* You know me. I will soon go to America. We will provide the Queen with some gold mines and things like that. I take all secrets with me and bury them in the bottomless marshes of Guyana.

*Walsingham* Kit needed some time out.

*Raleigh* So he is alive.

*Walsingham* He needed some relief from himself. Perhaps you remember his motto: "What gives me life consumes me." He was the most indulgent of all people. To some degree he loved himself to death. He needed some detachment from existence. The only way for him to learn who his enemies really were was to die.

*Raleigh* Well, he is dead now. Who were his enemies?

*Walsingham* All his closest friends except me. His closest associate, Thomas Kyd, who betrayed him under torture, and Richard Baines, who betrayed him without torture. They both defecated and pissed down his grave, so he robbed them of his grave.

*Raleigh* So they and no one else know where it is.

*Walsingham* They will be the last to ever learn that he lives. Tom Kyd is himself dying now by the way.

*Raleigh* Did he make it?

*Walsingham* What?

*Raleigh* To survive himself?

*Walsingham* He is writing greater plays than ever. He has found himself. He has rewritten all "Richard, Duke of York" and made his drama five times greater. He has found his humanity.

*Raleigh* Which he couldn't, if he had been allowed to go on as he did?

*Walsingham* Probably not.

*Raleigh* I begin to understand. But I haven't seen his name. It is deleted.

*Walsingham* Sir Walter, no one must even suspect that his death was only a play for the galleries.

*Raleigh* How many know?

*Walsingham* As far as I know, only very few are initiated in the secret, myself, the earl of Derby, Tom Thorpe, Essex and Southampton maybe, maybe the Bacon brothers, in that case also father and son Cecil, you, her majesty the Queen and William Shakespeare.

*Raleigh* Who is William Shakespeare?

*Walsingham* Our poet's new name.

*Raleigh* I understand. But didn't the earl of Derby die recently?

*Walsingham* Lord Strange, earl Ferdinando of Derby, knew less than his brother William Stanley, the sixth earl of Derby, who knows it all.

*Raleigh* Are the others reliable? The earl of Essex is an honest man, but what about the young dashing dandy Southampton?

*Walsingham* He is completely under the influence of Essex.

*Raleigh (lower)* Do you know anything about our friend Ferdinando Stanley's death?

*Walsingham* He was poisoned by Jesuits for refusing to accept the catholic candidature for the throne. He betrayed the leader of the Catholics to the Queen. The Catholics reacted as usual by killing the one they wanted for a king. The Catholics have no sense of humour.

*Raleigh* Neither have the puritans.

*Walsingham* No. All such fanatic rubble are just a plague to the nation, like a boil of pus, which the country only can recover from by letting it bleed to death.

*Raleigh* I will soon go to America. I might never come back.

*Walsingham* Good luck, Sir Walter.

*Raleigh* You don't wish to divulge where our friend Kit is at present?

*Walsingham* My friend, no one knows the whereabouts of his grave.

*Raleigh* I understand. Farewell, brother.

*Walsingham* You will be welcome back from America, Sir Walter. Even Kit has friends left in England. If he with such enemies still has friends, you always will as well.

*Raleigh* Thanks for those words, Tom. I will be back. *(leaves)*

*Walsingham* An honest man. He is so honest, that one day he will be rewarded for his honesty by betrayal, for honest men are too good for this world. Kit proved that once and for all. Thanks for still being alive, Kit.

*(drinks a cup, toasts the fire in the fireplace.)*

### Scene 3. Thomas Kyd's death bed.

*(Thomas Kyd lying fighting with death.)*

*Kyd* I didn't want it myself! They forced me to it!

*Thorpe* Take it easy, Thomas Kyd. We know what those inquisitors are good for.

*Kyd* But I must know if he in the least way was behind it himself!

*Thorpe* Who?

*Kyd* Kit, of course! Kit Marlowe!

*Thorpe* Behind what?

*Kyd* That I was arrested! Who the hell reported me if it wasn't he!

*Thorpe* Why would he have done something like that?

*Kyd* Professional jealousy! We were the two most skilful dramatists! He was number one, but I stuck up and beat him! My Hieronimo beat all Kit Marlowe's heroes! I created the anti-hero!

*Thorpe* I know nothing of Marlowe's eventual culpability in your case, but I find it hard to believe.

*Kyd* I must know it! I must know it! I must know if I am to condemn him or glorify him!

*Thorpe* You only had some bad luck, Thomas Kyd. They caught you on the suspicion of lying behind those pamphlets against the Flemish. They therefore ransacked your house and trampled straight into your most heretical philosophical arguments.

*Kyd* So Kit was innocent? And I reported him?

*Thorpe* He loved you, Thomas Kyd.

*Kyd* Then I am the cursed traitor who murdered him, blind in my own envy and suspicion!

*Marlowe* (*appearing out of the shadows*) Not at all, Thomas Kyd.

*Kyd* Kit! You come to visit me? Am I already dead, since I see your ghost?

*Marlowe* You called on me. I have come.

*Kyd* Kit! Can you forgive me?

*Marlowe* Anyone can be made to say anything on the rack.

*Kyd* Kit! I never wanted your death!

*Marlowe* Who said that I am dead?

*Kyd* Don't tell me that you are alive!

*Marlowe* It's worse than that, Tom. You are dying, and I am living on, when it should have been the contrary.

*Kyd* But how is this miracle possible? First they all told me you had died in the plague, and then we heard that you had perished in a miserable tavern brawl. Was it all then just a play for show?

*Marlowe* The best performance I ever made. I didn't even have to act myself. But my disappearance from the public stage by a trap-door in the floor was most appropriate and necessary after your clumsiness.

*Kyd* I know. I was caught. When we both could have continued together towards ever greater heights as infernal competitors for the world scene! So you never reported me?

*Marlowe* I promise you, brother, that I never even dreamt of it. Morally we were together on the same side against the puritans and the hypocrisy of society. None of us had anything to gain by working against the other. On the contrary. When you no longer could back me up, I also had to fall together with you.

*Kyd* So you forgive me my greatness in my "Spanish Tragedy"?

*Marlowe* It's the greatest drama that has been written for the English stage. All my characters are butterflies against your tragic, mad, wonderful Hieronimo. No one has taught me as much as you.

*Kyd* Then live on, Kit, and fulfil both of us.

*Marlowe* You burden me with your life's work. I will manage it and carry on.

*Kyd* But how can you be alive? Are you not on the black list of the law? Aren't you heading Elizabeth's death list?

*Marlowe* Formally I am dead already. I can't be more dead, since I have a paper on it. I can't die any more. A man dies only once, and I am already dead. But I keep on working under another name.

*Kyd* May I ask which?

*Marlowe* William Shakespeare, a bloke from Stratford of the same age, who thinks he can act and ran away from his old bitter wife to the theatre to devote the rest of his life to a most needful and profitable escape from reality. He has a sense of humour and immediately grasped and accepted the joke. He has already made great money on what I write, which of course he shares with me. Haven't you read his "Venus and Adonis"?

*Kyd* Was it you who wrote it?

*Marlowe* Who else?

*Kyd* Didn't I hear the voice from "Hero and Leander" in the lines of "Venus and Adonis"? But it's the most popular poem in England.

*Marlowe* That pleases Kit Marlowe, who is dead.

*Kyd* But Kit, such a joke could turn bitter with time. And as long as you live you will remain in mortal danger since you should be dead. You shouldn't be in England.

*Marlowe* I never left England. You who know me well, Tom, must know that I never feared death, whatever I did. I have even died without succeeding, as you can see for yourself!

*Kyd* Still as presumptuous as ever, Kit. That's your basic character: Chronic, hopeless hubris. That made your plays.

*Marlowe* And by punishing myself for it there will be many more plays. I never give up, Tom Kyd, the work we started. You had a better sense of form in your division of acts than I had. I will work on that.

*Kyd* So we seem to have become like one in the end. But the result is neither you nor me. It turned out to be William Shakespeare.

*Marlowe* But he is only one. He has no competition, and since I am dead he may work entirely in peace. He has no risky political contacts like me and no burdens of the past. He is just an artist, and he is rid of me.

*Kyd* It's a precarious destiny you have entered on, Kit Marlowe.

*Marlowe* I know. It's my play of life. And I am curious about how it will end.

*Kyd* I die, Kit Marlowe. (*takes his hand*) Thanks for coming and giving me a final applause.

*Marlowe* I didn't want to miss your last line.

*Kyd* I am sorry that I reported you.

*Marlowe* I will never forgive those who accused and tortured you.

*Kyd* The only thing we made ourselves guilty of, Kit, was common sense – no heresy or blasphemy or atheism or paganism. We both know that.

*Marlowe* And so does our tutor Sir Walter Raleigh.

*Kyd* Farewell, Kit. I will be your protector from the other side of the grave.

*Marlowe* And I will be your defender to eternity. (*Thomas Kyd dies.*)

*Thorpe* An honest man's heart has broken.

*Marlowe* And what's worse – he was innocent. A splendid power of creation was in the morning of his budding creative accomplishment broken by the blind berserk violence of ruthless politics entirely without cause or reason. He was a pious philosopher who saw the best in the deepest fallen of men. Hieronimo is in his

greatness a paragon and teacher to all mankind, for which mankind now has killed him. He is the martyr of this age to its blindness, ignorance and evil – not I. He was my twin soulmate, and I am condemned to carry on but without him, without my brother, without my stage and without my identity. For I can only go on living if I am dead. (*cries*)

*Thorpe* Take cover, Kit. You must not be seen here. We demand that you go abroad.

*Marlowe* I can't give up my England. And I have powerful guardians. I don't fear for my life, Tom Thorpe, for I am dead in my heart and soul after they brought down and took the life of Tom Kyd, my only respectable colleague and master. (*Tom Thorpe leads him out.*)

Act III scene 1. Lord Stanley's wedding.

*A huge banquet with sumptuously dressed up Elizabethans.*

*Southampton* What a sumptuously capital wedding, isn't it, my lord Essex?

*Essex* My dear Southampton, it couldn't be more perfect. I couldn't have married better myself. The daughter of Edward de Vere, the earl of Oxford, isn't just anyone.

*Southampton* I wonder why the Queen isn't here.

*Essex* She is related with the bridegroom. She doesn't like relatives.

*Southampton* But surely there is nothing wrong between them?

*Essex* The Stanleys have always shown the crown a servile benevolence, and for each new sacrifice the house of Derby has laid down for the crown, the crown has grown more callous and suspicious, as if their majesties thought: "Another flattery to bribe us to more safely be able to knife us in the back!" But there were never any long knives with the house of Derby.

*Southampton* But they are Catholics?

*Essex* The father of the Stanley brothers was a puritan. That's why the house of Stanley sympathizes with the Catholics, which Lancashire is crowded with. But they will never be Catholics themselves.

*Southampton* What about their dangerous cousin William Stanley in Spain then?

*Essex* He is a Catholic to be sure, but he will never again become an Englishman.

*Southampton* How did actually the elder brother Stanley die, the former lord Stanley? There are so many rumours.

*Essex* He was secretly poisoned by the Jesuits. He aroused the Catholics' resentment when he refused to be their candidate for the throne and instead betrayed their conspiracy to the Queen. By that he dug his own grave. That was the latest sacrifice of the Derbys to the crown: the fifth earl of Derby deliberately sacrificed himself. Or was he only stupid? He appears to have raised some resentment already before his taking sides, and the Catholics actually wanted our bridegroom William Stanley here for their king from the start.

*Southampton* I think they are preparing some speech.

*Essex* So let's listen.

*Edward de Vere (rising solemnly)* My dear son-in-law, thus our families at last have been fused into one! Many thought you would never marry, the nobility had already considered you lost to the theatre forever, but then suddenly you get family fancies and want children. I hope this was not only instigated by your elder brother's so tragic and sudden death without issue.

*Stanley* No man can endure standing alone at length. He was made for a woman. He is fashioned by nature to beget children. Why would I then be different?

*Oxford* I can only assure you, that we all gave a sigh of relief when that proved not the case. And now we no longer share just our passion for the theatre but also our common affection for the same woman, my beloved daughter, your beloved wife, the mother of our children and grandchildren in common. Welcome to our family life, my dearest boy and colleague! (*embraces him. All cheer and applaud.*)

*Stanley* Thank you, father-in-law.

*Oxford* But you should know, who has remained a bachelor for so long, that woman isn't just anyone. She is not just a bag to carry around, she is no armchair for your comfort, she is no servant to command, and least of all she is calculable. And most of all: she costs money. So mind your house, and make it worthy your wife, she will not tolerate that you just waste your assets on plays, she is worth your thrift and continence, your virtue and your attention, your piety and your humility.

*Stanley* Surely you don't mean that I should abandon the theatre?

*Oxford* Everything except that, my son, everything except that! The theatre is always there waiting for you, but your wife will only be there waiting for you as long as you are good for her. That's the whole difference.

*Stanley* May then my father-in-law's impressive wisdom catch on to me, so that I would get wiser. Which brings me at last to call for a toast to my beloved bride Elizabeth! (*raising his glass. All share his toast with enthusiasm:*) Elizabeth and the Queen! (*all drink*)

*Elizabeth de Vere (rising)* Now it's my turn to say a few words. A wise wife will never stand in the way of her husband. She will choose her husband carefully, so that she can be certain that he will never let her down. It's more important that the man is calculable to the wife than the contrary. But a good wife also needs to often be left in peace from her husband. If he uses her too fastidiously, she knows that both could tire of each other. That is why I chose my husband, who not only is possessed by the greatest interest in the theatre in the country, but who also is an accomplished lawyer and scholar, devotes himself to hunting and politics, is more outdoors than indoors and more often away than at home. That gives the housewife full licence to rule at home and full care of her children. Like yourself, William, I hope to bear you many handsome sons. (*raises her glass*)

*Stanley (rising enthusiastically)* Well, did I choose the right wife or not?

*All* Cheers! Cheers!

Elizabeth and the Queen! The Queen and Elizabeth!

(*All share the general toast enthusiastically.*)

*Southampton* How close is actually this Stanley to the throne?

*Essex* Closer than he would admit. He is related both with Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart.

*Southampton* Queen Elizabeth's aunt was his grandmother. Is that it?

*Essex* Grandmother's mother, if I remember correctly.

*Southampton* And Elizabeth has no progeny.

*Essex* Stanley is as close to the throne as king James of Scotland.

*Southampton* And many would surely prefer Stanley?

*Essex* All outside Scotland would prefer Stanley.

*Southampton* So we are perhaps today guests with our next king?

*Essex* That's why we are here.

*Southampton* How does the Queen like that you are here?

*Essex* She doesn't like it. I challenge here and am aware of it. But she is too old for me. I can't be her golden favourite as a substitute for her lack of grandchildren. I am an independent Englishman with a life and name of my own, and she must accept it.

*Southampton* And if she doesn't?

*Essex* If she can't accept me as I am, she has the power to cut my head off, as her father did with several of his ladies. But I would rather be executed with my soul intact and free than honoured and elevated as a slave. What about you? What are your inclinations?

*Southampton* You know that I am devoted to you. I would rather follow your ways than the Queen's.

*Stanley (approaching them)* Gentlemen, you stand off from society. I hope you are not conspiring?

*Essex* Dear William, you know me. I never conspire unless I must.

*Southampton* How about your theatre company now when you must devote yourself to a wife?

*Stanley* You heard. They can be combined. And you are taking well care of young Will Shakespeare.

*Southampton* Yes, that's a completely different poet from that wild atheist who died the other year. Our man from Stratford is only compliant and accomodating, has no controversial ideas, suffers from no delusion of grandeur, is well established and married in Stratford.

*Essex* But didn't he run away from his shrew of a much older wife?

*Southampton* What do you mean by that? Rather a married poet for my protégé than a homosexual fantastic constantly carried away by his fancies.

*Essex* I guess it was a good thing for England to at the same time get rid of both the wild Marlowe and the garrulous Thomas Kyd. If Marlowe had lived on, he could have done anything, preach atheism from the stage, organize coining, seduce young men to chronic perversity and homosexuality, practise black magic...

*Stanley* Marlowe only coined Dutch money.

*Essex* Are you defending him?

*Stanley* You have no right to calumniate a dead man just because he is dead and everyone is doing it. And you, my good Henry Wriothesley, you dashing earl of Southampton, surely you could have no objection against affection between men? They say you associate with Will Shakespeare on a daily basis, giving money enough for him to buy houses and properties for.

*Southampton* He is worth it. His poems are delicious. And he is very good company.

*Stanley* Just that? (*leaves*)

*Essex* Of course you must know, Henry, that Will Shakespeare didn't write his poems himself?

*Southampton* Who says so?

*Essex* Those who know, the Queen among others.

*Southampton* Who is then his ghost writer?

*Essex* I wonder that as well. But a good guess is our host here today.

*Southampton* Lord Stanley?

*Essex* Put two and two together. He has journeyed all around Europe. He has an extensive education. He is a jurist and politician and incurable theatre enthusiast. He has everything that Will Shakespeare lacks. And above all: a royal relation doesn't write plays and poems. He has every reason in the world to stick to anonymity.

*Southampton* I could make some research and ask from where Will gets his plays and poems.

*Essex* No, don't let him suspect that you know. That would only hurt him. He is a theatre man. He needs his vanity.

*Southampton* Well then. As long as the works keep appearing we have no reason to complain.

*Essex* And a mystery has no need of a solution as long as everyone enjoys it.

*Southampton* Do you think Stanley will keep on like that all his life?

*Essex* He is a man of sound habits, good sense, great wisdom and best possible health. Such a man could survive all his generation.

*Southampton* And consequently keep such a secret?

*Essex* That would be most exciting to see. But I would be surprised if he ever removed his wonderful mask.

## Scene 2. Behind the curtains of a theatre.

(*some actors reasoning*)

1 It's no joke, I promise!

2 If there is anything you can't trust in this world, it's the word of an actor.

1 Everybody knows that Kit Marlowe is still alive and kicking! Ask anybody!

2 Everybody knows that he is but a ghost of haunting unblestness. No wonder, ending so badly after the way he lived!

1 He was an agent in Sir Francis Walsingham's secret service, wasn't he?

2 You are right so far.

1 And he went to several missions in Holland and France, didn't he?

2 It's true.

1 Imagine that his death was arranged. Where would he be then?

2 Dead. He could never show up again alive.

1 Right – in England! But abroad he would have no problem.

2 What are you driving at?

1 Where abroad? He was a bugger, wasn't he? Where is the world's leading bugger king?

2 In France.

1 Right! And that's where he was seen close to Henry IV! He has never into safer and more loving hands!

2 So you suggest that Kit Marlowe is at the court of Henry IV?

1 Right!

2 If there is anything you can't trust in this world, it's the word of an actor.

1 Then you can't trust yourself. But I trust myself to know that what I say is right.

2 Then you are no actor.

1 Yes, when I act on stage, but this is backstage!

2 Listen. I was there at the time. I played all the roles of Kit Marlowe and Tom Kyd. Both are dead. Will Shakespeare's plays are better. Would you like a good advice? Be happy with them, stick to them, and forget Tom Kyd and Kit Marlowe. He would have said the same thing himself if he had seen our theatre today.

*Jonson* If Will Shakespeare has written a single one of his dramas himself, then I have written the entire Bible.

2 Are you here now again, you importunate knave? Haven't you understood that you are not welcome?

*Jonson* I am waiting for a verdict on my play.

1 If Will Shakespeare doesn't write his plays himself, who is doing it for him?

*Jonson* It doesn't matter. Anyone can write trash like that. He has probably dozens of ghost writers locked up in his wardrobe. He is just a clever businessman. That's all. (*Will Shakespeare appears with some others and starts listening, gives a sign to the others to stay quiet.*) He saw to it that Kit Marlowe and Tom Kyd destroyed each other, so that he could dominate the stage alone.

*Shakespeare (to his closest man)* Who is that man?

3 Ben Jonson, who wrote that dreadful play.

2 You are just a damned trouble-maker, you clown, who only comes here to talk a lot of bullshit!

1 If Will Shakespeare doesn't write his plays himself, it's probably Kit Marlowe hiding behind him.

2 Kit Marlowe is dead, you miserable humbug!

*Jonson* Or the theatre earl Stanley. Or his bugger friend the earl of Southampton. Or anyone. Maybe Essex, Raleigh or even Edmund Spenser. Everyone can write excellent stuff except him.

3 Don't come here talking shit about England's greatest playwright!

*Jonson* Evidently you are another one of his arse-lickers.

3 (*throws a play in his face*) Here is your bloody miserable play! It's the worst play ever written! Kit Marlowe, Tom Kyd, Greene and Sackville, Shakespeare and Heywood, they are all better than you!

*Jonson* If I differ so sharply from such a bunch of bumpkins I must be the best of all.

*Shakespeare* Enrol him.

3 What?

*Shakespeare* He acts well.

*Jonson* I am a playwright, no actor, you nitwit.

*Shakespeare* If you want your plays performed, you have to accept acting in them yourself.

*Jonson* Does that mean that you accept my play?

*Shakespeare* Of course.

3 (*shocked*) That silly trash?

*Shakespeare* I write worse myself.

*Jonson* So you are – Will Shakespeare?

*Shakespeare* And you, I understand, are Ben Jonson.

*Jonson* (*They shake hands.*) At least we could probably collaborate on stage.

*Shakespeare* This country needs new playwrights. Welcome.

1 (*continuing the discussion with 2*) I tell you, that Kit Marlowe lives! (*During the following, Shakespeare leaves.*)

2 And I tell you he is dead! That blasphemer and atheist got what he deserved! He dug his own grave! He said that the Jews did right in crucifying the Saviour, and for that Kit Marlowe got silenced enough in his own crucifixion! May the devil take him, as he took his doctor Faustus!

1 You are such a good actor that you believe yourself in the play you are acting!

2 And you are such a bad actor that you'd never understand that the truth doesn't matter!

1 What do you mean?

2 I have been in it longer than you. Even if Kit Marlowe lives and writes Shakespeare's plays, it doesn't matter, for all that matters in his theatre are the plays! Stick to the play, and don't bother about the truth!

1 Who taught you that?

2 Kit Marlowe! (*leaves in a fury*)

1 There is actually something to it. It's the play that must live and not the playwright, as he writes his plays like an act of self-effacement to endow his plays with life at the cost of his own. Kit Marlowe would perhaps prefer being dead in order to live, although he lives. That's how it must be. Now I understand what the theatre is!

3 How could Shakespeare accept such a bad play as this rot by Jonson? Does he desire the contrary to his own?

*Jonson* Don't you get it?

3 No.

*Jonson* He is painfully aware that his own plays are the worst of all. Therefore he tolerates mine, which are the second worst. I come closest.

3 You have only come here to talk rubbish! Get down to work instead! Learn this part by heart! At once! (*gives him a manuscript*)

*Jonson (throws a glance in it)* You must be damned to be an actor! Once you are, it's farewell forever to all your credibility. Then all that matters is the masks and the characters. (*leaves studying his manuscript*)

3 (*to 1*) And you, don't just stand there with your mouth open! Do you want to play the fool?

1 I was always a fool up till now, but suddenly I have realized the meaning of life.

3 And what's that?

1 To be true to all the lies that you perform to your audience.

3 Are you a philosopher?

1 The divinest philosopher is a playwright who only lives to deceive his audience. No one is wiser than he.

3 Who is that?

1 Kit Marlowe.

3 He is dead.

1 Then it's Will Shakespeare who doesn't exist. (*leaves*)

3 Perhaps after all that we could be in need of a miserable failure like Ben Jonson just to balance all that first class incomprehensible nonsense that already is too immortal on stage for us ever to be rid of it. It would have been different if Kit Marlowe had been allowed to continue acting!

### Scen 3. The court of Henry IV in France.

Royal banquet in great festivity. Food and drink is served around.

General song: "*Vive Henri Quatre, vive ce roi vaillant!*"

*Henry IV (after the song is over)* Well, how do you like it in my country, my friend?

*Marlowe* I never felt better, your majesty.

*Henry* Call me Henry. We are after all colleagues. (*twinkles, and raises his cup*)

*Marlowe* Honestly, Sir, I never quite understood your overwhelming good will for me. I find it difficult to believe it's true.

*Henry* I know you, my friend. Not many are those who know you, but those who do have the world's greatest sympathy for you. And it's not just because you are the most important diplomatic link between France, England and Holland. We trust you, my darling.

*Marlowe* But your wife, my king? How can you deceive her with me?

*Henry* Woman, my friend, is the saddest of all human chapters. Ask me, who had my life and destiny run by Catherine of Medici. I know the women. On my wedding night all the decent people of Paris were murdered just because I was

obliged to marry the daughter of Catherine of Medici. Whatever you do, Kit, don't call her a queen. She is just a woman. Her mother could run my life and everyone's life according to her will, but after the old terrible hag is gone with all her intrigues, I will do with her daughter as I please. I never hesitated in deceiving her and least of all with handsome young men.

*Marlowe* But, my king, aren't women still human, and shouldn't they be treated humanly? Man's love of woman is natural, but love between the same sex is unnatural.

*Henry* Are you pulling my leg, my friend? Or are you just teasing me? You must surely know as an unprejudiced and wise man that all love is natural. All men are by nature bisexual. So let them! Let nature have its course! Of course it is a fact that only women can be mothers. You can only get sons by sexual intercourse with women. That's undisputable. And for the sake of the family and his children, a man should be faithful to his wife, and he acts wrongly if he isn't. But it is an entirely different story if you are the king of France. All courts have always been totally corrupted. I will not brag about it, just acknowledge facts. But please allow me a question of some intimacy, my dear friend.

*Marlowe* Please go ahead.

*Henry* Have you actually never had a woman?

*Marlowe* I never drilled a hole in a woman, if that's what you mean.

*Henry* That's exactly what I mean. Did you drill a man in that way?

*Marlowe* I don't drill holes, your majesty. I am too sensitive for that. I was early seduced by older men and learned love that way. I love. That is all.

*Henry* And that gave you your strange destiny. You loved yourself away. You are a dead man without a human existence. How does it actually feel to be nothing and still the greatest craftsman of words of your country?

*Marlowe* Honestly, my king and friend, I gave a sigh of relief when I was dead. I didn't have to pose and act any more and could start observing life from its true perspective – from the gutter. I was no longer stuck in any position. I was free at last to start writing for real.

*Henry* But you can never retrieve your position. You can never form a family or live safely at home in your own country.

*Marlowe* But my art will remain established. I still have friends in England who will protect me with their lives. And if I wish I can go home and operate under other names. But I prefer to live completely for my art as the best channel of my love.

*Henry* So your plays are like your children?

*Marlowe* Yes, my spiritual children, and as such I endow them with immortal life.

*Henry* What play are you working on now?

*Marlowe* Henry IV.

*Henry* About me?

*Marlowe* No, an English king 200 years ago. But the play reflects much of my free life without responsibility in good company.

*Henry* Would you include me in any of your plays?

Marlowe You already are, your majesty, in two of them.

Henry Let me guess – a tragedy and a comedy.

Marlowe Quite correct, your majesty. Your life almost turned into a tragedy by the massacre at Paris after your wedding but still turned a comedy by your sensible detachment from religion.

Henry If Paris had been worth a black mass I would have celebrated that as well. Religion is fool's play which only admits morons void of all self-criticism and common sense. Politics is something else.

Marlowe What is politics, your majesty?

Henry Just stick to calling me Henry. We are colleagues, aren't we? (*twinkles and raises his cup*) Politics, my friend, is to make sure that every Frenchman has his own chicken for dinner every Sunday. If you succeed with that, you are a good politician and may retain your power. Cheers, my friend, for good hunting!

Marlowe To follow you on your chase, my friend Henry, has become my life's greatest pleasure.

Henry That's the spirit! More wine! More geese on the plates! We have a party here!

(*The general song is resumed, and the banquet goes on in the best of moods.*)

Henry Damn, Kit, I envy you. We shall share the night together, and we shall make love like pigs, but you are still young, your whole life is still ahead of you, and you must allow yourself some true love with a woman, the real, natural, carnal love, so that you become a human being of flesh and meat and not just remain an eternally dying soul out of touch with reality. Go to Italy. I will send you as my ambassador to Mantua and Florence, Verona and Venice, and shall pay all your costs. Love women, Kit, love life, and think of me who gave it to you. Write poems of me. Write love poems to your king, the man who loved you more than any man can love a woman.

Marlowe I don't know Italian, my king.

Henry It is easy to learn. You know Latin, you dunce, and Greek as well. In Italy you will be like a fish in water. That's where you should have lived from the start. You are a renaissance poet and could become the greatest of all. Go to Italy, my friend, at my cost, and love the women of Venice, at my cost, and think of me, your king, who never could allow himself a human life, because he was stuck in his role as a king; except with you, my friend, who came and saved me from all my power and inhumanity by your total honesty in the lack of roles. (*pause*)

Marlowe My king, I have loved many, but none have loved me as you.

Henry And you say that without my having touched you.

Marlowe Yes. Your love is greater than any flesh can express.

Henry Then I will touch you even less. You are sacred by your total humanity. Be my friend, young poet, but never forget me.

Marlowe Your love, Henry, will never die.

Henry Thanks for those words, my friend. You almost make me feel like a human being.

Scene 4. Scadbury Park (like act I scene 2 and act II scene 2.)

*(Sir Thomas by the open fireplace.)*

*Walsingham* The years pass and only grow longer while the increasing slowness of age makes life only vanish the quicker out of your hourglass. At the same time positions are more hopelessly locked, crises more difficult to solve and the burdens of your life's mistakes more heavy on your heart and more difficult to bear. And then the ailments enter your body with the increasing lust to just forget and bury everything in the cup of drunkenness, which only dims your brains and hastens your senility. But it's perhaps best that way, so that you the sooner may die and forget everything. What is it Toby? *(enter Toby)*

*Toby* A guest, Sir.

*Walsingham* The one I expected?

*Toby* The same.

*Walsingham* Show him in. *(Toby leaves.)* And as the only happy one, he in his loneliness appears, who survived his own death and lives on like a ghost without position and identity and with no honour, but the freer in constantly increasing creativity, which just goes on impressing more and more in confounding greatness of output.

*(Enter Lord Stanley.)*

Lord William Stanley! Thanks for visiting me! You are one of those few who always return and are the more welcome each time.

*Stanley* I just wished to hear the latest news as usual.

*Walsingham* Nothing new. He writes poems, produces plays, lives freely and keeps on constantly surpassing himself.

*Stanley* What is the latest?

*Walsingham* *(producing a bunch of papers)* A fresh intrepid war drama of the fifth Henry of Lancaster.

*Stanley* He never took part in any battle but still describes war as if he lived in it as a general.

*Walsingham* And he is always victorious, even if there is a long way through defeats and tragedies to a still infallible glorious end. There is no greater fighting spirit in all England than in the dramas of this dead exile.

*Stanley* Have you already written it out?

*Walsingham* It's copied and finished. The distribution will now be on your responsibility as usual. And our man on stage, William Shakespeare, does his job thoroughly, I understand?

*Stanley* He undertakes his task with great seriousness. We could never have found a more reliable man. He studies the dramas meticulously, shows a deep understanding for their texts, has a good hand with the players and produce them with splendid results, as if he had written them himself.

*Walsingham* It's just a pity that Kit cannot see them.

*Stanley* Who is Kit? I thought he was dead. Maybe you mean someone else?

*Walsingham* Pardon me. I forgot myself. *(enter Toby, greatly agitated)*

What is it, Toby?

*Toby* Sir, another most unexpected visit!

*Walsingham* Who is it?

*Elizabeth (outside)* Don't loiter, boy, but show me in! I haven't come here from London to be antichambered!

*Walsingham and Stanley* The Queen!

*Elizabeth (breaking in)* So you are two? So much the better! Tom, I am to knight you, so it is just as well that I may see how you live. (*looking around*) It will do. There is room enough here for my retinue. I can stay here for a few days. That will be a nice and suitable rest and relaxation from my working life. (*takes a seat in the greatest armchair*) How are you, gentlemen?

*Stanley* Thank you, life goes on.

*Walsingham* We manage.

*Elizabeth* And how is your strange ward, Tom, whom you had killed and then sent on to the continent?

*Walsingham* He writes beautiful letters and poems, plays and compositions. Our hastily and unnecessarily executed poet has never felt or written any better.

*Elizabeth* Where is he today?

*Walsingham* If he isn't with the intrepid Henry of Navarre, he should be knocking around in Italy.

*Elizabeth* What is he up to in Italy? His place is on the continent. After all, he is our most important agent in France, the Netherlands and Vienna.

*Walsingham* King Henry sent him on a mission to Italy.

*Elizabeth (angry)* He is in our service and not in king Henry's!

*Walsingham* Your majesty, he is a free man after his murder, since he no longer exists.

*Elizabeth* God damn and God's blood! Get him home to England at once! Henry could change sides any time, as he has done before, and again become a Catholic in league with that old scoundrel Philip! Don't you know that we are at perpetual war with Spain? Ireland is in rebellion again, and Philip intends to send another armada against us!

*Stanley* My Queen, I heard from reliable sources that our arch enemy king Philip now is dead. To the relief of all Spain, there will be no fifth armada sent against England to its own certain destruction.

*Elizabeth* Philip dead? Can such tough scoundrels die?

*Stanley* He appears to have died of joy when he heard about the new rebellion in Ulster.

*Elizabeth* Then the Ulster men's rebellion brought a piece of good news, even if it was the only one. And I must send Essex there to clear up the mess. Him I cannot trust. Lord Stanley, you will go with him, although I do not trust you either. It will be your task there to guard him. But what was the subject we were discussing? Oh yes, our dead heretic poet! He must come home to England!

*Walsingham* My Queen, there is one thing I can assure you, and that is that our poet will not change sides. There is no greater patriot and no more loyal Englishman than

the poet we murdered, buried without a grave and exiled without honour. His own plays prove it.

*Elizabeth* The ones that are making master Shakespeare rich?

*Walsingham* Not without deserving it. He produces them, enacts them and entertains all England with them as if he had written them himself.

*Elizabeth* A great opportunism, brilliant double standards, a perfect arrangement, and what a double play! What does our poet think about it?

*Walsingham* He is quite satisfied if he is allowed to work in peace.

*Elizabeth* So it seems to work out all by itself. You, Stanley, will accompany Essex to Ireland. Remember, that you watch him for me! If he turns against me you are both dead!

*Stanley* My Queen, I am as faithful as your poet.

*Elizabeth* I will knight you in a few days, Tom. I just wanted to look around and make sure that you deserve your knighthood. You deserve it for the poet's sake. I wish I could knight him along with you.

*Walsingham* I will write that to him, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* You will do nothing of the sort. He is dead, so it will not do. He must wait until some day he will have some sort of an exoneration, and it will hardly occur in my lifetime. Look to it that you behave and act your parts, gentlemen. I haven't been here tonight. (*departs*)

*Walsingham* You never know where you have that woman.

*Stanley* The same accounts for every woman, Tom.

*Walsingham* Are you not happily married?

*Stanley* My wife is more with Essex than with me. She rather stays here in London than with me in Lancashire.

*Walsingham* What do you think of the Irish rebellion?

*Stanley* The Irish just are like that. It's a hell every time it happens and you have to go there to massacre them. Most tired out of that sordid business of all is our good friend Essex.

*Walsingham* Is she sending him there to be rid of him?

*Stanley* That is to be feared, Tom. Of all punishments, that's the worst, the most inhuman and thankless. If he doesn't fall in battle there, it will make him an irreconcilable enemy to her.

*Walsingham* So she will get what she wants whatever happens?

*Stanley* It looks bad for Essex, Tom. He is practically executed already. Thanks for the play. Fortunately the theatre will always survive.

*Walsingham* Good night, Sir William. (*Stanley takes his hat on and leaves.*)

She might have five years left to live at most. What will come after her? Nobody knows. But no matter how she governs, no one can follow her. Our good days are hopelessly drawing to a close, and every man knows, that after each day of sunshine, there will be a night of darkness.

(*resumes his place, brooding by the fire.*)

Act IV scene 1. An army camp in Ulster.

*Essex* It's hopeless, Derby. We can't defeat Tyrone.

*Stanley* It's unlike you to give up, Robert.

*Essex* We have no choice. I am no general. I can't handle a war. I am a courtier and cavalier, like the earl of Leicester. I should be sitting down by the skirts of the Queen and not be cast out into a warfare masquerade to the wild Ireland, where I can only make a fool of myself.

*Stanley* You begged for this mission yourself.

*Essex* I know.

*Stanley* The Queen expects you to go through with it. She will never forgive you if you fail.

*Essex* She coolly calculated on that I would augment her cult by my Irish victories. She thought that I better than anyone else could increase her prestige and pour some oil on the senseless psychosis of nationalism. It turned out to be water instead, and her proud army in Ireland has been lost in the rains dwindling to a fourth. We have nothing else to do than to admit our defeat.

*Stanley* What will you do?

*Essex* Make peace.

*Stanley* For that you could be beheaded in London.

*Essex* Do I have any choice?

*Stanley* Go on with the war.

*Essex* And sacrifice the last fourth? Consummate my defeat? Come home to London naked? To cut the losses now and go home is my only chance.

*Stanley* You risk your life.

*Essex* Here there is nothing else to do for all of us than to lose our lives.

*Stanley* Our poet's nationalistic drama production will get upset and fall out of fashion. He will not be happy.

*Essex* You mean that William Shakespeare, alias Kit Marlowe.

*Stanley* You know about it?

*Essex* I am related to Sir Thomas. We still have that state secret left even if we lose everything else. But where is the poet now? How did he manage to remain concealed all these years without raising any suspicions?

*Stanley* He has a safe refuge with Henry of Navarre in France and another with me in Lancashire. I do have several castles.

*Essex* And then he can hide with Sir Thomas but never for long. Sometimes he has been seen haunting London but only to always disappear at once.

*Stanley* He is very careful and very restless. Wherever he stays it's never for long. It's only with me and king Henry that he feels quite safe. But his best protection is William Shakespeare.

*Essex* But they haven't even met.

*Stanley* No, but that theatre man is very careful about handling the business well. He makes much on it, since the plays are given in his name, and he doesn't want to lose that productive milk cow. His name has become synonymous with a good play of quality which must fill the house. He lives on not falling out of his role, and his stagings are always perfect.

*Essex* Is that why the Queen favours him?

*Stanley* Yes, she also doesn't want to lose her role.

*Essex* What does the poet himself say about it?

*Stanley* Nothing. He just goes on working, obsessed by his art and by humanity.

*Essex* How long do you think it can go on?

*Stanley* Until he is abandoned by his muse. (*enter Southampton*)

*Southampton* Gentlemen, aren't we ready for attack?

*Essex* There will be no more attack.

*Southampton* What?

*Essex* Sit down and take it easy. We have more important things to discuss than vain and futile wars.

*Southampton* Like what? What could be more important than winning the Queen's war?

*Essex* Your poet, who writes love poems to you.

*Southampton* (*brightening up*) William Shakespeare?

*Stanley* (*aside to Essex*) Doesn't he know?

*Essex* (*back*) He knows absolutely nothing. – Yes, the very same.

*Southampton* It's an honour for me to be his sponsor. His love poetry is the most beautiful in the world.

*Stanley* And he writes all his love poems only to you?

*Southampton* I take that for granted. They are all dedicated to me ever since his first great poem "Venus and Adonis".

*Essex* Yes, there will be reasons enough to discuss William Shakespeare's love poems to Henry Wriothesley of Southampton for several hundred years.

*(Stanley laughs aside.)*

*Southampton* What is the joke?

*Stanley* (*cheerful*) Nothing, my friend, just your debatable future legendariness.

*Southampton* (*doesn't understand, doesn't care*) But isn't it risky to interrupt the war? What will the Queen say?

*Essex* She may say what she pleases. I don't care. I don't want to kill and sacrifice more people, and I am tired of being her puppet and jumping-jack. I am a free human being and no slave and least of all an old capricious vain and tyrannical old maid's lackey.

*Southampton* If your views reaches the Queen's ear, your head will be likely to come off.

*Essex* Let her hear it! Let all women hear what cruel tyrants they are, who aren't even aware of the irresponsibility with which they handle men's feelings and

make themselves guilty of unfathomable tragedies to them! She will be certain to cut off my head, since she is a woman, and I loved her!

*Stanley* Take it easy, Robert. You still have your wife to live for.

*Essex* Yes, I have, just as you have your wife to live for.

*Stanley* That was unnecessary.

*Essex* So? I happened to hit the bull's eye? I didn't even think of aiming.

*Southampton* Gentlemen, don't start arguing about your women.

*Stanley* We might as well have it sorted out immediately. You know very well, Robert, that my wife rather stays with you than with me.

*Essex* I can only admit that she is keen on me. Judge her, not me.

*Stanley* Have you slept with her?

*Essex* Ask her. She knows best that I rather slept than was awake.

*Stanley* So it's true.

*Essex* I can't judge her. You may judge her, for she is your wife. But take into your account, that she was bored up in the cold winter fortresses of Lancashire and always wanted festivity and warm society around her, which she only found in London. (*laying his hand on him*) She is only a woman, William. Don't judge her for being a woman. Then you must judge the whole female sex.

*Stanley* Kit Marlowe did that, who created our theatre for only male actors to play both women and men, so that no women could drag the female ideal in the mud, and by the years I am more and more tempted to give him right.

*Southampton* There are also good women.

*Stanley* Yes, they always mean well but cause irreparable damage nonetheless.

*Essex* All can not be buggers like Kit Marlowe. The world must also have children. And we men must have sons.

*Stanley* You are right, Essex. We can't judge woman. This trial is not correct since there is no woman present to defend her hopeless cause. So we close the case.

*Essex* The judge has spoken. May we instead be judged by Queen Elizabeth.

*Stanley* I am afraid that woman could be worse as a prosecutor than as an advocate.

*Essex* Especially if she has power.

*Stanley* I resign. Mind your business, gentlemen. (*leaves them*)

*Southampton* We are in the same boat, Robert. I had fallen out of grace even before I followed you to Ireland.

*Essex* Still I don't think she will touch a hair on your head. She needs you more than me.

*Southampton* For what?

*Essex* You protect Shakespeare.

*Southampton* And why am I needed for that?

*Essex* Because you don't know who you are protecting. (*leaves him*)

*Southampton* Now he also speaks in riddles. The devil take these cryptic literates! If Essex now will turn as mysterious as Shakespeare in his incomprehensible love poems to me, I think I will have just had it!

Scene 2. The Queen's bedchamber.

She is completely unmasked with long grey hairs, old and awful.

*Elizabeth (facing her mirror)* Behold the power of England, that defeated Spain with her four invincible world armadas and fundamentally ruined the catholic papal empire with its world monopoly! What is then this brave England, which thus can act a police and bringer of freedom to the world? – Nothing but this shallow shell of a bitter crone, frustrated of all things human and with nothing left except this rotten superficial artifice of power. If England could see the soul of England in this fallen derelict shed, this dusty outlived ruin of what once could have become a woman, this mummy that survived herself for generations, England would implode for shame to never more be able to show herself even politically to this world. All my power and glory and sovereignty are but theatrical effects in a superficial masquerade in the theatre of vanity, which only gets more exhausted in its emptiness the longer it is hanged out as a scarecrow on stage to there catch an easily beguiled audience in fascination of her lies, borrowed feathers and deceits piled up like towering stones of cliffs on each other in a pyramid just to conceal a black hole of a grave that never gets filled up enough with only vanity and emptiness.

*(Essex suddenly opens the door and breaks in.)*

*Elizabeth (frightened)* Essex!

*Essex (throws himself on his knees in utter humility)* My Queen, I had to see you at once to explain everything.

*Elizabeth* What has happened? Why aren't you in Ireland?

*Essex* I have made peace with Tyrone.

*Elizabeth (finds herself immediately)* So he is still alive? You were to vanquish him once and for all and triumph with his severed head on the Tower!

*Essex* My Queen, three fourths of my army was lost. They just went down in fevers, desertion, cowardly escape, they fell on the battlefields, disappeared in the forests, went over to the enemy, ran home to their farms – I can't say more. I couldn't crush Tyrone, and to save your last four thousand men I made peace.

*Elizabeth (pretends benevolence)* My friend, you are brave coming here with such a confession, accepting your own responsibility for such a backlash to my entire government. Your honesty is impressing in its straightforward fearlessness.

*Essex (still on his knees)* No one else is guilty. I carry the whole burden of accountability. I have failed. Forgive me.

*Elizabeth* All my men have failed in Ireland. You are but one of many, but the last one.

*Essex* Don't judge Southampton. Judge none of the others. Judge only me.

*Elizabeth* I am looking through you, my friend. *(takes his chin)* You forget that I know you. With your eloquence and nobility as means and arguments you ask me to overlook your failure. That is not for me to do. Your destiny is decided by the council, not by me. I am still less a military than you. But I appreciate your honesty,

and I forgive you your worst crime: (*harder*) to dare to impose on my privacy on your own initiative and surprise me in my own bedchamber!

*Essex* Please forgive me, your majesty.

*Elizabeth (softer)* I forgive you. But go straight home and change. Your clothes are muddy. Neither am I very representative. Come to dinner, and we will talk better. This is quite unworthy of both of us.

*Essex* My Queen...

*Elizabeth (angry)* Get lost! (*Essex pulls out, backwards.*)  
(*embittered*) What a scoundrel! (*blackout*)

### Scene 3.

*Stanley* False, miserable woman! Are you happy now with your love? You haven't just completely put yourself to shame and lost all your credibility, but also deceived me with the greatest traitor of the country!

*Elizabeth de Vere (desperate)* My husband, I haven't committed adultery.

*Stanley* No, and Essex has in no way made any rebellion! He only conspired by mistake! By accident he happened to raise the banner of rebellion!

*Elizabeth* Don't condemn me. He was the favourite of the Queen and of the whole country. He flirted with me and invited me to friendly intimacy. We didn't go to bed.

*Stanley* You are infected with that man's lies! He proclaimed his rebellion in the noble intention not to harm the Queen! He only wanted to overthrow the state but keep the Queen! His lies are like yours: you didn't sleep with each other. You only loved each other.

*Elizabeth (throwing herself on the floor)* Then kill me rather than bereave me so cruelly of my soul and womanhood!

*Stanley* You didn't know what you were doing. Women never know what they are doing. They just do it and repress it and forget it, deny it and regret it for the rest of their tortured lives. You didn't know what you were doing when you preferred the vain superficial charlatan to honour and your country and your life with your husband.

*Elizabeth* My husband, you were like a desert, sinister, cold and gloomy. I needed some change, I couldn't live without water, I desperately needed an oasis. Our friend the proud Essex showed me understanding, like as if he could think like a woman himself.

*Stanley* He acted just like a woman. He was more womanly in his distraction and impulsiveness than the Queen, who in all her frigidity still is a woman who understands how to guard her honour. (*enter a servant*)

What is it?

*Servant* Sir Walter Raleigh, my lord.

*Stanley* Away with you, woman! Your narrow luck is that I have been faithful to you. I pardon you. Now get out!

*Elizabeth* I only wanted to have some fun for a change. (*leaves*)

*Stanley* Alas, that's what they all want, but they all find it more difficult than anything else, and it always ends up badly: tears, blood and tragedy is all that my wife and Essex harvested on their quest for having fun. (*enter Raleigh*)

What's up, Sir Walter?

*Raleigh* In brief, everything is going to hell.

*Stanley* Is there any hope for Essex?

*Raleigh* He dug his own grave in sheer thoughtlessness.

*Stanley* What will be his verdict?

*Raleigh* The Queen can forgive him everything, but when she blocked him from his business monopoly on sweet wines his true ego burst forth. He could not forgive her that, and then he let the whole world know that she was an abominable living carcass.

*Stanley* Essex carelessness galore.

*Raleigh* A woman can forgive anything except being hurt in her vanity by an unpleasant truth. That's why Essex will be decapitated in February.

*Stanley* Thereby she executes the finest remains of her proud and free England. He was the final glorious flower of all her fruitful gardening.

*Raleigh* That's the way all England feels. But there will still be another age after her. Our country will not perish with her.

*Stanley* What are you insinuating?

*Raleigh* We must have a King after the Queen.

*Stanley* Of course. King James of Scotland, Mary Stuart's son.

*Raleigh* No one wants him in England. He is a conceited fool.

*Stanley* No one else is possible.

*Raleigh* There is only one candidate.

*Stanley* Oh no. Don't try that one on me, Sir Walter.

*Raleigh* You are the only one, William. You have everything which that Scottish fop is lacking.

*Stanley* He has everything which I lack: legitimacy.

*Raleigh* What is that legitimacy? A royal family of petty egoists, vain maniacs, metaphysical drunkards and incompetent fools? Half of all the Stuarts have been decapitated or murdered in other ways and never without a reason.

*Stanley* That merit is shared by most royal families.

*Raleigh* William, accept your responsibility! Your family is spotfree. You have no maniacs in the family. You are all intelligent, cultural and diplomatic characters of integrity. Your balance and world knowledge is needed as a counterweight to the passions and exaggerations of the last century!

*Stanley* I have a more important obligation.

*Raleigh* Impossible! What do you have to live for besides politics except the theatre?

*Stanley* The theatre is more important than all the world.

*Raleigh* Are you then a fool?

*Stanley* No, I am all that for which you accuse me: a balanced, world wise diplomat.

*Raleigh* Then you fail your country!

*Stanley* No, Sir Walter, I only fail you. I know that you have nothing good to expect of king James. But put yourself in my situation. Perhaps you intentionally forget, that my family is gravely involved with the Catholics. I was always the candidate of the Catholics to the throne, and if I were to accept that candidature as pretender to the throne, not only the Protestants and puritans would react sourly with violence. I would also have James and Scotland against me. While if James now would be king, Scotland and England would be united in peace. That would constitute a firm ground for a great age of the kingdom of the united British Isles. That's what Elizabeth and England needs and wants. You must weigh the political advantages against the disadvantages of the alternative. I will vanish in that scale, Sir Walter.

*Raleigh* King James would wish to see me dead.

*Stanley* I will do anything to help you. My voluntary abstention from the candidature would perhaps help you most of all.

*Raleigh* You commit political suicide for England's political future. What will you get out of that? You must realize yourself that you are so much better than that conceited faker.

*Stanley* I have my theatre.

*Raleigh* I know. Many believe you wrote all those excellent chronicles that appear in the name of William Shakespeare, for they all carefully follow your own family.

*Stanley* I trust you belong to those who know about the secret of the murder of Christopher Marlowe?

*Raleigh* You don't mean to say that he is still keeping busy writing plays?

*Stanley* Who else?

*Raleigh* Who else but you? All Catholics know and tear their hairs for that you don't care about the crown and only wants to pen comedies.

*Stanley* Marlowe lives under my and Walsingham's protection and also under king Henry's of France if necessary. Sometimes I considered sending him to Man. There would be no place safer for him.

*Raleigh* Where is he now?

*Stanley* Only he knows.

*Raleigh* I always wondered about his departure. Still today many maintain that he was the greatest poetical genius of all and that not even Shakespeare surpasses him. But you go well together, the two of you. You are both masters of self-effacement for the sake of England.

*Stanley* Don't be surprised if he suddenly turns up.

*Raleigh* Can't you make him do just that? I would like to meet him, if he is actually still alive. *(A secret door opens in the tapestry, and Marlowe comes forth.)*

*Marlowe* Pardon my eavesdropping.

*Raleigh* Kit Marlowe! You are really alive! *(goes up to him, touches him, embraces him)* My son! My disciple! All your fate is entirely my fault! It was I who first seduced you by my heresies!

*Marlowe* Sir Walter, no one must know that I am alive.

*Raleigh* Is that your condition for staying alive?

*Marlowe* My sincere and sinister condition.

*Raleigh* An inhuman condition. How long can you allow an amateur from Stratford to harvest all the glory that only is yours?

*Marlowe* He does a good job. He produces my plays and makes them successful. I could never have done that myself.

*Raleigh* And he makes outrageous fortunes on them.

*Marlowe* Some of that reaches me. Some goes to Walsingham's clerks, who write them out. And some goes to Lord Stanley here, who copies them. But the most important thing is that the poetry reaches all England.

*Raleigh* How can you accept such an existence? Without family, without name, without future?

*Marlowe* Look at Essex and Southampton, Shakespeare's sponsors. They had a name, family and future. Southampton betrayed Essex, so that Essex will end on the scaffold. For that the dashing Southampton got a life sentence in prison. There's England's glory and destiny for you, Sir Walter. And if you survive them yourself with your doubtful merits, it would perhaps be a miracle. Perhaps I am the happiest among you who is already dead.

*Raleigh* My Kit, my darling boy! (*embraces him*) Shall we meet again?

*Marlowe* At least on the other side of the grave if not before.

*Raleigh* I can only say, what they all say in your tragedy, that if we meet again we will smile indeed.

*Marlowe* That's what Brutus and Cassius say with sadness, since they know they will never meet again.

*Raleigh* This is too much. I came to you, Lord Stanley, full of hopes but part from you with a broken heart. I have seen too much, having seen the truth.

*Stanley* Farewell, my brother. The theatre is always there.

*Raleigh* But for how long? Everything is falling apart in this world of betrayed ideals. And when our glorious Queen is no more, we shall have a vain imbecile and flimsy clown for a fake king who isn't even funny. The tragedy is masked in a most pathetic political black comedy which only can end up in disaster. I don't believe in your new England, Stanley. Only you could have saved it. (*leaves*)

*Marlowe* I apologise that I couldn't keep myself from appearing.

*Stanley* Absolutely no harm is done. Sir Walter Raleigh belongs to us reliable enough to rather vanish in a grave without honour than divulge anything of our secret. We still have our theatre, my friend, no matter how much England may go to hell.

Act V scene 1.

*The King's own private theatre. The entire court enters with King James leading with his Queen. Among the others are Sir Thomas Walsingham and in the end Lord Stanley. They all find their seats (with their faces to the audience) expecting a theatre performance.*

*James* What is it now, Lord Stanley, that you have come up with? How dare you present surprises?

*Stanley* Your majesty, it is an old play which always has been performed with success, but it has now found a new form and been greatly expanded.

*Queen* No indecencies, I hope?

*Stanley* Of course not, my Queen.

*Walsingham* I know the play. It was performed with success already twenty years ago, and didn't you yourself act in it in Denmark?

*Stanley* It was to the Danish court in Elsinore, which castle Kronborg then was inaugurated. But much water has flowed both in the English Channel and the Danish since then.

*James* Was that the king who was so flamboyant that he fired cannons to every common toast taken at his party?

*Stanley* The very king.

*James* That was no king for gloomy puritans, who think they will be admitted to heaven just for banning all humour.

*Queen* Is the play amusing?

*Stanley* It's an exciting and in parts amusing tragedy.

*Walsingham* Let's just have enough corpses filling all the stage with blood in the finale, and it will be like in Kit's good old days.

*Queen* Who is Kit?

*James* A deceased scandal writer.

*Walsingham* It was he and Tom Kyd who created the English drama. Our all dominating theatre man Shakespeare is just like a village craftsman in comparison.

*James* Don't talk ill of our good man Shakespeare. He has given us many good laughs by his cheerful comedies. He will be here tonight, won't he?

*Stanley* He is the producer of the play who staged it.

*James* Call him out. I want to see him.

*Stanley (giving a sign to the backstage. Calls are heard: Will Shakespeare! He appears from one side.)*

*James* My good entertainer, they tell me you are responsible for the performance tonight.

*Shakespeare* May it please your majesty.

*James* It pleased earl Derby here to make it a surprise. I hope there will be no unpleasant surprises to my Queen?

*Shakespeare* There is a ghost in the beginning. But like in all real tragedies there are lots of tears and blood, but may it please your majesty that all villains will die in the end.

*James* In other words: a happy ending! I like that!

*Walsingham (aside)* Let's see how you like it that the king is a villain!

*James* So let the show begin! We are eagerly expecting it!

*Shakespeare* It will be my pleasure, your majesty. (*bows and leaves*)

*Stanley (aside to Shakespeare)* No truncations of the text?

*Shakespeare* It's like an entirely new play now performed for the first time. (*exit*)

*Walsingham* What have you really come up with, Stanley? No unpleasant reminders of Sir Walter Raleigh?

*Stanley* He is with us tonight like in the good old days.

*Walsingham* He and Southampton are imprisoned for life. What does master Shakespeare think of that?

*Stanley* He never touched on the subject with one word.

*Walsingham* Not even in this new play?

*Stanley* Least of all.

*Walsingham* Then we'll manage.

*James (impatient)* Get on with the show now! What are we waiting for?

(*The staff is thumped in the floor. The lights are cut, except for a cold light on stage.*)

*Queen (shuddering)* Evidently it's cold in Denmark.

*Stanley* It will pass.

*Cecil* Horatio? Wasn't there a Horatio in Thomas Kyd's play?

*Walsingham* All ghosts of the past come back in this play.

*Queen* Whew!

*James* There is the ghost! But that is master Shakespeare himself!

*Cecil* Quiet! Don't ruin our play!

*Walsingham* A sad old countenance, one of the constantly more common unblest spirits of our realm, that unjustly were forced out into limbo and therefore never will find peace.

*Stanley* I share your melancholy, Sir Thomas.

*James* I think I recognize this.

*Queen* Have you seen the play before?

*James* It's possible. But it is very daring to start a play with an unblest ghost.

*Cecil* Don't ruin the whole play for us by sitting gossiping! Another wants to hear what the actors are saying!

*Queen* They have their written parts. What we say is more relevant.

*Cecil* But not during the performance!

*James (to the Queen)* My dear, Sir Robert Cecil is right.

*Walsingham* So there is the protagonist. Another sad melancholy character from yesterday. It could have been Kit.

*Queen* He seems depressed. Could he suffer from tooth-ache? Perhaps he has an indigestion.

James He is probably only suffering from spleen, like everybody else.

Cecil Can't you keep quiet?

Queen Surely we have a right to talk?

Cecil But not in the middle of the drama!

Walsingham Your theatre production is like pearls to swine, Stanley.

Stanley It has always been like that. That's why Kit left it all – and concentrated on writing even better plays instead.

Shakespeare (*looking furtively out of the curtain, to Stanley*) Is the performance all right?

Stanley Splendid, Will, just splendid!

James I want to see the ghost again!

Shakespeare It will come! (*disappears*)

Cecil I don't like that old chancellor. Is that to be some caricature of my father?

Stanley How on earth could you get such an idea, Sir Robert?  
(*The light darkens and gets blue again.*)

Queen Oh oh! Now it's getting cold again!

Walsingham Night of fate, night of horror, night of destiny.

James What do you mean, Sir Thomas?

Walsingham I just wanted to join in the mood.

Queen Whew! I dare not look!

James So that was it. The ghost was murdered by his brother, who usurped the power. But the brother is an anointed king, and this king is a villain. Is this very appropriate and constructive to morals of society. Lord Stanley?

Stanley It happened in Denmark long ago.

James So it's only in Denmark that something is rotten in the state and only long ago. Is that correct, Lord Stanley?

Stanley Exactly so.

James Yes, it is best seen symbolically. Or else, who knows who might become inspired to what?

Cecil That old clown again! He reminds too strongly of my father. Can't you strike him out of the play?

Stanley Too late, Sir Robert. But he will be disposed of.

James A bold play, on my honour, which sets the entire court in a state of embarrassment: a criminal king and a mad crown prince. Could it get worse?

Queen Can't you make it quicker so that we can see how it ends? Like all actors they talk too much.

Cecil It's always like that in all of Shakespeare's scenes.

James It has been said that he doesn't write them himself. Who else could it be? Could it be you, Lord Stanley, who gave up your candidature for the throne for the theatre?

Stanley I am innocent, your majesty.

James Yes, you are almost the only one in the country who managed to keep your family innocent by keeping out of every intrigue. But you could have taken the crown after Elizabeth, Stanley. Why didn't you?

*Stanley* I didn't want it.

*James* I thank you for it.

*Stanley* Nothing to be thankful for.

*Queen* But that he is allowed to go at the poor innocent Ophelia like that! Can no one teach him manners?

*James* But he is mad, my love. Madmen are allowed anything on stage.

*Queen* But little Ophelia could be harmed by such an offensive and clumsy manly brutality!

*Walsingham* Mind you, it's only a play.

*James* But the intrigue has petered out. Will there be no action soon?

*Stanley* The action hasn't even started yet.

*James (bored)* Yes, I can see that. And of course we'll not see any more sign of the ghost?

*Stanley* Just wait.

*James (invigoured)* That sounds good!

*Queen* You and your ghosts! Is that all that could interest you?

*Walsingham* Unfortunately all interesting people are but ghosts nowadays.

*James* Just don't mention Essex!

*Walsingham* I haven't mentioned him.

*Queen* What about Essex?

*James* Elizabeth cut off his head. I am content with having them in the Tower for life.

*Queen* You are gracious, my king.

*James* But what is this? A play in the play?

*Stanley* Why not? Sometimes you need a theatre for a mirror to see your own reality. That's what's happening to this Danish court now.

*Queen* Will that not somewhat complicate the intrigue?

*James* You bet it will.

*Walsingham* He suddenly sounds like Elizabeth.

*Stanley* To please you, my Queen, there will now be a pantomime, so that none of the actors will say a word, so you may talk as much as you please.

*James* I think that murder of the king is getting a little too much of an argument.

*Queen* Weren't your own father murdered in a similar way, darling?

*James* My father was blown up in pieces.

*Queen* By his wife's lover, who assumed power after him?

*James* Please don't remind me of it.

*Queen* Earl Derby, you seem to have projected your king's own terrible past in a play on stage. For what purpose?

*Stanley* None at all. This king was murdered by leprosy poison by his own brother. That's much worse than any royal assassination that ever took place in Scotland.

*James* You are right. I like the play. There are different dimensions to it.

*Walsingham* It's a correct review of all the world's politics.

*Cecil* But how could Hamlet doubt the ghost? Why doesn't he at last take the life of that criminal usurper? To say the least, it is criminal to tarry!

*Walsingham* Because he is a Catholic. He didn't want to send the king to heaven but to hell. Pure superstition, so to say. Kit would have liked that satire. Superstition paralyses power and politics.

*Queen* No, this is going too far! Now the boy abuses his own mother!

*Walsingham* He is only bitter against the female sex.

*James* For some good reason, it seems. His own mother let him down, didn't she?

*Queen* But he just can't behave in such a manner! First his beloved Ophelia, and now his mother the Queen! This is outrageous! What kind of a play is this?

*Stanley* Try to look at it in its correct perspective of time, my Queen.

*Queen* What do you mean?

*Stanley* It happened many hundred years ago.

*Queen* But it's happening now and on stage! I can see it for myself!

*Walsingham* Let me remind you, that it is just a play.

*Queen* That's not so just!

*James* Don't get upset, my dear. It will soon be over.

*Queen* Let's hope so indeed!

*James* Hurray, there's my dear ghost again!

*Queen* You can go to blazes with your darn ghosts!

*Cecil* The king is perfectly right in sending his nephew to England. Such a talented young man belongs here. But listen, Lord Stanley, wasn't there a real Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? I mean, in our own time?

*Stanley* It's true. They were present at the court of Frederick II in Denmark.

*Cecil* Did you know them?

*Stanley* Yes.

*Cecil* So you wrote the text! You are the man!

*Stanley* The playwright got them from me. He will show up in the end.

*James* Isn't it master Shakespeare?

*Stanley* You will see.

*Queen* So that irresponsible playboy succeeded in driving poor Ophelia both to madness and suicide. Will he kill his mother the Queen as well?

*Stanley* No.

*Queen* This is at least no play for ladies. That's for certain.

*James* I think it's getting better and better.

*Cecil* Yes, things are starting to happen now as people begin to die.

*Stanley* I am afraid there will be no more ghosts, your majesty.

*Queen* Thank heavens!

*James* It doesn't matter. People are beginning to die off instead.

*Cecil* Now they start fighting even though they have no woman to fight for.

*Walsingham* The honour, Sir Robert! Honour is like a woman, for which anyone could do anything. Just look at Essex, Southampton and Sir Walter Raleigh.

*Stanley* So you got it out at last.

James I have heard nothing, Sir Thomas.

Walsingham *(aside)* Good for you, you incompetent shitbag!

Cecil There! Now they are all dead! Are we satisfied now?

James A splendid play, lord Stanley, the best I've seen for a long time! When can we have a second performance?

Walsingham Every day, if you wish.

Stanley Any time, your majesty.

James Call the author! You promised we would see him!

Stanley Look, there he is!

*(Kit appears surprisingly dressed and masked as Shakespeare.)*

Marlowe Thus was this play just a flight of thought, a dream quietly passing by unnoticed to immediately be forgotten and vanish, not even going up in air. So are we all mere mirages of air, we the living dreams, who but for a brief moment flutter by, as some kind of a glimpse of a higher truth, like a thought-provoking reminder of an appearance that we only truly can see in our mind's eye. If this dream of air could in some way possibly bring up man and make her better – then the actor's life's effort was not entirely in vain. Thanks for your interest – and forget us! *(bows)*

James *(applauds)* More! More! *(to Stanley)* Is that the writer?

Stanley Yes, your majesty, the same, the unknown actor.

James But the man is dressed up like Shakespeare. Isn't he the one?

Stanley No, he is unknown.

James Let me see! Bring on Will Shakespeare!

Stanley *(calls)* The King wishes to see William Shakespeare!

*(Shakespeare appears together with Kit.)*

Shakespeare *(embraces Kit)* My brother, you are the best of all.

Marlowe No, we are a team, and as such we are the best of all.

James Who is he? Off with the masks!

Marlowe Your majesty, an actor must never remove his mask. If he does, he is no longer qualified for the theatre. *(bows and quickly disappears)*

James No, don't let him go away! I want to see him! Off with the masks!

Stanley It doesn't matter, your majesty.

James What doesn't matter?

Stanley Who wrote the play. It's only the play itself that matters. Isn't it right, Will Shakespeare?

Shakespeare Yes, that's right.

James Now I got furiously thirsty. First you get both horny and hungry from such a damned good performance! Well, it doesn't matter who wrote the play, but I want to see it again soon!

Stanley As you please, your majesty.

James Away now to our supper!

Walsingham *(to Stanley)* How could you let Kit appear?

Stanley He asked for it.

Walsingham He risks his life and all our lives!

*Stanley* You saw for yourself the king's duplicity. In front of his very eyes there was his own family history, how his father was murdered by his own wife's lover, and he didn't even react! Elizabeth would not have contented herself with less than an execution.

*Walsingham* You are right. Still Kit took a great risk.

*Stanley* He wanted to test the king. Now he can write whatever he likes.

*Walsingham* And Shakespeare?

*Stanley* He cooperates as usual. He is the actor and director who is only grateful for each new play, whatever it contains. He is paid for it, you know. (*nudges his arm*) Come, let's join the King at his supper and keep up our good countenance in this decadent masquerade of hypocrisy and deceit which our court now has become! I chose right in preferring the theatre to the crown. What happens on the theatre is so much more sophisticated than everything that's happening in the whole banal world.

*Walsingham* You go alone. I am not much for royal banquets.

*Stanley* Perhaps you will join us later?

*Walsingham* Possibly.

*Stanley* The king will take it as a discourtesy.

*Walsingham* No, he is not that thoughtful. (*Stanley leaves.*)

A queen lost, who raised England to a leading country of justice and freedom like nowhere else, though cocks and adventurers like Essex and Henry Wriothsley of Southampton finally had to pay for it. And then comes this dog from Scotland demanding obedience from all England and imprisoning Sir Walter Raleigh for life, the oldest and first of Elizabethans, only because he remains a worthy Elizabethan and makes James feel what he is – worthless.

*(King James returns alone.)*

Your majesty – have you forgotten something?

*James* No, I am just not satisfied.

*Walsingham* With the performance?

*James* No, the play was splendid – I have never seen a better show. But I am not pleased with the poet.

*Walsingham* The play was good but not the author?

*James* I don't even know who he is!

*Walsingham* William Shakespeare. Who else?

*James* It doesn't fit. In play after play we have this motive of exile with longing melancholy heroes, unfairly dealt with who may not come home – already Romeo in exile in Mantua was like that. You can only write things like that if you have been exiled yourself.

*Walsingham* Your majesty is wise.

*James* Now I want to know who the poet is, so that I can exonerate him, if possible.

*Walsingham* I don't know who he is myself.

*James* Still he was appearing here tonight dressed up as William Shakespeare.

*Walsingham* It could have been someone else – symbolically.

*James* So you don't know who it is?

*Walsingham* May I come with a suggestion. Christopher Marlowe.

*James* Are you pulling my leg? That atheist and coiner was justly murdered in a tavern brawl.

*Walsingham* Then there is only William Shakespeare.

*James* That smug self-complacent businessman speculating in properties and houses, who has been at home all his life stuffing his greed, while he writes plays with expert knowledge from foreign lands – he is the least probable of all. Don't try to fool me.

*Walsingham* Then we have William Stanley.

*James* Many suspect him. He has been travelling all around the world and has much experience and wisdom. It could be he – and he would have his reasons to keep anonymous. He is a royal relative, and royalties don't write challenging plays. But Stanley was never exiled.

*Walsingham* Then I can't think of anyone else.

*James* Neither can I. (*rising*) Pity. Whoever he is I can't exonerate him in any way as long as I don't know who he is. – Aren't you joining the party?

*Walsingham* I will come presently, your majesty.

*James* Lucky for you. Or else I might have started suspecting you for belonging to Raleigh's party. It was he, that devilish crook, who first seduced and ruined Christopher Marlowe, and you also knew him in those days. I know you well enough, you old Elizabethans, and I know all about you!

*Walsingham* (*bowing*) You are wiser than I thought.

*James* Nobody knows me, but I know everyone! Come now, my friend, and you shall tell me everything about your cousin Sir Francis Walsingham's activities in those days! (*takes him around the shoulder, and Walsingham must follow.*)

## Scene 2. Sir Walter Raleigh in prison.

*Raleigh* What the hell got into you, vain peacock without feathers, when you got the idea that I was an enemy of the state? Or was it the same ambitious man to bring about my fall who whispered those deadly words into the ears of Queen Elizabeth to make her execute the earl of Essex at Sir Francis Bacon's hint of an insinuation about his subversiveness or guilt? My only crime is the perpetual crime of all humanity – I failed. Broken and ruined I came home from America with my pockets plundered instead of filled, but the same did Columbus. He was not imprisoned for his failures, but I got a life sentence, like the unfortunate true peacock Henry Wriothesley of Southampton for betraying Essex to keep his own life. So this most glorious height and glory of beauty in England also turned into the deepest dishonour of falseness and cowardice. Maybe he actually deserved his life sentence for that in contrast to me. Or perhaps king James simply couldn't accept that we kept Queen Elizabeth's secrets to ourselves. Only I and Sir Thomas Walsingham are still around who know the secret of England's best agent abroad, a secret that king James could never

understand. Perhaps that is the answer. He can't stand that Elizabethans know more about certain things that he is not qualified to handle the knowledge of, which he is unconsciously conscious of and refuse to accept for himself. (*The gate is opened.*) But there is some rattling in the door.

*Guard* Sir Walter Raleigh, you have a visitor.

*Raleigh* Who is it?

*Guard* Don't ask me. I know nothing and want to know nothing. That's why I was also set to guard Mary Stuart and the earl of Essex and many others who got their heads chopped off. But I know nothing about that, for I wish to survive and know nothing.

*Raleigh* But I am not to be decapitated.

*Guard* You never know. (*raises a finger*) Don't be too sure! Mary Stuart was absolutely certain that Elizabeth would never dare to have her head chopped off, but she had it coming to her anyway! But I know nothing. They all took their secrets with them down the grave, and I keep their secrets with them.

*Raleigh* But still you must know who my guest is?

*Guard* Can't you understand? I know nothing! I am a grave to all my prisoners, and the grave is silent forever with what it knows whatever it knows.

*Raleigh* Do you mean that... (*is interrupted by Walsingham who enters*)

*Walsingham* My dear Sir Walter, it gives me pleasure that you seem unbroken.

*Raleigh* If the worst swamp fevers of South America can't break me down, then not even the worst cruelty of England could do it.

*Walsingham* We are working on your release. The King must realize that he has no case against you. Your chances are good.

*Raleigh* Don't try to bluff me, Sir Thomas. That king will never get his thumb out of his arse. Even if he knows that I am innocent it will take such a long time for him to mobilize his bureaucracy that I will die of old age before he gets to the first table of rounds.

*Walsingham* He is completely without Elizabeth's excellent intuition and contact with the people. It's surprising that she chose such an awkward successor.

*Raleigh* Power, my friend. England and Scotland together. Diplomatic triumph. That was her temptation, overwhelming enough to bring even her down.

*Walsingham* As always, in theory ideal, but practically devastating.

*Raleigh* Is he a disaster?

*Walsingham* He doesn't understand anything about politics and has no imagination. All he has is vanity. If the house of Stuart commences that bad, it will end even worse.

*Raleigh* What alternatives were there except William Stanley?

*Walsingham* A wise man in a difficult position. The Catholics adore him, and the puritans hate him. King James has from Elizabeth inherited the crown's suspicion against him. He would have made an ideal king, but his position would have been untenable from the start. Kit realized that when he wrote 'Hamlet', which really is all about William Stanley's dilemma.

*Raleigh* You dare say Kit and not William Shakespeare.

*Walsingham* We who know the secret are constantly getting fewer. King James is not worthy the knowledge of it. No one keeps secrets better than Henry of Navarre, and Will Shakespeare's whole career rests on it being kept. Essex is gone with Elizabeth, and Southampton never even suspected it. Left are only you and I.

*Raleigh* And your hired assassins.

*Walsingham* They have been paid to keep it, and no one suspects them.

*Raleigh* It was an ingenious venture. Who thought it out? You or Kit?

*Walsingham* We worked it out together. But Kit showed the greatest courage, who agreed to be the victim.

*Raleigh* Did he ever regret it?

*Walsingham* That you must ask himself. (*sweeps his arm backwards like to prepare the way for another, and Kit comes forth.*)

*Raleigh* I don't believe my eyes.

*Walsingham* Who would if he didn't see it for himself?

*Raleigh* My darling boy! (*embraces Kit*)

*Marlowe* Sir Walter Raleigh, we all three risk our lives in this moment, but I wanted to take the risk just to see you again.

*Raleigh (touched, cries)* It's all my fault. All your tragedy was only my fault.

*Marlowe* Nonsense. It was my own.

*Walsingham* Nonsense. You were unlucky. If you hadn't caught the eye of the government by Richard Baines damning report, you would never have been obliged to disappear underground.

*Raleigh (let's go of him, looks at him)* It was the authorities, the English inquisition, the persecution of your colleague John Penry and other free-thinkers, probably prompted by the puritans. But how do you live?

*Marlowe* It's all right with me. But you are worse off, Sir Walter.

*Raleigh* And I deserved it, because it was I who first seduced and corrupted you and brought you into dangerous company with satanists, atheists, whisky drinkers and tobacco smokers.

*Marlowe* But also with enlightened philosophers and scientists like Harriot and Northumberland, the Throgmortons and John Penry.

*Raleigh* Qualified heretics, who corrupted your soul, ruined your security and risked your life!

*Marlowe* I never regretted one day of my life, Sir Walter.

*Raleigh* Still I hear you are writing so bitter tragedies nowadays.

*Marlowe* It's because of the age. It's hopelessly out of joint, we all suffer from the pathetic fake king who replaced the best queen of all ages, Essex is executed betrayed by his best friend Southampton, and Lord Stanley's life is being poisoned by lawsuits fired at him by his relatives.

*Raleigh* What relatives? The king?

*Walsingham* No, it's worse than that. His deceased elder brother's widow claims that it was he who poisoned his own elder brother.

*Raleigh* But that's the very intrigue of Hamlet!

*Walsingham* But Stanley didn't do it. It was the Jesuits. But the widow demands indemnity from Stanley. In addition to that, his wife is ruining him.

*Raleigh* Elizabeth de Vere, the daughter of the earl of Oxford?

*Walsingham* She was spoiled by her father to a perpetual life of luxury, which Stanley can't afford. He will soon be ruined.

*Raleigh* And you, Kit? Are you also affected by this?

*Marlowe* No one taught me as much as Lord Stanley. I dedicated my "King Lear" to him.

*Raleigh* Another bitter tragedy?

*Marlowe* The most bitter of all. It's the story of a king who voluntarily resigns from power leaving it all to his children and is rejected by them, so that he old and in despair is driven out on the moor in madness.

*Raleigh* Dear me, what will become of this England?

*Marlowe* The fight is between Lord Stanley and the puritans. They have the real power in England. Stanley still represents the age of Elizabeth with all its best aspects, while the puritans wish to dispose of it, bury it alive, forget it and introduce an intolerant autocracy. Their religious fanaticism turn them into something of a supreme evil.

*Raleigh* Well, they aren't exactly amusing.

*Guard* You must leave now before I get to know too much.

*Walsingham* You realize the importance of your silence? If you tell anyone about this meeting you will lose your job and be placed in an asylum.

*Guard* Of course.

*Walsingham* Farewell, Sir Walter. See you at liberty.

*Raleigh* You restored a whole world to me. You gave an old man something to hope for.

*Marlowe* Sir Walter, I owe you the obligation to see to it that you will not become a king Lear.

*Raleigh* Thank you, my friend, my darling son, the best of my disciples.

*(Walsingham and Marlowe leave.)*

*Guard* Your grace, no one knows better than I that those two fellows never have been here. You had better learn that as well. *(twinkles and leaves)*

*Raleigh* That man has learned much from Mary Stuart and the earl of Essex. That twinkle from such a guard gives me better hopes of life and freedom than any royal pardon ever could do. Kit lives on as England's greatest secret, and the king doesn't know. Thereby the king is lost, and that is my joy.

Scene 3. A London theatre, like in Act III scene 2.

*Walsingham* How are things going, master Jonson?

*Ben Jonson* Not very well. The audience are getting tired. The theatre isn't the same public festival as it used to be.

*Walsingham* What's wrong?

*Jonson* Don't ask me. Ask the age. Ask the royal bore, whose boredom seems to infect the whole country. People are bored and yawn at the theatre faced with Shakespeare's constantly more boring spectacles.

*Walsingham* I know. He went from cheerful comedies and sumptuous chronicles to painful tragedies.

*Jonson* And do you think people can feel or appreciate that pain? No. When Julius Caesar was concluded with war and suicide, people believed it was some kind of a merry dance. Othello's strangulation of Desdemona they sense as some kind of a sensational sex murder. And all those whining misanthropes – Timon, king Lear, Coriolanus – they feel as exasperating grumblers. Our great director himself seems dissatisfied, as if it were the works of someone else he had to stage.

*Walsingham* But the language is all right, isn't it?

*Jonson* It's the language that saves the plays. Ever since the first night of "Tamburlaine the Great" twenty years ago this wonderful theatrical language has turned the theatres into a better alternative than both church and university. They say that Shakespeare never had to blot a single line. But between ourselves, I wish he had blotted some thousand. Marlowe's plays were much more concise and intensive.

*Walsingham* Do you mean to say that master Shakespeare is getting tired?

*Jonson* Yes, he seems tired. He is also troubled by some growth like a boil in one eye. They say that's what he got for crying too little over all his murdered victims' blood.

*Walsingham* Here he is in person. Thank you, Ben Jonson. You will go on writing plays yourself?

*Jonson* I don't spit them out as easily as master Shakespeare.

*Walsingham* But they are good. I'll never forget "Volpone" and "Every Man in his Humour".

*Jonson* Rare strokes of good luck.

*Walsingham* You are a wonderful satirist. Neither Shakespeare nor Marlowe were ever like that.

*Jonson* Yes, Marlowe was in "Doctor Faustus" and "Massacre at Paris". To me he is more a master than Shakespeare.

*Shakespeare (entering)* Welcome, Sir Thomas! You are just the man I needed to talk with. Ben Jonson, could you leave us alone?

*Jonson* Are there some state secrets for you to discuss? Remember what I said, Sir Thomas! (*shows his thumb up and leaves*)

*Shakespeare* We have a problem.

*Walsingham* Master Jonson said something about the audience getting bored.

*Shakespeare* That's not the trouble. Ben Jonson is a pedant who sees everything darkly. Just because he can't write great dramas himself, he wants to scrap the theatre and replace it with lighter entertainment. He will surely have his way in his time when I am gone.

*Walsingham* Are you thinking of quitting?

*Shakespeare* Not yet, but I have a problem with my left eye, and I feel that I don't have many years left. I am beyond the age when ordinary actors quit. No, the problem is another one. It's Timon and Coriolanus. I don't want to produce such plays any more.

*Walsingham* What's wrong with them?

*Shakespeare* Coriolanus is perhaps the most brilliant play ever written. But people don't come to the theatre to get abused from the stage or to experience how traitors of their country can be right, and the king doesn't like to see how a Scottish king is corrupted beyond repair just because he obtains power.

*Walsingham* You are thinking of "Macbeth".

*Shakespeare* I am tired of all these hopeless tragedies. Can't he write anything positive any more? If that is the case, both he and I had better quit.

*Walsingham* What do you wish?

*Shakespeare* Something really positive and uplifting, like for instance some fairy tale motive from our ancient Celtic days.

*Walsingham* I will convey your preference. But I sincerely hope you will continue as long as possible. The cooperation between you and our friend is the most wonderful chapter written in our English literature so far.

*Shakespeare* But he writes everything alone. I only make it real.

*Walsingham* But you get the honour and the reward while he is happy with being dead and forgotten.

*Shakespeare* How could he be happy with such a miserable lot?

*Walsingham* Because you exist, who can represent him.

*Shakespeare* Thank you, Sir Thomas. I will try to do my best.

*Walsingham* Thank you, Will Shakespeare. *(leaves)*

*Shakespeare* But a more serious threat than both my age and worsening eyesight is the puritan hostility against the theatre. The renaissance theatre has succeeded in driving the church out of business by stealing the public, but when the church will react with a vengeance, I will no longer wish to be at the theatre.

#### Scene 4.

*Stanley* Let me hear the worst of it.

*Jonson* It was nobody's fault, your grace. It was precisely at the first performance. There was a cannon fired for a salute, we always use real cannons, for the sake of the effect.

*Stanley* Yes, everything for the effect.

*Jonson* Unfortunately the cannon balls landed on the roof and set fire to it. It was just straw. You know.

*Stanley* So the whole theatre burned down.

*Jonson* Yes. Nothing could stop it.

*Stanley* Tough luck. And it happened to be the best and greatest theatre in London, and it happened to be at William Shakespeare's last premier. How did he take it?

*Jonson* We theatre people are hopelessly superstitious. We take omens seriously. William went home to Stratford and refuses to ever again set his foot on a stage.

*Stanley* But you have to agree it was not a very good play.

*Jonson* It was completely adjusted to the audience. It was completely fit to suit the king's taste. It was completely intended to soothe the taste of the public and the establishment. Formally it was a perfect play.

*Stanley* It was a damned arse-licking play that never should have been produced at a decent theatre!

*Jonson* But my lord Derby!

*Stanley* Pardon me. Have you met Will Shakespeare since?

*Jonson* Yes. He will never get over the first and last failure of his life. He takes it as a punishment by destiny. He says that he has been a slave on stage all his life and only turned his coat to the wind and been a dishonest opportunist. He feels directly and totally guilty of the entire fire disaster.

*Stanley* Poor fellow. That puts an end to an era. Then there will be no more Shakespeare plays.

*Jonson* It doesn't look like it, does it?

*Stanley* Has he told you what he will do with them?

*Jonson* That's the oddest thing of all. He doesn't care about them at all. He says that we can do with his plays whatever we wish. He doesn't want to hear anything more about them.

*Walsingham* Poor man. I understand him.

*Jonson* Do you? Can you then explain him to me? How can he be so completely self-despising and self-effacing?

*Stanley* It's a long story, my friend, which I have no right to divulge. You had better leave now, my good Ben Jonson, to continue writing new plays to fill out the vacuum after Shakespeare.

*Jonson (rising)* That void I can fill as little as anyone else.

*Stanley* But the king likes your masks.

*Jonson* Yes, I can write for money. I can be a royal arse-licker. That's all I can, Lord Stanley. I am not even a shadow of Shakespeare. *(leaves)*

*Stanley (after he's gone)* You could have been, my friend, if you had known who Shakespeare was. I regret that it is too late now.

Scene 5. The inn at Deptford, (like in act I scene 1).

*Much people, noise and movement. Mrs Bull handles the business.*

*Poley (coming up to the bar)* How is business, Nellie?

*Mrs Bull (with a light fright at first)* It was a long time since I saw you here, Bob Poley.

*Poley* You chose a fitting name for your pub.

*Bull* How long since is it? Twenty years?

*Poley* More.

*Bull* I owe all my thanks to that day. My pub has become a historical monument. Everyone is coming here to see where Kit Marlowe was murdered.

*Poley* Still it's all a fake and a myth.

*Bull* People love myths. That's what they are living for. Nothing is more exciting than a myth, especially if it isn't true and if the origin and history of its construction is veiled in an unfathomable mystery.

*Bacon (has entered as a customer, reaches the bar)* A strange name for a pub. Who was the poet?

*Poley* You were evidently born yesterday.

*Bacon (offended)* I apologise for my ignorance, Sir, but if this pub is called 'The Dead Poet', I could believe that you were his murderer.

*Bull (interferes)* 'The Dead Poet' was Christopher Marlowe, and he was actually murdered here in a brawl. I witnessed it myself.

*Bacon* So? How interesting! I thought he was murdered for his dangerous contacts with catholic agents abroad.

*A drunken guest* Kit Marlowe isn't dead. I saw him yesterday.

*Bacon* And who are you, my good Sir?

*Guest* Who are you yourself, you conceited fop?

*Bacon* Sir Francis Bacon, at your service.

*Guest* You bastard! It was you who betrayed the good and honest earl of Essex!

*Bull* That's enough, Paddy. You've had enough. Get out and cool down.

*Guest (excusing himself)* I just wanted to fight with this haughty gentleman.

*Bull* No fighting here. There has long ago been one brawl too much in here.

*Guest* And on that fight you have lived well ever since. Don't you want another? Wouldn't you like to see me knead this Bacon to some edible decency as well, to double your career? (*Mrs Bull alerts a chucker-out*)

*Chucker-out* Enough. Get out.

*Guest* Mrs Bull lives on borrowed feathers, just like Will Shakespeare! I know that Kit Marlowe lives!

*Bull* Get him out of here. (*The drunken guest is thrown out.*)

*Poley* What a place for you to visit, Sir.

*Bacon* The name caught my attention. So you were actually here when the dangerous poet was murdered, Mrs Bull?

*Bull* He wasn't that dangerous. He was as placid as a child.

*Bacon* How did it happen?

*Bull (getting uncertain, looking at Poley for support)*

*Poley* Tell it, Nellie. Or else I will.

*Bacon* Were you also present?

*Poley* I was sitting beside the poet's murderer.

*Bacon* How very interesting! Was everybody drunk, since there was a fight?

*Poley* We had finished eating when there was an argument about the reckoning. Kit withdrew and attacked Frizer from behind. Frizer had no chance sitting squeezed in between me and Nick Skeres and couldn't get away. He had to defend himself and thrust his dagger in Kit's eye. It was an unintended death blow.

*Bacon* So it was an accident?

*Poley* You could call it that.

*Bacon* But Mrs Bull just said that the poet was as placid as a child. How could he then insidiously attack a sitting man from behind?

*(Poley and Bull get uncertain and exchange glances: none of them knows what to say.)*

*Bacon (receiving no answer)* The poet was also a learned man and as intelligent as Shakespeare. He is known to never have attacked anybody and least of all from behind. Only once he was involved in a fight and against his will. There is something in your story that doesn't make sense. Have I by mistake come across an old crime? You can't answer?

*Bull (after some hesitation)* We know nothing.

*Bacon* That was the most stupid thing you could have said, Madame. You were present yourself and know nothing. That equation does not work.

*Poley* You had better leave, Sir.

*Bacon* Will you throw me out, like you did with that drunkard who talked too much? Don't you know that I am the King's own secretary?

*Poley* It could be dangerous to get to know too much.

*Bacon* That's the experience I believe young Kit Marlowe made.

*Another guest (in another part of the pub)* I know who you are.

*A third* Who is he then?

*Guest 2* It's that playwright William Shakespeare, who retired to Stratford when his theatre burned down. But he never dared to show himself in London since. What are you doing here, Will Shakespeare?

*Marlowe (hasn't been seen before)* You have taken me for the wrong man.

*Guest 2* Who are you then?

*Marlowe* Nobody.

*2* What kind of a bloody answer is that?

*Marlowe* Gentlemen, I didn't come here to argue.

*(The argument catches the attention of several guests, including Bacon, Poley and Mrs Bull.)*

*Poley (grows pale)* Oh no!

*Bacon* What is it? You look as if you had seen a ghost.

*Guest 3* So what did you come here for then?

*Marlowe* It's none of your business.

*Bacon* There seems to be interesting things going on in your pub, Mrs Bull.

*Bull (to Poley)* Try to get him out of here before anything happens.

3 I don't like your attitude, buddy. Either you are honest with nothing to hide, or you are in for some refreshment. Perhaps you are here for spying?

*Bacon (to Mrs Bull)* Do you often have fights here? I thought you said you had had one too much long ago. Well, here is another one coming up.

*Marlowe* I came here to visit the place of the crime.

3 What bloody crime?

*Marlowe* The murder of Christopher Marlowe.

2 Have you never been here before?

*Marlowe* No, never.

2 But I am sure that I have seen you somewhere. Are you sure you are not Will Shakespeare?

*Marlowe* Absolutely. He is at home in Stratford.

2 How do you know?

*Marlowe* Is this a cross examination?

2 No, but I do recognize you. If you aren't Will Shakespeare you must be Christopher Marlowe, but he is dead, so you must still be Will Shakespeare. They were almost as like each other as twins.

*Poley (calls)* Leave him alone.

2 And who are you commanding us? Do you know this bloke who talks so fine and still denies being Will Shakespeare?

*Poley (coming over. Mrs Bull feels some relief for his interference.)* I am one of them who were present when Kit Marlowe died. I helped Mrs Bull start this pub in his name after that.

3 Then perhaps you know where to find his grave. I always wondered about that.

*Poley* What will you do there? Throw some water on it?

*Marlowe* My grave is the theatre.

*(Everybody falls quiet.)*

2 *(meaningly)* He is a philosopher.

3 Explain yourself, stranger.

*Marlowe* My grave is the theatre. I have no other grave and will never have any other grave.

2 He talks in riddles.

3 We can't guess your riddle, pal. Give us a clue.

*Marlowe* The theatre has burned down. Will Shakespeare has gone home. There will be no more plays in Will Shakespeare's name.

*Bacon* This is getting more and more interesting.

2 We are nearing the truth! More clues!

*Marlowe* I am dead but have no grave. The theatre is my only grave, and therefore I will never die.

3 *(dissatisfied)* This is getting too tricky. I can't follow.

*Poley (calling)* I can solve the riddle. You must be Kit Marlowe.

2 But he is dead, isn't he?

3 *(frightened, to Kit)* Then you must be his ghost.

*Marlowe* I am no ghost. I give you my thanks, gentlemen. The show is over. You will never see me again. (*wants to leave*)

2 Stop! Wait!

*Bacon* You really have a mystery in your pub, Mrs Bull.

*Bull* Yes, I should close up immediately.

*Poley* No, Nellie, this is good for business.

2 Let's sort this out piece by piece. You are not Will Shakespeare, and Kit Marlowe is dead. Are you then Ben Jonson?

3 He doesn't look like it, stupid.

2 But I remember Kit Marlowe. He was a small man of your own size. Are you his brother?

3 Give us more clues.

*Poley (calling)* Kit, Mrs Bull wants you to leave. She wants no more mysteries in her pub.

2 You called him Kit! So you must be Kit Marlowe.

*Marlowe* I assure you, gentlemen, that Kit Marlowe is dead.

*Bacon* The man is right. There are two witnesses here who were present at the poet's death twenty years ago.

3 Then you must still be a ghost.

*Marlowe (offers his hand)* Touch me and feel my hand. (*3 receives his hand. They shake hands.*)

3 He lives!

2 Kit Marlowe lives!

*Poley (calling)* Long live Kit Marlowe!

*Bull (falling in)* May the dead poet live forever!

*Poley* Cheers for Kit Marlowe!

*Bacon (shares the toast but with hesitation)* Most strange indeed.

*Poley* What, Sir?

*Bacon* There is something wrong here.

*Poley* Could there possibly be something rotten in your state?

*Bacon* That sounded like a quotation.

*Poley* So it was.

*Bacon* Of Christopher Marlowe?

*Poley* No. William Stanley.

*Bacon* I give up. (*will leave, looks around for Kit, but he has disappeared as unnoticeably as he showed up. Bacon shrugs his shoulders and leaves. The pub life continues as if nothing had happened. Poley returns to being like any other visitor, and Mrs Bull returns to business as usual.*)

*Epilogue.*

*Bacon (before the curtain)* I could never fathom the mystery. I found that many suspected William Stanley for being the author of William Shakespeare's works, but William Stanley's complete works and documents were destroyed when the puritans burned his castle in the civil war. Thereby we shall never know what part William Stanley played in Shakespeare's works. Christopher Marlowe's patron Sir Thomas Walsingham died in 1630. His tomb was opened 325 years later in the hopes of finding a clue as to what part he played in Shakespeare's works by possible manuscripts in his coffin, but the coffin was utterly empty. Sir Thomas was not in his own grave, and we were only one mystery the richer.

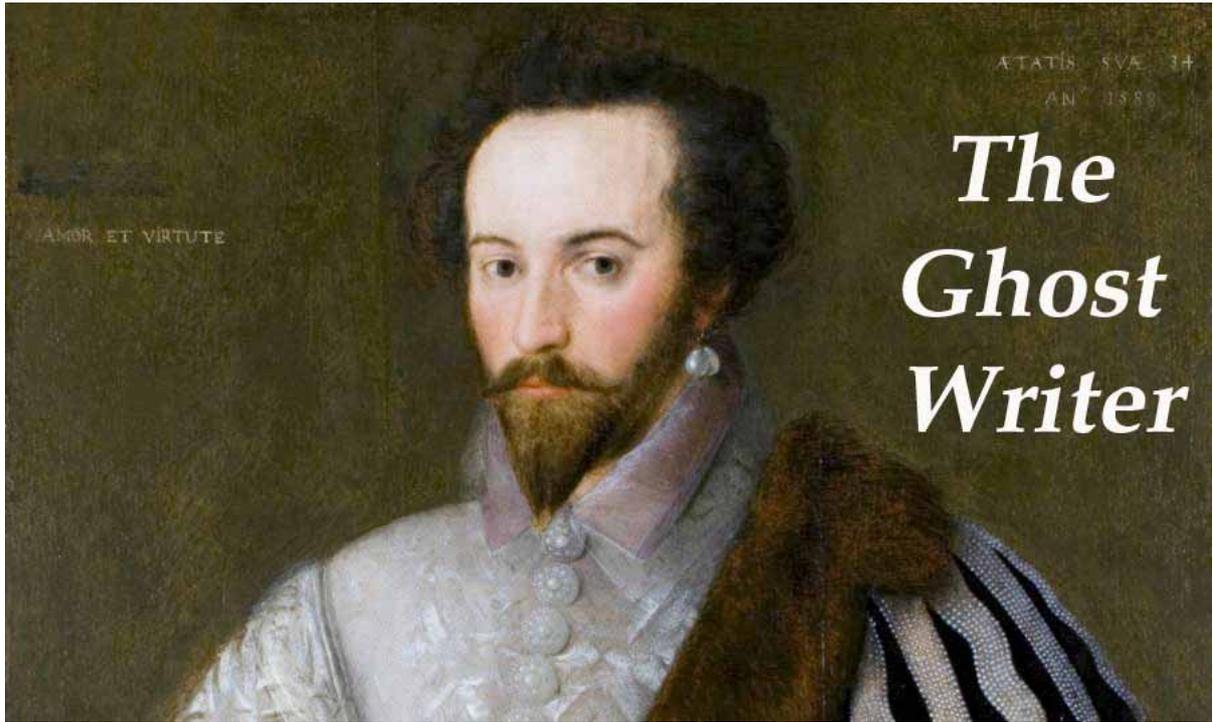
All we know for sure about William Shakespeare's part in the works published in his name by probably William Stanley and Sir Thomas Walsingham is, that he actually played several parts in these plays in the theatre.

*(bows and leaves.)*

29.5 – 14.6.1998,

*Gothenburg, Stockholm, Virham,  
translated after Christmas 2018,*

1.1.2019.



# *The Ghost Writer*

*the fall of the Elizabethans,*

a tragedy in five acts

by Christian Lanciai (2002, translated 2019)

*Dramatis personae:*

Queen Elizabeth of England  
William Cecil, Lord Burleigh  
Earl Robert Devereux of Essex  
Lady Derby  
Lord Chamberlain  
Ben Jonson  
Richard Burbage  
William Shakspere  
John Hemmings  
Francis Bacon  
Sir Thomas Walsingham  
Lady Audrey Walsingham  
Christopher Marlowe  
Sir Walter Raleigh

Robert Cecil  
Earl Henry Wriothesley of Southampton  
Earl William Stanley of Derby  
Earl Edward de Vere of Oxford  
Two lords  
A prison guard  
King James I  
Crown Prince Henry  
Duke of Buckingham  
Captain Keymis  
Sir Walter Raleigh's other captains  
His son Wat  
Sir Lewis  
An agent  
Guards  
Robert Burton

The action is about 1598-1623 in England and (Act IV) in Venezuela.

The drama is in part a sequel to "*The Plot*".

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### *The Ghost Writer*

Act I scene 1. The court, after a theatre performance.

*Elizabeth* Our poet laureate is only excelling himself all the time. Tell him that I wish to speak with him.

*Cecil* Your majesty, no matter how good he is, and however admirably he works for the edification of your monarchy and government, he is still just a poet, a common man of the people, an entertainer of the masses.

*Elizabeth* Burleigh, obviously you didn't hear me very well. I wish to see him.

*Essex* Your majesty, I know him and can forward your wishes to him with need for you to be seen in his simple company.

*Elizabeth* You too, Essex? May I then not see whoever I wish?

*Lady Derby* Your majesty, my husband is intimate with the actors and playwrights.

*Elizabeth* I know that well, but he is not the man I wish to see, lady Derby, and no actors, but only our personal poet, since he needs some direction.

*Lord Chamberlain* Has the play displeased your majesty?

*Elizabeth* But there you are, my lord Chamberlain! Not at all! It's the best play you ever produced, but I don't like the ending.

*Chamberlain* That Henry V is crowned king?

*Elizabeth* That he dispose of Falstaff. It's that fool who makes the play. He must not be dispatched by an ungrateful and intolerable brat king like that. I must demand an exoneration of Falstaff.

*Cecil* Your majesty, it is not appropriate...

*Elizabeth* Don't be ridiculous, lord Burleigh. I only wish to remedy a human lack of balance. An English king must never show himself inhuman and least of all on stage.

*Chamberlain* If it would please your majesty to suggest certain changes...

*Elizabeth* Would I correct an already finished poetical masterpiece? Leave the play as it is. But let the poet write a new play. I wish to see Falstaff honoured by a comedy.

*Chamberlain* Your majesty, I am sure it could be arranged...

*Elizabeth* A joyful comedy, which would make you laugh heartily, where the good man Falstaff could triumph and be merry all the time without a dreary future to have to face. I wish to see Sir John Falstaff in a good humour and funny from beginning to end.

*Essex* A reasonable wish, lord Burleigh.

*Cecil* Every Queen has her whims. I will not interfere.

*Chamberlain* Your majesty, I think there will be no difficulty in delivering what you wish.

*Elizabeth* I wish for nothing less. It's just for you to get going.

*Chamberlain* Your majesty. (*bows and leaves.*)

*Elizabeth* After all, he can't just go on writing tragic chronicles, that man Shakespeare. We have seen excellent proofs of his comical art, and his *Midsummer Night's Dream* for your wedding, lady Derby, was the most fascinating spectacle I have seen. I want to forget the bloody Lancaster saga and especially that miserable martyr Richard II. Such chronicles are honestly speaking not proper to present to the public.

*Essex* But it is beautiful, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* Too beautiful, Robert. Such a beautiful royal martyrdom could tempt people to repeat the play in reality one day. Such a prospect I would like to defer far beyond the horizon of my life and reign.

*Essex* There is no risk for something like that happening to you, your majesty.

*Elizabeth* Why then do I constantly recognize myself in the unfortunate king? Never mind, what we need is a comedy with Falstaff without kings! People need to feel good from laughing.

*Essex* We all do. But we also love crying.

*Elizabeth* You can cry alone in privacy, lord Essex, but never in public. That's that. Let's go home now. (*The court breaks up.*)

## Scene 2. Off stage

*Jonson* What did the Queen say?

*Chamberlain* She was satisfied by the performance.

*Burbage* Of course she was. We never acted better.

*Shakspeare* The credit is yours, Burbage.

*Burbage* Are we not a team? Are we not all working together? Are we not all helping each other? What is an actor without the others for support? Remember the

great Edward Alleyn, the only stage emperor ten years ago! What is he doing now? In the vanity of his greatness he has fallen down to an ordinary manager!

*Hemmings* The best talents of the theatre remain and act backstage if they no longer are good on stage.

*Chamberlain* But the Queen had an important message.

*All* Well?

*Chamberlain* She wishes to see Falstaff on stage again but in a comedy without melancholy.

*Burbage* A clear-cut comedy with only room for laughter? That's only for common people.

*Chamberlain* That's what she wished. What else can we do than please her?

*Hemmings (nudging Shakspeare)* Fix it, Shakspeare.

*Jonson* No poet can write on command. Her majesty should know that.

*Chamberlain* She only expressed a desire. No one has to feel pressed.

*Shakspeare* We'll make it, my lord Chamberlain. Just give us some time.

*Chamberlain* We have all the time in the world, and you shall have all the time in the world.

*Burbage* If only her majesty doesn't come importuning behind the curtains, we could manage anything. We can make the public believe whatever, as long as they don't see our tricks behind stage.

*Hemmings* We'll do our best, Lord Chamberlain.

*Chamberlain* I never doubted that for a moment. (*leaves*)

*Jonson (nudging Shakspeare)* Get going, Shakspeare. It's your job.

*Shakspeare* It's more than my job. It's my duty.

*Burbage* Now we must celebrate!

(*The actors settle for a noisy and cheerful supper, while Shakspeare sneaks out the back door.*)

### Scene 3. Bacon's study.

*Bacon* Our good earl is drawing his bow ever tighter as if he took for granted that it would never break, but with his policy he must go too far one day, and then I can't follow him anymore. But how shall I be able to alert him to make him take my warnings seriously? (*enter Shakspeare*) Yes, what is it, master Shakspeare?

*Shakspeare* The Queen has requested a play.

*Bacon* Has the Queen requested a play? That is unusual. Is she not satisfied with what she gets?

*Shakspeare* The more she gets, and the more satisfied she gets, the more she desires, and the higher her demands.

*Bacon* She has no right to demand anything of literature since she doesn't write herself, since like her father she is a dilettante. This must be something special. What did she say?

*Shakspere* She was unhappy about the end of Falstaff in "Henry IV" and therefore wishes to see him in a comedy with a happy ending.

*Bacon* The royal bad conscience. Every time a king misbehaves or dies on stage the bad royal conscience is stirred, which constantly grows worse. But of all monarchs she least of all has any reason for a bad conscience. She will have her comedy with Falstaff.

*Shakspere* She especially requested it without royalties.

*Bacon* You can't tailor-make a play. It lives its own life, and its characters live independent of the author. The poet is just the instrument. The muse directs everything. She must be patient and accept the result as it will be.

*Shakspere* That's what the other actors meant also. – My lord Essex!

*Essex (enters)* What luck! Both my secretary and our leading theatre man! Are you discussing the new play?

*Bacon* Your grace, I have warned you a number of times, but you are closing your eyes to my warnings. You can't challenge the Queen.

*Essex* Take it easy, Bacon. I can handle her. I know her and feel instinctively how far I can push her.

*Bacon* But you can't deceive her!

*Essex* You once spited her yourself, Francis.

*Bacon* And it cost me some invaluable years that were lost! I learned to never try challenging royalties anymore!

*Essex* Royalties are there to be challenged. They need it, or else they have to govern without challenges, which makes them decay into boredom and sloth. The character is only moulded by crises.

*Bacon* But you are drowning in the deep water of your reckless foolhardiness!

*Essex* Not as long as the Queen is there. She is a mother to us all, and she would never allow any of her children to drown.

*Bacon* Don't be too sure. All is lost if there is once too much.

*Essex* That would be her own destruction as well in that case.

*Bacon* The more self-confident you get, my lord, the more it worries me.

*Essex* Don't worry. I don't.

*Bacon* That's all right, Shakspere. You may go. We will try to get your play fixed as the Queen would want it. (*Shakspere bows and leaves.*)

*Essex* Are you a ghost writer for the theatre?

*Bacon* Someone must write the plays. You might as well leave it to a professional then.

*Essex* Are you that qualified? Isn't science and philosophy your line? What do you know about dramaturgy?

*Bacon* I have it all too close upon me to ever be able to be rid of it.

*Essex* I thought the contrary, that you always kept as far away from it as possible.

*Bacon* When you hold and manage the strings, you must not get tangled up in them.

*Essex* But no strings will hold at length, Francis. I lead my own life and am independent even of the Queen.

*Bacon* No one is independent of the Queen. We are all dependent on her for our lives and our freedom.

*Essex* No freedom is political.

*Bacon* Politics is a discipline that makes freedom possible.

*Essex* Freedom exists independent of politics.

*Bacon* I have warned you, my lord, and I will continue warning you until you fall.

*Essex* Just go on, Bacon. An eagle with wings will never fall unless it is shot down.

*Bacon* You are no eagle, Essex. You are just a man.

*Essex* So are you, Bacon. We are in the same boat. Never forget that. (*leaves*)

*Bacon* That earl is constantly getting more dangerous especially to himself. But now to the Queen's problem. Let's see how her court poet will be able to please her better next time.

#### Scene 4. With the Walsinghams

*Thomas* I hope you are happy now, my love.

*Audrey* We had a happy wedding after a long engagement. How could I be happier?

*Thomas* We lost our poet.

*Audrey* We have never lost him, and you know it. The last work in his own name has now been published with public dedications to us both.

*Thomas* Thanks to old George Chapman.

*Audrey* There is no risk for our poets ever to die out. Already Sir Philip Sidney said that.

*Thomas* The liberal host of Giordano Bruno, who opened England to all free-thinkers.

*Audrey* Even to the point that others found it necessary to start inquisitions here.

*Thomas* We have managed.

*Audrey* But others were visited, like Sir Walter Raleigh.

*Thomas* He was only investigated. They couldn't do anything to him.

*Audrey* While others had to go underground.

*Thomas* Like always, it's those in a position with responsibility that have to stand up to fire. We without ambitions and pretensions are left in peace.

*Audrey* And the Queen protects us.

*Thomas* Yes, we won her protection, and that is part of our happiness. Nothing could ever come between us, my love. (*gives her a kiss. There is a knock on the door.*)

*Audrey* Who could that be?

*Thomas (calling)* Who is it?

*Bacon* Francis Bacon, at your service.

*Thomas* It's only Francis Bacon, my love.

*Audrey* Essex' secretary. I hope Essex isn't in any trouble.

*Thomas* Essex is always in trouble. (*opens*) Welcome, Francis.

*Bacon* Pardon me for disturbing. I only come in a small matter.

*Audrey* We hope it has nothing to do with Essex.

*Thomas* We would like to stay out of politics. I just happened to mention to Audrey, that if Essex isn't in trouble, he makes trouble.

*Bacon* This has nothing to do with Essex. The Queen has only wished for a play.

*Thomas* She has never done that before.

*Bacon* Apparently she was inspired by the last one.

*Thomas* Henry IV?

*Bacon* Yes. She wishes to see another play with Falstaff. Is the poet available? Do you have any contact with him?

*Thomas* We are always in touch with him.

*Bacon* Where is he now? In Spain or Italy?

*(A door opens discreetly, and Marlowe enters.)*

*Marlowe* I happened to hear what you were talking about.

*Bacon* Marlowe. I am happy to see you alive and well.

*Marlowe* Never forget that I am dead.

*Thomas* The Queen wants a new play with Sir John Falstaff, Chris.

*Marlowe* What's wrong with the old one?

*Bacon* It ended badly for Falstaff.

*Marlowe* That clown didn't deserve any better. No monarch can keep a beer barrel for a fool at court. If the king is to have any credibility as king, he must leave Falstaff behind.

*Bacon* I think the Queen understood that as well. That's why she wants a new play with Falstaff but without a king.

*Marlowe* Just a comedy then?

*Bacon* With a happy end and with a merry and funny Falstaff all through.

*Marlowe* In other words, a comedy just to make people laugh. A common comedy, coarse and vulgar with no stylish language, with no eloquence or royalty, with almost anything allowed. If it should be really vulgar it must be entirely in prose.

*Bacon* That's for the poet to decide.

*Marlowe* I think we understand each other.

*Bacon* Like always.

*Thomas* Marlowe doesn't remain long in England. You don't have much time to write yet another great comedy, Chris.

*Marlowe* That's why it must be in prose.

*Thomas* When it comes to creative writing, nothing is impossible for Marlowe.

*Marlowe* But we are lucky to have Shakspere for a reliable agent.

*Thomas* How reliable is he, Francis?

*Bacon* As long as he is paid, he is completely reliable. The only thing worrying him is, if the flow of plays would stagnate.

*Thomas* I don't think there is any risk.

*Marlowe* A poet lives only for his art, even if he is dead.

*Bacon* We are grateful for that, Marlowe.

*Marlowe* How is the case proceeding?

*Bacon* What case?

*Marlowe* My exoneration.

*Bacon* Sir Walter is working on it. He is about to regain his old position at court. I am sure you will be able to come out in the clear again as soon as the coast is clear, but the Queen has to be sure of your safety.

*Thomas* Time is working for us, Chris. All we need is patience.

*Marlowe* No patience lasts forever.

*Bacon* We trust yours as long as you live. And as long as you have your exoneration to look forward to, you have something to live for.

*Marlowe* Sir Walter is my only hope. Derby as a Catholic can't do much for me, unless he becomes king after the Queen's demise.

*Thomas* I don't think he wants to.

*Bacon* Burleigh prefers Mary Stuart's son.

*Marlowe* So nothing is certain.

*Bacon* I have delivered my message. The Queen will be pleased, if you provide the play, Marlowe.

*Marlowe* I will give her something to laugh at. I have as many funny Canterbury tales at hand as Chaucer.

*Bacon (pleased)* That sounds good. Farewell, my gentlefolk. (*leaves*)

*Thomas* Thanks for the visit, Francis.

*Audrey* Do you really think you could write something really funny?

*Marlowe* Comedy or tragedy, that's the question. The one never excludes the other. (*leaves in thoughts*)

*Thomas* He will make it, Audrey. He will make anything.

*Audrey* Even life, although he is dead.

#### Scene 5.

*Bacon* No, Essex, you are going too far. I can't support you in such measures.

*Essex* Do you mean to let me down after all I have done for you?

*Bacon* I can't follow you if you take action against the state.

*Essex* I am not taking action against it. I am taking over it. And only you can help me. You will be my prime minister for life.

*Bacon* Essex, taking over the government without its ruler's agreement is the same as rebellion and treason.

*Essex* I will procure her agreement by her own will. She loves me. Nothing can stop us.

*Bacon* And what about the Cecils?

*Essex* I have no fear of any dry impotent petty popes. If you squeeze them, all you will get out of them is putrid air. Swelling puffers in politics are only there to rot and spread infections.

*Bacon* You underestimate them.

*Essex* You overestimate them.

*Bacon* And what about Raleigh? He is closest to the Queen, and his loyalty is total. You can never touch or move his honour.

*Essex* People who don't give way when they are in the way you can always dispose of.

*Bacon* And for that you could be disposed of yourself. You usually are.

*Essex* You are a negative coward. So I'll have to manage alone.

*Bacon* Yes.

*Essex* But I will prevail. When I come home from Ireland as a victor no one will be able to deny me anything, not even the Queen! And woe betide anyone standing in my way!

*Bacon* And if you fail?

*Essex* I can't. Everyone is with me. Both Southampton and Derby follow me to Ireland. Only you will remain here lagging behind to get mouldy and rot by your pulpet like another Cecil.

*Bacon* Burleigh has managed the country well and given it stability over 30 years.

*Essex* Those days are over now. Raleigh and Drake paved the way. The destruction of the armada opened the oceans to us with vast possibilities. We will fathom them all.

*Bacon* Do you mean to aim at conquering the oceans?

*Essex* Of course! All of them! That was the favourite vision of Henry VIII.

*Bacon* So that England will achieve world domination?

*Essex* Nothing less.

*Bacon* It's a long way there. It will take at least some centuries.

*Essex* The more important it is to get the right direction from the start.

*Bacon* I am with you on that project but no other. You have to take the wills of others into consideration and above all not underestimate the opponents and the obstacles.

*Essex* Stay here and cultivate your mould in your musty sloth. I will give the Queen Ireland in her hand.

*Bacon* Good luck, but nothing is more dangerous than growing too powerful.

*Essex* You are a frightened superstitious coward.

*Bacon* No, I am a precocious realist or try to be at least. Power has an intoxicating effect on the mind and easily leads to disorientation and loss of correct perspectives and will in nine cases out of ten bring you to a logical downfall.

*Essex* Then I will be the tenth.

*Bacon* And the other nine who precede you by falling? Who will they be?

*Essex* They don't exist.

*Bacon* There you are, completely blind and unrealistic. A sea is full of invisible shallows, but you as a captain deny their existence and will not hesitate to bypass them all to risk foundering.

*Essex* What a bore you are. Goodbye, Bacon. When I come back you will think differently when you see my triumphs.

*Bacon* Don't trust anything, Essex, and least of all another human being. And even if you achieve your aims and gain your power, it will never be yours as long as the Queen lives.

*Essex* That old hag! She is already dead since many years. She is hardly more than a living mummy.

*Bacon* I didn't hear that, Essex. Leave now.

*Essex* I leave, sourpuss. (*leaves*)

*Bacon* He is lost. Not even all possible victories in Ireland could save him.

Act II scene 1. The court.

*Elizabeth* Is there anyone who understands what Essex actually is up to on Ireland?

*Burleigh* Your majesty, it is obvious that he doesn't know it himself.

*Robert Cecil* He is just wreaking havoc, gets everything wrong, he claims victories but accomplishes only defeats, and is constantly demanding reinforcements and more funds, while his Irish campaign shows no other sign than of a total disaster.

*Elizabeth* My dear Sir Walter, you know the Irish since of old since you have been there yourself for some ravaging. Do you share Robert Cecil's opinion?

*Raleigh* Essex has not yet lost everything.

*Elizabeth* Do you mean that he must lose everything before he can be judged?

*Raleigh* Ireland is one bottomless bog of chaos and tough rebels. No one gets out of there without hard lessons. The Irish are incorrigible and the most hopelessly stubborn papists in the world. On top of that they have their own elixir at hand which drives them utterly obstinate and mad.

*Elizabeth* If I don't remember wrong, you imported that medicine here.

*Raleigh* The Scots are as crazy as the Irish about whisky, but I think it's the salvation of the English that they prefer beer.

*Elizabeth* Or perhaps we are enough sensible to limit our consumption of whisky to reasonable proportions. But I didn't want to discuss whisky with you but Ireland.

*Raleigh* Although I love Essex as a friend, and I think we all do, there are reasons enough to recall him before it gets worse.

*Burleigh* Wisely reasoned, Raleigh.

*Robert Cecil* I think we all commend Sir Walter Raleigh's advice.

*Elizabeth* And what about you, Francis Bacon, his closest man? Do you think we should give Essex another chance?

*Bacon* No, Madame.

*Elizabeth* You surprise me. You always defended Essex until now.

*Bacon* Nothing can defend his irresponsibility any longer. He is wasting lives and resources only for his own sake, as if he gambled with her majesty's means. I have repeatedly warned him, but he has refused to listen to me. For once Sir Walter Raleigh is right.

*Elizabeth* I find that we are all more or less agreed on the matter. So we shall recall Essex, and his Irish campaign shall be disrupted.

*Robert Cecil* And if he refuses, your majesty?

*Elizabeth* He is in no position to refuse. He obeys us or is opposed, and if he chooses the latter he must face the consequences. It's his own choice. There is nothing more to discuss.

Now I want to go to the theatre. What is the latest production of master Shakspere?

*Chamberlain* A war play about Henry V, your majesty. You recognize Essex' glory in almost every scene.

*Elizabeth* His Falstaff comedy was too coarse. Is Falstaff in the new play?

*Chamberlain* Yes, your majesty. He dies.

*Elizabeth* Well then. Let's go to the theatre and see how Falstaff dies.

## Scene 2.

*Southampton* I can't understand it. Essex has done everything for him. It's a knife in the back on Essex.

*Derby* I am also bewildered, Henry. It could only mean one thing. Essex career is nearly finished. Bacon is no fool. If he goes against Essex he can only do so because he has no other choice.

*Southampton* Essex should never have accepted his mission in Ireland.

*Derby* His own ambitions drove him to it. We both knew him in his days of glory, and we both believed in him. If he had managed the crisis in Ireland he would have been invincible for life and have the entire people to back him up.

*Southampton* And so it all turned into a massive failure. But all is not lost yet. He could still turn his defeat to victory.

*Derby* He is the only one to believe it. No, Wriothesley, he is finished. He has only confirmed and strengthened the rebellions of Ireland, instead of turning them into our friends he has made their enmity incurable, and he has wasted both the Queen's armies and finances on exacerbating the situation. He has already been recalled.

*Southampton* Then he is lost.

*Derby* I am afraid so.

*Southampton* What settled the Queen's decision? What is Bacon's turning against him?

*Derby* We don't know. Bacon's stand could not have mattered.

*Southampton* I am not so sure. Bacon was Essex' man completely. If his closest friend now lets him down, who could then possibly support him?

*Derby* Least of all himself. He lacks perspective and has no judgement.

*Southampton* His judgement and perspective was Bacon. Now Essex falls while Bacon rises. Whose back will he knife next time?

*Derby* You exaggerate, Henry. Bacon is no traitor.  
*Southampton* But he made Essex a traitor. Whom will he make a traitor next time?  
*Derby* You mean that no one is safe for Bacon's ambitions?  
*Southampton* Precisely.  
*Derby* Then we had better keep out of the way for Bacon.

Scene 3. The court.

*A lord (to another)* I expect there will be a show now as Essex will perform in front of the court.

*Lord 2* You can count on that. He has laid all England to his feet and believes himself to be the most popular man in the country. He believes himself that he was only victorious in Ireland and that he transformed all his defeats and disasters into triumphs.

*Lord 1* But the people love him.

*Lord 2* They are drunk with his dashing sport. They adore him.

*Lord 1* England could never have a better idol.

*Lord 2* And still he is only a bluff.

*Elizabeth (appearing)* My lords, I have summoned the earl of Essex here to answer for his actions and your questions.

*Lord 1 (aside)* He will have to run the gauntlet.

*Elizabeth* Consider your questions well while he is available, for he is as volatile and fleeting as the first romance of youth.

*Lord 2 (aside)* It sounds as if he was her last romance and that she has accepted it.

*A herald* The earl of Essex!

*(He enters to the centre of the stage and kneels to the Queen.)*

*Essex* Madame, I bring Ireland to lay it down at your feet.

*Elizabeth* You do not. You have wasted it, and instead of curing an enemy you have made all Ireland our enemy.

*Essex* You have listened to loose rumours and exaggerated them to yourself.

*Elizabeth* I have received exact reports of figures and losses. I gave you an army and ample means to put down a rebel. You wasted it all, and the rebel is still there.

*Essex* I was not permitted to fulfill my mission.

*Robert Cecil* My lord Essex, you have ignored our orders and more often than not applied the contrary to our instructions rather than followed them. How do you explain it?

*Essex* Here in Westminster no one knows anything about the conditions of Ireland. I suited my actions to the actual conditions to minimize the losses. *(The court laughs.)*

*Robert Cecil* Minimize the losses? Could they have been more maximized?

*Burleigh* My lord Essex, you have bought the love of the people at the prize of the Queen's armies and money and the stability of Ireland.



*Oxford* Am I? You believe yourself to be her bastard son.

*Bacon* Don't you believe it?

*Oxford* I am too old. I couldn't have been her son, fortunately, and my family is of much older and nobler blood than hers. But you are a dastard, Bacon, whom everyone disdains.

*Bacon* And you are an old drunk who should keep away from court.

*Oxford* Wine is only good for your health.

*Bacon* If only you had only wine!

*Oxford* Essex' blood will be on your hands.

*Bacon* No risk. He will not bleed.

*Oxford* You are lying to everyone but most of all to yourself. (*wants to leave*)

*Bacon* Just for your information, Oxford, after Gloriana James of Scotland will be our king, and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

*Oxford* That milksop! Was it arranged by you?

*Bacon* No, it's the Cecil company, father and son, since your son-in-law is a Catholic and only pens comedies.

*Oxford* That's why he should have been the king. Goodbye, you stinking Bacon.

*Bacon* Get lost, which you already are, you old drunkard!

#### Scene 4.

*Derby (aside)* My wife, how could you give yourself over to such a maniac as Essex? That man has seduced all England and wringed its helm out of the Queen's hand – to run it where? He has no sense and lacks all judgement, like a weathercock, completely out of character and a victim to his own impulses. But everyone has a weakness for him, and I even loved him myself as the dashing romantic hero he was to all of us. But my own wife! She claims innocence, and maybe I am just a blinded victim to my own jealousy, but everyone can see that he has seduced her like he has seduced all England. My Essex, my darling boy, nothing can save you now.

– My gentlefolk, we are heading for difficult times.

*Walsingham* What's happening, Derby?

*Derby* Lord Essex is only making his own case worse when he in desperation grabs hold of everything he can reach around him in an effort to pull the whole nation down with him in his fall. And most seriously affected of all will be the Queen herself.

*Walsingham* And what can we do?

*Derby* Not much more than take cover. Our Queen's days are reaching their end, and when she and Essex are gone there could follow a dark age under the restricted meanness and suspicion of a Scottish king as a dominating factor touching all our lives. Without doubt heads will roll.

*Walsingham* Are you thinking of anyone special?

*Derby* Walter Raleigh, Southampton, Lord Bacon and all free-thinkers.

*Walsingham* Francis Bacon is the cat with nine lives always landing on his feet. Sir Walter is immune to warnings. Wriothesley is like he is, and nothing can change him, but no one would ever wish to have him executed. By his effeminate ways he stands above all politics. But what about Marlowe?

*Derby* Our next king doesn't know that he exists. Our poet could easily evade all dangers by simply keeping away like heretofore. He would be safer though at some alienating distance from London, for example among us Catholics in Lancashire.

*Walsingham* Thanks for your offer. Chris would gladly accept it, especially if the situation in London would grow dangerous again, since all he wants and needs is to be able to work in peace.

*Derby* My estate and security will always be open to him, as the very safest form of exile out of reach of any regime without even having to leave the country.

*Walsingham* Let's hear his own wishes about it. Come in, Marlowe! (*enter Marlowe*)

*Derby* is here for a visit.

*Marlowe* Is there any problem?

*Walsingham* Not yet, but there could be with the next regime.

*Marlowe* I am always prepared for another exile. There is ever too much to do in warmer countries.

*Derby* But soon we will be getting old, and travelling will become more nervous and tedious. Live, Marlowe, as if my brother was still alive, your school fellow, who embraced you with his love like a younger brother. If he was your brother, I am the same none the less. My home is your home, and you will always find comfort there, for we Catholics are fortunately clinically excluded from intrigues of the crown and infections of politics.

*Marlowe* Ferdinando is dead, cruelly poisoned because he didn't want to share what you call infectious world politics. He died as a martyr for his integrity, like Kyd, my colleague and brother, who had a far more difficult death, since in his case his soul was poisoned by the inquisition. We will never be rid of those powers, and that's why I also prefer remaining dead. Although so many of my friends now are dead, like Greene, Philip Sidney and Kyd, there are still many left who could recognize me. We know nothing about the new regime, but if it prove difficult I am grateful indeed, lord Derby, for your invaluable security offer as a complement to that of lord Walsingham.

*Derby* Feel completely free at large. You are dead and liberated, and that is your fortune. we who know about it are just a few, a handful reliable men whose wives will not gossip. you might thereby be more fortunate than any of us, and the only price we gratefully accept from you for our protection and silence is your beautiful art, which protects you more than anything else. As long as you carry on your poetical work, you will remain immortal and invulnerable.

*Marlowe* Your words warm my heart as if they came from a colleague and more than a brother. I feel no bitterness. I can view my case with darkness, but I have come out of it like the butterfly out of my pupal stage, my personal ego, which I have left behind. My human feelings are not mine any more. They are well masked in virtual

characters carefully concealed behind the painted faces of actors, which give public expression to all I feel except my ego. I feel safe in the role as a medium for human feelings and every personality but my own. My non-existence is my best protection, and thanks to that I can write poetry at all.

*Walsingham* As long as you keep busy at your work we are gratefully happy about your presence.

*Marlowe* I am the only one who should be grateful.

*Derby* I will return to Lancashire. Marlowe, your home and your security will wait for you there whenever you need it.

*Marlowe* Thank you, lord Derby. (*Derby leaves.*)

*Walsingham* His instinct has never failed. He knows what he is talking about. When Robert Devereux, the earl of Essex and the Queen's days are over, no one will be safe anymore.

*Marlowe* My last wish is to expose you, my lord Thomas, to any compromising danger.

*Walsingham* I will never let you down.

*Marlowe* For which I am grateful, and my trust in you will likewise never fail. I would rather leave you in peace with your Audrey than risk a breach of trust.

*Thomas* Audrey is yours as she is mine.

*Audrey* We are the Queen's closest friends and absolutely impeccable as such. Nothing could harm us, not even a Scottish king. You are as safe with us as with Derby.

*Marlowe* For which I thank you. Still my single absolutely perfect safety is only in my own privacy, which will follow me wherever I go.

*Walsingham* And we are aware of your safety within yourself. That's why everyone who knows you gratefully will receive you.

*Marlowe* But they are few and getting fewer. The more invaluable be those who are left.

*Audrey* They are more than you think, and with Sir Walter Raleigh as our flagship we are unassailable.

*Marlowe* Yes, he will always remain our ultimate security, and only he can still save my life.

#### Scene 5. Essex imprisoned.

*Essex* What did I do wrong? It's a nightmare. Everyone turned against me without reason, and I no longer have any friends. Everything has turned against me as if by a stroke of destructive magic, and I as the fool I was did not make things better by going desperate. Here I am now cornered by destiny without anything more to expect from life than death.

*Guard* Sorry to disturb you, Sir, but you have a visitor.

*Essex* You shouldn't be sorry for that. I deserve no visit but am honoured if I have one.

*Guard* That's the question, since it must depend on who the visitor is.

*Essex* In my lonesomeness even death would be a welcome visitor.

*Guard* Please enter then, my lady. (*allows Elizabeth to enter*)

*Essex (rising, terrified)* My Queen! Is it real, or am I raving mad and hallucinating?

*Elizabeth* Sir down, incorrigible knave! I only wish to give you what they call a fair chance of an explanation.

*Essex* There is nothing to explain.

*Elizabeth* Oh yes, there is, and I if anyone have the right to demand some answers.

*Essex* I am ready for the rack.

*Elizabeth* Don't be silly. This is not a question of torture.

*Essex* There is no more dire torture than to be tried by a woman superior in power from whose grip there is no escape.

*Elizabeth* Why did you desert me, your best friend? What made you spite my orders, turn against me and try a rebellion against me?

*Essex* It was you who turned against me. I was the last one to deserve any enmity from you.

*Elizabeth* You are trying to wriggle out of the issue, my poor friend. You tired of me and found me an encumberment, wherefore you traduced your queen and became a rebel.

*Essex* I had no other choice when I became desperate.

*Elizabeth* You went out of your mind.

*Essex* Yes.

*Elizabeth* That is no excuse. You ruined our friendship completely yourself when you in the presence of others called me more dead than alive and hardly more than a carcass.

*Essex* My Queen, is that why you have sentenced me to death?

*Elizabeth* I was no more than a woman, Robert, and I was your best friend. I trusted you unreservedly and loved you like a son, yes, like more than a son. All England shared my love. But you did not know woman well when you trampled on her and on England's heart. Women cannot do without their men when they have given them their hearts. They are all the ground they have to stand on. If a woman is betrayed by the man whom she entrusted with her life, she will no longer have any life. She has lost everything and haven't even any strength left for revenge. You have trampled on my soul, but that is not why you will be executed. Your process is entirely a result of your own mistakes, nothing has been able to stop it, you started the avalanche yourself by your insubordinations and betrayals – I have nothing to do with them. I came here as a woman only to release you.

*Essex* What do you mean? Release?

*Elizabeth* I give you your life. I offer you safe conduct out of the country. All doors between you and your freedom are open.

*Essex* No, your majesty, you can't thus manipulate me and once again demonstrate your power. I will not allow you to triumph. I am aware that I forfeited my life and any right to live. Let then destiny have its course, and let me be executed tomorrow.

*Elizabeth* So you spite me even to the bitter end?

*Essex* I never belonged to you, and you can never bring me under you.

*Elizabeth (sighs)* So you save at least your honour at last. I have given you a fair chance, and you have taken it but in your own way. I leave you with my errand unfulfilled but still not without some reward. Now, my Essex, I can leave you be.

*Essex* I regret everything that happened.

*Elizabeth* That's the least thing any man can do. I wish you a good journey to the other side, Robert Devereux, my last favourite, where I believe we will meet soon again.

*Essex* Perhaps under different circumstances.

*Elizabeth* There is nothing more to say to these. Farewell. (*leaves*)

*Guard (enters when Elizabeth is gone)* Well, was the lady kind to you?

*Essex* You can't blame her, for she made an effort at kindness which I was not worthy.

*Guard* Then die worthy, my good lord, tomorrow. Then you don't need to worry about that any more.

*Essex* Leave me alone, poor cynic.

(*The guard walks out. Essex buries his head in his hands.*)

#### Scene 6. Behind the curtains.

*Chamberlain* Lord Bacon! What an honour! What gives us the honour? What can we do for you?

*Bacon* May I have a talk with the actors?

*Chamberlain* They are all here.

*Jonson* The Queen is dead, and our new king is a foreigner, but we still have our lord Bacon.

*Hemmings* What can we do for you, lord Bacon? I hope nothing has changed.

*Bacon* I hope so too.

*Burbage* Some special reason must have brought you here. Is it because of the new king?

*Bacon* Listen to me, my friends. We have a new king, and he must know his place. We need a play to show him that the theatre is superior to him and his establishment. He must be made aware of that we know more about him than he knows about himself.

*Shakspeare* What do you know about him?

*Bacon* His soft spot is his mother, who helped her lover to kill her husband, his father. After the murder she ruled shamelessly with the lover until she was overthrown by her people's outrage.

*Hemmings* We never dared to present a play on Mary Stuart. The subject was always untouchable, since Queen Elizabeth decapitated her.

*Bacon* But she is dead now. She was finished when she decapitated Essex, and now she is dead for real. The new king must be put into place with Mary Stuart or without. Is there no play that resembles her story, that could be dusted off as a healthy reminder?

*Shakspeare* We have Kyd's old play about Hamlet, whose mother married her husband's murderer. That I guess is the closest we could get.

*Bacon* Let me see. So it has not been performed since Thomas Kyd died?

*Shakspeare* It disappeared with Kyd and Marlowe.

*Hemmings* But if there is anything that could remind of king James' precarious position, it's that play.

*Bacon* We could always remake it and render it more relevant. That's maybe just what we are looking for. The main thing is that the king will realize that there are higher powers than his own.

*Jonson* Here is the play, Sir. Rewrite it, manipulate it as you wish, make a parody of all the dead, and it must turn out a success.

*Bacon* I will take care of it. When you'll have it back, you can count on something extra.

*Jonson* We are looking forward to it, Sir.

*Hemmings* Derby presented it with Kemp and others to the Danish king in Elsinore 18 years ago in German. It made a success even then, but it needs some improvement. Kyd and Marlowe were never finished with it before they both died.

*Bacon* We will resurrect their spirits. I will be back soon, gentlemen. (*leaves*)

*Burbage* Do you think he could make something presentable out of that bloody play?

*Jonson* Lord Bacon has many tricks down his sleeve. It wouldn't surprise me if we at last got a real play to perform.

### Act III scene 1.

*James* What kind of a damned play is this? How dare they show something like this to me? Don't they know that I am the king now?

*Robert Cecil* Your majesty, it is only an entertainment.

*James* Some entertainment indeed! Death and murder, intrigue and treachery, ghastly ghosts and mad women! It could hardly get worse, could it?

*Cecil* The actors are only trying their best to please, your majesty.

*James* One could almost suspect that some devil manufactured the play just to lecture me.

*Bacon* Your majesty, it was written for the king of Denmark for his inauguration of his castle Kronborg in Elsinore eighteen years ago. The story is from the chronicles of Denmark. Our English actors made a great success of it at the court of Denmark.

*James* So it is a true story?

*Bacon* Practically, yes.

*James* But who wrote it? Find the author of the play! He is dangerous since he knows more about court intrigues than the court knows about him.

*Cecil* It is a certain William Shakespeare, your majesty, an honest actor from the country.

*James* Don't you think I know that, you silly dolt? Everybody knows, that William Shakespeare is the trademark of all controversial plays, so that their authors can't be reached and questioned. He is just an agent, a playmonger who makes money on those aristocrats who use his name to avoid getting the attention of the government. That's how Oxford produced his plays, so did Derby, and whoever is behind this play has followed the same procedure. I suspect Sir Walter Raleigh. He is here, isn't he?

*Cecil* He is at your command, your majesty.

*James* Sir Walter, I have some questions to ask of you, if you don't mind.

*Raleigh* I am at your service, your majesty, like I was to her unforgettable majesty's humble service.

*James* What did you really have to do with Arabella Stuart?

*Raleigh* Nothing.

*James* You are lying, you dastard.

*Raleigh* If I am lying, your majesty, you should have it proven before having me accused.

*James* I know that you are lying! You wanted her on the throne instead of me!

*Raleigh* I was innocent of that plot, your majesty.

*James* But you knew about it!

*Raleigh* I didn't take it seriously.

*James* So you knew about it! So you were an accomplice! Away to the Tower with him! He has already proved himself guilty!

*Cecil* Your majesty, Sir Walter Raleigh is the oldest and sincerest defender and servant of the crown. It would be a scandal to put him in the Tower for a mere suspicion.

*James* Are you defending a traitor, you dolt? Are you also applying for a stay at the Tower?

*Cecil* Your majesty, I only advise you not to rush things.

*James* I never rush things! Everything will be conducted in legal order, and Raleigh shall be prosecuted and tried for high treason! If he can prove his innocence he will be set free, but we already have written evidence that he would have preferred Arabella Stuart to me on the throne! File the prosecution, Bacon!

*Bacon* Your majesty, a written carelessness in a private letter is not a case enough for a prosecution of high treason...

*James* File the prosecution, or you are done for!

*Southampton* Your majesty, no one has rendered greater service to the country than Sir Walter Raleigh.

*James* So you have also taken part in the conspiracy, you insipid freak? Do you wish to share Raleigh's company in prison?

*Cecil (to Bacon)* The king is out of his humour, and there is nothing we can do.

*Bacon* I hope it will pass.

*Cecil* It could take years. I am afraid that the problem is in the character.

*James* Away with them to the Tower! Let them prove their innocence if they can, but I am certain they can't! No bloody Englishman wanted a Scots king to command them, so all leading Englishmen are equally accountable! They all need some thumb screws!

*Southampton* Bacon, are you siding with the king against us?

*Bacon* You will need someone left in a leading position to get you out.

*Cecil* He is right. Be patient, gentlemen.

*Raleigh* Henry, with such an incompetent greenhorn for a king we need some forces left at the top who could govern. A ship with a drunken crew and a mad captain could still reach its destination if only the helmsman is sober.

*James* What kind of a twaddle is that? Get them out of here! The case is closed!

*Cecil (notifies guards to take out Raleigh and Southampton)* Everything will be arranged to your majesty's satisfaction.

*James* I hope so indeed. Or else the house of Stuart knows how to chastise hopeless delinquents. We had enough of troublesome clans in Scotland and would rather do without them in England.

*Bacon* Your majesty, you can fully confide in us in matters of maintaining law, order and justice.

*James* Well, Bacon, that's my man. Then at least there is one for me to stick to. My predecessor had too many favourites, and she learned nothing from their presumption until she was forced to execute them. A government works better without favourites.

*Raleigh* But she had a damned good taste.

*James* Don't I?

*Raleigh* Your majesty, that's exactly what you are missing. *(is taken out)*

*James* Foppish coxcombs and finikin snobs! But I will teach them! No one shall teach me my job! No one has a right to teach the world manners except me!

*Cecil (bending his neck together with Bacon)* Yes, your majesty.

*(Raleigh and Southampton are taken out by armed guards.)*

*James* You might as well get lost as well, you dolt. I want a word with Bacon the lawyer here. *(Cecil takes his leave.)*

I don't know, Francis, if you had any part in the manufacture of this play, but you are not so stupid that you could have failed to grasp that the play is a mortal insult to my dead mother!

*Bacon* Your majesty, I assure you that the play has its only source in actual medieval happenings in Denmark.

*James* Don't argue! You always know more than you will admit. You irritated me from the beginning with your supercilious superiority. I will not have it. But you are the cleverest lawyer in the country, and I need you. Either you obediently cooperate, or you will be dismissed. Is that clear?

*Bacon* Your majesty, I am only due for cooperation.

*James* You bloody hypocrite! You don't seem to get what I want. I want you to cooperate on my terms, not yours.

*Bacon* You make the terms. I never made any terms.

*James* Liar! Your terms were always conditions! You are dangerous, and you are the only one I fear as a political competitor, just because I need you. You must marry. That's my first condition. And your wife must be of the lesser gentry.

*Bacon* Any particular on your mind?

*James* I only have all that rubbish on my mind that you could possibly have been a bastard son of the old hag the former queen, and that you could inherit the throne, which must be silenced. You must never have the throne and none in your family either.

*Bacon* I bow to your will. I only beg to remind you that there was only one condition ever that I made for my full support of you.

*James* Which was?

*Bacon* The freedom of expression for concealed poets.

*James* You mean the right of underground scandal writers to conspiracies? As long as they remain concealed I will not get at them anyway. No one can silence poets. I give your poets license, but your loyalty must be absolute!

*Bacon* I always served the crown without reservations.

*James* So get married then! I have just found the right wench for you.

*Bacon* I give you all I have, your majesty, and only reserve my life for myself.

*James* It's a deal. You may keep it – for the time being. Leave now. (*Bacon leaves.*)

He stinks and is abhorrent to me, but it would be stupid not to use him as far as possible. But the sincerest pleasure of my reign will be to one day kick him out.

## Scene 2. The Tower.

*Raleigh* Up like a rising sun and down like a fallen angel. My comet career under Gloriana had its ups and downs, but the ups always returned. But this new king appears to only put his thumb down to everything allowing no one to rise. – My old friend Oxford, are you still alive?

*Oxford* I couldn't keep out of visiting my old brother of destiny in his prison. How is the process going?

*Raleigh* To hell. But at least I will not be executed.

*Oxford* All the people are upset about the treatment you have received from a king who can't stand the Elizabethans. I am just an old drunk, so I am exempt from being considered dangerous, but you, poor devil, are extremely dangerous since you are still vitally and youthfully alive.

*Raleigh* Aren't we of the same age?

*Oxford* Just about, but I always considered you as the dashing youth in his prime. You went to America, you created our new land Virginia after our Queen, you went treasure hunting for Eldorado in the jungles of South America, found Guyana and acquired Trinidad, you did everything that I didn't.

*Raleigh* But you had your good years in Italy and also came to Spain, Cyprus, Turkey and Morocco.

*Oxford* Yes, we both became Elizabethan legends. And now you are shackled here by a lousy king's meanness and can't move out of your enforced coffin, while I can only go home with a sigh, pull something old and mouldy about me, disappear and die.

*Raleigh* We are not finished yet, Oxford. The theatre is still carrying on in spite of the king's barren incompetence.

*Oxford* It's much thanks to Bacon, who secured the king's insurance of safe conduct for unknown poets to continue working in peace and publish their indecent challenges on stage. That old Hamlet story is selling out for revealing the present king's outrageous family scandal history, and the king can do nothing about it, since he has no wish to appear with a bad conscience on behalf of his corrupted mother.

*Raleigh* Say nothing derogatory about Mary Stuart. Gloriana admired her and envied her.

*Oxford* And she had reason to. They were each other's contraries. Mary took all the liberties Gloriana never dared to indulge in, while the romantic Queen never could create any order in her country which Gloriana with her enlightenment so gloriously could achieve.

*Raleigh* We all loved her.

*Oxford* No, we all adored her and had reason to.

*Raleigh* Even you in spite of the fart?

*Oxford* You can see that I am still blushing. I do that every time the incident is mentioned.

*Raleigh* Did it really happen as the legend says?

*Oxford* I was young then and adored her more than anyone else. Not even Sir Philip Sidney could adore her like me. Edmund Spenser's praising verse of her was completely without passion while I had all the passions. And then I was presented to her, as that unfortunate breaker escaped, like a lover taken by surprise and escaping by the back door in a din of revealing noise. It was terrible. I could have gone to earth

and did so indeed. When I left England for shame of the fart in her presence I actually thought it would be forever.

*Raleigh* But you returned. After two years.

*Oxford* I had hoped that she would have forgotten the outrageously painful incident, and then her first words for a greeting were: "Welcome back, earl of Oxford. I can assure you that we have all forgotten all about that fart." And everybody laughed almost to choking, but she laughed most of all. Then she was like a revelation of herself as a seventeen year old girl. I have never seen her so young and glad and fresh and lovely.

*Raleigh* Was it you or Bacon who gave her the name Gloriana?

*Oxford* It came naturally by itself, just like Cynthia. It doesn't matter who invented it. She *was* Gloriana.

*Raleigh* But here is Bacon. There seems to be some party here in the Tower today.

*Oxford* Welcome, cousin Bacon.

*Bacon* Oxford. I thought you were at home and dying. You shouldn't be out at this hour.

*Oxford* Evidently I am. You'll do anything for the old Raleigh.

*Bacon* We all have interests in America. Sir Walter, we will get you out of here eventually. England needs you for her interests in Virginia.

*Raleigh* Try to convince the king about that.

*Oxford* No one can convince the king about anything. He is a Scotsman and a hopeless case of petty meanness like all Scotsmen.

*Bacon* But he is not disinterested in your possibilities in America. Raleigh. If you could find your Eldorado for him he would forgive you everything.

*Oxford* But Raleigh is without guilt, like all imprisoned Elizabethans.

*Bacon* Tell that to the king. His ear is not qualified enough to hear it and still less qualified to understand it.

*Oxford* Yes, he would interpret it to the contrary and imprison even more Elizabethans.

*Bacon* To the point, Raleigh! How is your work going?

*Raleigh* Which one?

*Bacon* Your world history.

*Raleigh* I have just about got started. It's cold here in the Tower, you know, the fingers get stiff, there is a constant draught from the windows and the walls, I get no exercise, and the eyes are tortured by the lack of sufficient light.

*Oxford* A dog could not be treated worse.

*Raleigh* Still I am optimistic. The plan is clear, and I think I have shamed all bigots already, all those narrow-minded puritans who branded and persecuted me as a free-thinker, although there never was a more literal interpreter of the Bible than I. The entire first part of my world history concerns only Moses and the Jews and God and his definite part in the whole thing.

*Oxford* Then you will end up as the hero of the puritans, especially if the king will decapitate you in the end.

*Raleigh* But I need more books, Bacon.

*Bacon* You will have them. The last thing they could deny you was your own books.

*Oxford* When do you think we could get him out?

*Bacon* Unfortunately it will be a matter of years. I must cultivate the king's interest in another expedition to Guyana and Eldorado, the success of which would be Raleigh's only possible exoneration.

*Raleigh* And what about your concealed poets, Bacon? How are they faring?

*Bacon* They all went down with you, Sir Walter. You were their highest hope. Marlowe has given up entirely and departed for the wilderness of the Catholics in Lancashire, where they say he is working on wild plays about mad kings in the darkest tragedies ever written for the theatre since the days of the Athenians.

*Oxford* I heard that he resumed my old tragedy of Othello.

*Bacon* That was his most crushing tragedy. Everyone enjoys wallowing in its erotic horror. But a decisively contributing factor to its success is that Marlowe lives with Derby, whose jealousy of his wife is notorious enough to provide him with infinite study material in practical reality.

*Oxford* Wriothesley was supposed to have married my daughter, but Wriothesley turned her down. Derby got her instead maybe to his own greatest misfortune... But he did turn out a good son-in-law.

*Bacon* Was it Derby who wrote the Hamlet tragedy for the king in Denmark?

*Oxford* No, but he was over there acting in it. Derby had his experience from France with a court lady unhappily in love who drowned herself, I had my experiences of Burleigh, whom I had hoped to cut through when I noticed someone was listening through the tapestry, while it turned out to be just an ordinary servant. Kyd's and Marlowe's Spanish tragedy was constantly sold out and gave invaluable experience and impulses how to handle other ghosts on stage, and so on. We were all involved in "Hamlet". That one more than any other is our play about ourselves, about our suppressive overlordship, about the corruption of power and about the eternal damnation of an established regime.

*Raleigh* Oxford is getting back into his melodrama. I almost recognize him from better days. Back to reality. When can I have my fleet?

*Bacon* Only the king can procure it. It all depends on him.

*Raleigh* Then it will take at least ten years.

*Bacon* Or more, probably more. Prepare yourself for a long stay in limbo, Sir Walter, but sooner or later you will get out. And in the meantime you can write your world history.

*Oxford* Good luck, both of you. My time is over. I leave the stage.

*Bacon* Derby stays on.

*Oxford* There are always successors. The theatre will never die.

*Raleigh* Thanks for your visit, my friends. I think it's time for me to start concentrating on my work.

*Oxford* That Shakspeare, who is he really?

*Raleigh* Our trademark and pen name, a reliable man of honour who will never give us away as long as he gets paid.

*Oxford* Is he watertight as a cover?

*Bacon* Until the end of ages.

*Oxford* Then I feel calm. Sir Walter, your destiny is in safe hands whatever happens.

*Raleigh* In the hands of a simple rustic opportunist like William Shakespeare?

*Oxford* No, we are all hiding behind his name. And we are both a considerable number and immortal.

*Raleigh* Against the king we need more than just immortality.

*Bacon* With Marlowe, Chapman and Jonson we can easily bypass the king. Then we also have Dekker, Beaumont and Fletcher as reserves.

*Oxford* The king's days are already numbered like those of his entire family with such explosive dramatic talents to reveal the corruption of power.

*Bacon* Come along now, Oxford. Raleigh wants to get down to work.

*Oxford* Happy the man who manages to work, for without work you are dead.

*Bacon* Farewell, Sir Walter. I will be back.

*Raleigh* Welcome back with more books and words of wisdom.

*(Oxford and Bacon leave.)*

### Scene 3. Another part of the Tower.

*Guard* Sir Henry, you have a visitor.

*Southampton (rising)* Lady or gentleman?

*Guard* A gentleman in disguise.

*Southampton* Disguised as a lady?

*Guard* No, but undressed enough.

*Southampton* You talk in riddles.

*Guard* Life is a permanent riddle.

*Southampton* You don't have to inform me about that.

*Guard* Thanks for informing me.

*James (entering)* Is there anyone here who thinks he is more informed than me?

*Southampton* His majesty the king! *(kneels and uncovers his head)*

*Guard* I leave you two alone.

*James* Yes, do so. *(The guard leaves.)* – Forget all that, Wriothesley. We are content with you and aim to release you.

*Southampton* Your majesty, I am not stupid enough not to understand, that my freedom will have a price.

*James* Of course. How could you guess? Do you think I would let a nobleman out of prison for nothing? – According to my information, you should know some things to Sir Francis Bacon's disadvantage.

*Southampton* You give me an advantage. That means I am able to negotiate.

*James* You will not get out of here with less than giving us a catch on Bacon. Do you know something?

*Southampton* Perhaps.

*James* Some dirty business perhaps? Bribes? Boys? Entertained pages?

*Southampton* Didn't you force him to marry?

*James* Yes, and that conceited snob had the audacity to dress in purple for his wedding. I can never forgive him that. No one must dress in purple in England except the King, and a violation of that law prescribes a capital punishment. But I can't touch him. We have our agreements.

*Southampton* Why did he dress in purple? Isn't that a dress as good as any other?

*James* Don't you see, you effeminate dullwit? He always fancied himself as a possible bastard of that old hag who executed my mother and lived and died impotent, and that myth he has tried to spread around himself. In a ridiculous effort to give it publicity he dresses up in purple, to make him appear to be of royal blood. It's unforgivable.

*Southampton* Your majesty, Bacon tries his best to serve the country, and he is probably the most astute and sensible lawyer and politician of England, but he compromises with justice. He disposes of it when it suits him.

*James* Isn't that what all lawyers do?

*Southampton* Yes, but Bacon has cultivated an image of himself of standing above such practices and attained a reputation of impeccability.

*James* While he isn't?

*Southampton* I was myself a close witness of how he sacrificed Robert Devereux of Essex for his own career. Essex was in his way.

*James* Which means he would gladly do something like that again.

*Southampton* I could never forgive him the fall of Essex. I and Derby fought with Essex in Ireland and could testify that he did nothing wrong although everything went against him. If he had been allowed to continue he would have pacified Ireland for good, but the Queen recalled him at the advice of lord Burleigh and Bacon. The son Robert Cecil is completely corrupted by Spain, and Bacon had an interest in Essex' downfall.

*James* What is your angle?

*Southampton* When the day comes to necessitate Bacon's downfall I will be at your service with means enough to have him dishonoured for good.

*James* Something like that was exactly what I wished for. So I can trust you, my earl of Southampton, implicitly?

*Southampton* I shall serve your house as long as I live. Through you Queen Elizabeth has peacefully united England and Scotland, that union is worth maintaining and can only be maintained by your royal house.

*James (takes his hand)* Henry Wriothesley, you are pardoned and free.

*Southampton* Thank you, your majesty.

*James* Guard, let this pardoned nobleman have free access to all the Tower may have to offer of what is good, so that he may resume his place in the world as a free man.

*Guard* Yes, your majesty. (*lets Southampton out of his cell.*)

*James* I've got him! He was imprisoned without a case, no court could have judged him for anything, we had to let him go, but then I got him anyway! Now I have both Wriothsesley and Bacon in my hand, and the only problem remaining is Sir Walter Raleigh. Perhaps there is something to what Bacon says, that the only way to get rid of Raleigh is to send him back to South America. But if we give him that freedom, we must make sure that he never gets back. Hem!

#### Scene 4.

*Prince Henry* It's a shame to keep such a magnificent eagle shut up in a cage year after year! My father is acting wrong, and he knows it! And it's more than an injustice, it is stupidity! Of what use is a bird in a cage? None at all, and it will only languish in misery. Why was it given wings if not to fly in freedom? And this is an eagle at that, and what an eagle! The greatest talent in the country with its greatest assets of knowledge and experience! It's unacceptable. – Guard, let me in at once.

*Guard* But your father has given me strict orders to forbid you to visit Sir Walter Raleigh.

*Henry* It's on my responsibility. I answer to my father. Let me in to the prisoner!

*Guard* Yes, your highness. (*Henry is allowed in Raleigh's cell.*)

*Raleigh (rising)* Your highness, you shouldn't be here.

*Henry* Not the thickest prison walls of England could stop me!

*Raleigh* But you risk both your own situation and mine. I have no wish to cause a division between you and your father.

*Henry* Be calm, Sir Walter! I can handle him. He is just afraid and doesn't understand that there is nothing for him to be afraid of. He thinks he is seeing ghosts in the middle of the day and imagines everyone to be his enemy while he has none. They all pity him and despise him for his stupidity.

*Raleigh* Alas, Prince Henry, but could your defiance of his orders in any way make things better?

*Henry* Yes, for I can plead with him, I if anyone have influence over him, and I could be your best advocate and champion. It's only beneficial that I be seen with you here, for nothing is more potent in the world than a reputation, to which all must flinch and bend their knees. When he hears that I love you as much as he fears you, he must start reconsidering. We will get your fleet for you, Sir Walter, you can be sure!

*Raleigh* What does Bacon say?

*Henry* He is with us. He has quietly kept promoting the new Guyana expedition in all these years with his indomitable persistence, which never gives in and always prevails in the end. We have also won over Southampton and Buckingham to our side. All England demands a fleet for you.

*Raleigh* That will be my swan song. Here I have been stuck for eight years with nothing else to do but to vegetate and philosophize, while Drake's fleet has been let

down to rot and rust and the Virginia colony neglected to perdition. But I still have my powers. I can still meet the Spaniards in battle and crush them one against a hundred, and I am still eager to explore and transcend new frontiers in poisonous jungles beyond the Orinoco. Eldorado is still there somewhere waiting for us, like an unaccomplished immaterialized dream, which man's faculty couldn't realize, being restricted by his self-destructive stupidity. You can't guess what inexhaustible resources of new life your encouragement endows me with, Prince Henry! Only you could make me believe that these long years of restricted freedom still had some meaning and were worth while.

*Henry* Just put your trust in us, Sir Walter! Soon England will be human again. Now I must leave, but I will always be back. (*leaves*)

*Raleigh* Go with God, my dear boy, England's hope and future! There is still hope for me and for Marlowe and other trampled and humiliated free-thinkers who were grinded down to dust in the soulless mills of power by mistake, just because they happened to get in between while the power cannot think. But as long as there is life, there is hope that humanity will not permanently go to blazes, but that there still might recur occasional flashes of light.

#### Scene 5.

*Marlowe* I can't wait any longer, Derby. My life has run out of me, I have written myself off and have nothing more to give the theatre. I languish like Raleigh in his prison.

*Derby* But he hasn't given up, and the king is getting constantly more positive to giving him a fleet and another chance. You could follow him to Virginia or Eldorado and there have a free life of your own without having to hide anymore.

*Marlowe* Yes, I am tired of this hopeless hiding existence. I want to cast off the magic mantle of exile once and for all and no more having to appear in masked roles. This role that I have accepted to play of being dead has been efficient as a magic cloak making me invisible in it, but have I then no human right to ever be myself? May I not be human just because I am a poet? Must my outsidership imply my exclusion from that humanity which I all my life wallowed in cultivating? It's not fair. I will play one more role, but that will be my last. Then I will cast off the magic cloak of the theatre and cease to pretend.

*Derby* May I suggest a play in connection with Raleigh's journey to distant islands in the Atlantic and with his saving angel and cherub, crown prince Henry as his closest part?

*Marlowe* You inspire me. It will be a play about Raleigh and Henry, a comedy of Raleigh's exoneration with prince Harry as his guide and aid, an angel but hedonistic as such, a spiritual being, an Ariel.

*Derby* And what name will you give Raleigh?

*Marlowe* May he flourish and at last gain his fortune. I will call him Prospero.

*Derby* With such good presages there can only be a happy outcome of the adventure.

*Marlowe* I hope so, lord Derby, I hope so indeed, for it will be our farewell performance.

Scene 6.

*Buckingham* I am profoundly sorry and too much so for words, my lord.

*James* We all are, Steenie. Of all disasters that could have struck our nation, this was heavier than any other thinkable. He was the most brilliant promise of a king that appeared on both these islands.

*Buckingham* Could it have been an act of poisoning?

*James* Who could have had any motive? Everybody loved him. It was God that nipped a flower while it was still only a bud, and he did it without cause or reason, for he if anyone was the darling of the gods.

*Buckingham* It has been said, that whom the gods love dies young.

*James* But he was *too* young, Steenie! He was only eighteen years! He certainly was mature enough already, but he was still just a youth! My son! My beloved son! The most beloved princely heir of all the world!

*Buckingham* We are all shocked with the entire nation, but most shocked of all I still think is Sir Walter Raleigh. He learned to love Prince Harry as his own son.

*James* He has sons of his own. He'll manage.

*Buckingham* Still I think it's proper to respect Prince Harry's last wishes.

*James* Don't you think I am aware of it? Who can refuse Raleigh his expedition and fleet now when his foremost sponsor has died for his altruism? He shall have his fleet. But it will take time.

*Buckingham* He is waiting outside, my lord.

*James* I am ready to face him. Show him in, Steenie.

*(Raleigh is admitted.)*

*Raleigh (kneeling deep and bowing his head in respect with his bonnet removed)* Your majesty, my deepest compassion in the grief of the entire nation and most of all yourself.

*James* Yes, that's all right, Sir Walter, rise, I know that you didn't poison him, and you shall have your fleet. No one can refuse you anything now when the only greater hero of England than you has died with an intercession for your cause on his lips.

*Raleigh* His loss is irreplaceable. If anyone was indispensable for our united kingdom and its future, it was he.

*James* He loved you, Sir Walter, more than he loved me.

*Raleigh* He was my best friend and sincerest disciple. Yes. We came close to each other.

*James* He learned nothing except from you. I could have had you murdered out of sheer jealousy, but it is out of the question now when he is dead. God has punished me for my unobligingness by bereaving me of my best son.

*Raleigh* He has punished all England and without cause.

*James* Precisely my view. You shall have your fleet. Unfortunately it will take time to get it in order. You will remain in the Tower until then, for you are still sentenced to death for high treason by your complicity with Arabella Stuart, and my pardon is only for your life, not for your freedom of movement. But as soon as the fleet is ready I hope that you will go as far away with it as possible and never come back.

*Raleigh* Not even with Eldorado?

*James* If you find the land of gold, England is of course not rich enough to refuse it, and in that case you shall be rewarded even better than Columbus. But if you return empty-handed, Sir Walter, you had better not return at all.

*Raleigh* I will not return empty-handed.

*James* One more thing. No trouble with Spain. You do not have my permission to take any Spanish ship. We are now at peace with Spain and cannot afford to lose that peace.

*Raleigh* I know that Spain is enriching your treasures by paying tribute.

*James* And my son is marrying a Spanish princess.

*Raleigh* That gives the Spaniards a motive for poisoning prince Henry.

*James* No insinuations, Sir Walter! I can't stand it! Don't provoke me! I can recall everything I have said! Your cynical superiority drives me mad! Shut up or get lost in the Tower forever!

*Raleigh* I shall be quiet, your majesty.

*Bacon (interceding)* Sir Walter, the king suggests, that under no circumstances there must be any conflict between our and Spanish interests during your expedition. At the slightest sign of any conflict, the crown will cancel its protection of the enterprise, and you will be charged with piracy.

*Raleigh* Understood, Sir Francis. I shall impress the order with all my captains.

*James* We have Trinidad and Guyana. That's enough. You must not inflict on Spanish interests in Maracaibo and Venezuela.

*Raleigh* Your wish is my law. Your majesty.

*James* That's good. Leave now, before I get angry again.

*(Raleigh bows and leaves quickly enough.)*

The sooner he gets on his way, the better. Buckingham and Bacon, it's on your responsibility that he gets his expedition and gets away, so that we are rid of him. If the enterprise fails, I will never forgive you.

*Buckingham* Your majesty, it can't fail.

*James* To make completely sure of that we must inform the Spanish. Notify them of the size of the fleet and its armament, its plans and destination, its command and cargo, and look to it that also the governors of New Spain are notified. If Sir Walter still attacks the Spanish, which I have reasons to take for granted that he will, then it must be absolutely imperative that they finish him once and for all.

*Buckingham* Do you intend to give the entire British fleet in the hands of the Spanish?  
*James* No, only Sir Walter Raleigh. If he makes the smallest mistake, he must not get away with it.

Act IV scene 1.  
On board of Raleigh's ship.

*Raleigh* My instructions are exact. There will be no fight with any Spaniard. The expedition depends on it. We will explore the Orinoco down beyond the borders of the unknown lands of the Eldorado without minding any Spaniards on the way, and we will return to England with Eldorado as a present for the King. That is the entire purpose of our journey. No captures, no fights, no conflicts.

*Captain Keymis* And what if we are attacked?

*Raleigh* If we are attacked by Spaniards we must only defend ourselves if that is our only chance to get away alive. Any questions?

*Another captain* What about Virginia? Are we not going to the American colonies at all?

*Raleigh* Only if we must, if we have no other choice and we have to find refuge somewhere.

*A third* And Caribia? Are we to leave all Caribia in peace?

*Raleigh* Only if we must.

*(The crew now recognizes their leader and cheer unanimously.)*

Scene 2.

*Captain Keymis (in the galley)* We are close to Eldorado now. I can feel it in the air.

*Wat* But what is Eldorado more than gold?

*Keymis* That's what we don't know, and that's the wonder of it. Eldorado is perhaps the fountain of youth, which keeps us in healthy youthhood forever. Eldorado is everything we dreamed about and more than we ever can get. It's the absolute ideal exactly on the location where the rainbow and the horizon meet and end.

*Wat* And shall we then just give it over to King James and keep nothing for ourselves?

*Keymis* That's Captain Raleigh's official plan, but he has other plans. He is free now. No explorer goes on a quest without liberty of choice and multiple alternatives. It wouldn't surprise me if he were to make a dash at Mexico.

*(Sudden outbreak of fire outside with cannons and gunshots.)*

But what is this?

*Sailor (comes running down the stairs in panic)* Captain! An ambush from ashore!

*Keymis* Who is firing at us from there? We are way up the Orinoco in virgin lands here no white man has set his foot!

*Sailor 2* There is a fort on the beach! We have passed it!  
*Keymis* A Spanish fort?  
*Sailor 2* It can't be anything else.  
*Keymis* But there was no fort here last time we passed.  
*Sailor 2* That was twenty years ago. This is new. It controls the river, and we are trapped. What shall we do?  
*Keymis* This is exactly a situation of the kind your father wanted to avoid at any cost, young Wat Raleigh. Now the Spaniards have attacked us and caught us in an ambush. We must shoot our way out or let our ships be sunk and get killed to the last man, for Spaniards never spare an Englishman. What shall we do, young Wat Raleigh?  
*Wat* We must storm the fort. Or else we are lost.  
*Keymis* Exactly. We have no other choice. Set the ships ashore in the lee, mates, and give order of attack against the fort! They have built it in virgin land where only Englishmen have sailed before, perhaps in the intention to bar all Englishmen from the Orinoco forever. We have no choice. Get cannons and muskets ready!  
*Wat* At last a real battle!  
*(They go ahead in full array for the battle.)*

### Scene 3. Sir Walter's camp.

*Raleigh* Of all accidents that could have happened, this is the least foreseen and the most incurable. How could everything go so wrong? My son, my best son, my most beloved son! Everything is lost! After this I can't live any more. – Yes, what is it?  
*Sailor* The captain is here.  
*Raleigh* Show him in.  
*Keymis (entering, broken-hearted)* My captain...  
*Raleigh* How dare you show yourself to me?  
*Keymis* Sir, it is more unbearable for me to show myself to you alive than for you to have to see me. But I had no choice. I was the only one who could give you a full report.  
*Raleigh* I know everything already. You were trapped in an ambush and were forced to answer the fire. Then you had to destroy the fort in order to at all get back alive. In the fighting my son was killed. What else?  
*Keymis* Sir, the worst of it remains.  
*Raleigh (furious)* Could anything be worse? The expedition failed and my son dead! What else?  
*Keymis* In the fort we found answers to our questions. Here are letters we found with the governor. *(presents letters)*  
*Raleigh (eyes them, is terrified)* What is this?  
*Keymis* Authentic documents, Sir.

*Raleigh* Letters from Philip of Spain to the governor with copies of letters from England... So they built the fort only to thwart our expedition?

*Keymis* Warned by the king of England, your principal.

*Raleigh* And not only warned. Here is exact information of our armament, our equipment and crews, our cargo and a detailed description of the plan of our expedition... Betrayed to the king of Spain in advance by the king of England and Scotland!

*Keymis* Sir, there is only one conclusion.

*Raleigh* Our expedition was sent to its destruction in the intention that we would all die and none return. That's why he was so mean with the equipment! That's why he tied himself so hard to a detailed expedition plan in advance! But he hasn't killed me. He only succeeded in taking the life of my best son, the most innocent member of our expedition!

*Keymis* That's all, Sir. I ask your leave to retire. Of course I accept the full responsibility for the disaster at San Tomé and the death of your son.

*Raleigh* The responsibility is the king's, but we must carry it for him. This is more and more like a Greek tragedy of destiny.

*Keymis* Sir, with your leave...

*Raleigh* Yes, my friend, leave. (*Keymis leaves.*) Not only my heart, but my mind is completely broken by this royal villain's meanness and the disasters he has caused unawares by his stupidity. I can't think clearly any longer. But I have no choice. I must home to England and take full responsibility for the total failure of the expedition. May the king cut off my head for his guilt in this, so that I may atone for my son's death and be sacrificed as an innocent victim to the king's idiocy. It can't get worse. (*a shot*) What was that?

*Sailor (entering)* Sir, captain Keymis has just shot himself.

*Raleigh* To death?

*Sailor* He couldn't miss.

*Raleigh* So the victims are amassed in a multiplication constantly doubled and which as yet only has started to reap their victims, while the reaper is utterly untouched in the indifference of his stupidity. Here we see the full glory of power in a nutshell: unconscious of its responsibility it is abused by the incompetent to a cruelty which he could never dream of. Thus is the crowned dog innocent of the bolting massacres of his power machinery among innocent victims, since he has no idea of what it is all about, since all he can do himself is to continue defending his position by in vain pitiable fury just go on barking.

#### Act V scene 1.

*James* The most unheard of reports have reached us from Spanish Guyana. Despite our express command to leave every Spaniard in South America in peace, Raleigh has still without cause attacked San Tomé in Venezuela, barbarically burnt

down the whole community and massacred all its people. Spain can only view this as the grossest possible war atrocity and even without a preceding declaration of war! All England is lying publicly scandalized at the feet of Spain. We must placate Spain. *Buckingham* Your majesty, I have received verified notifications that Sir Walter Raleigh is on his way home with scattered remnants of his expedition and is prepared to answer for his actions and give a satisfactory explanation to the failure of his expedition.

*James* So he didn't even find Eldorado and returns empty-handed?

*Southampton* Your majesty, would you have preferred that he accepted serving with the French?

*James* We shall hear him indeed if he comes home! Pray leave us, gentlemen! I wish to reason with Bacon about this. *(The others leave.)*

Could Raleigh really be so stupid as to return here after having failed so utterly with his expedition, his last chance of grace?

*Bacon* If he returns to our grace the risk is that he has nothing to hide or be ashamed of.

*James* Impossible! He has compromised himself to the entire world! He is no more than a brutal and disgraceful pirate! Our connections with Spain can't afford an acquittal of Raleigh. He must atone for his crimes. Fix it, Bacon! Your career depends on it!

*Bacon* Is that a threat, your majesty?

*James* Dare you oppose me? You will prosecute Raleigh and have him condemned! And if you wish to keep your position you will embed his prosecution and sentence in the law, so that we this time at last will get rid of him!

*Bacon* No one can get at Raleigh, your majesty. You saw how the trial went last time. The prosecutor Cooke made a poor case, lost his face, and the entire people took sides with Raleigh against the throne, and that was the only reason why you did not dare to execute him.

*James* This time it must be different! He got away only because his trial was public and he could defend himself to the entire world, which he did with a most unexpected and unwelcome vigour and bravura. Now it's different. No open trial for Raleigh this time.

*Bacon* But, Sire, such a trial against the most honoured of Elizabethans could hardly be conducted behind closed doors. It would only compromise the trial. Even the prosecutor Cooke advises against it.

*James* Fix it, Francis! I charge you with the entire responsibility! Constitute a commission to investigate Raleigh's case and have him condemned! It's an order!

*Bacon* Your majesty, I can't do more than my duty.

*James* Fulfill your cursed duty then and have the pirate prosecuted and sentenced! You have no other choice, *my lord protector. (leaves)*

*Bacon* He means it. He wants to give me the highest responsibility and power in the country, so that only he remains of higher authority. His condition is the

liquidation of Raleigh. This will bring King James no honour, but he doesn't seem to realize that himself. Well, we shall see what we can do.

Scene 2. The Tower.

*Raleigh* Imprisoned in my own destiny, like a mad whale swimming ashore, well aware that all he will find is death, but what is my choice? To escape to France and give validity to the rumour falsely spread that I am my own country's traitor? No, anything but that, and rather death. No one adored my Queen like I did, no one more solidly gave her a firmer basis for a better sea empire than the Spanish and with greater enthusiasm; and this creation, a free country for the initiatives of men of action and freedom of conscience, I can't betray and fail, even if a mean king of Scotland tries to do his best to trample it down in his own shit. But someone has come for a visit, Sir Francis Bacon, if I am not mistaken.

*Bacon* Sir Walter, why did you return to England?

*Raleigh* We have been through all this before, lord Bacon. I had no choice. I must stand up for my defense, since no one else would do it.

*Bacon* But it was unwise, for you must have known the odds. With a lost fleet and failed expedition you must have known that you could expect no mercy from the king.

*Raleigh* If it is his intention to sentence me to death by the supremacy of injustice, that's his problem and he may take the consequences. I am only interested in preserving my honour. It must not die with me, if I am to be sacrificed in the king's judicial murder.

*Bacon* No one except the king wishes you dead. You can still right away and at any moment have safe conduct to Paris.

*Raleigh* My friend, you come here as something of a tempter, like Mephistopheles to doctor Faustus with an offer that he can't refuse, which nonetheless would only lead to the ultimate ruin. I don't wish to be ungrateful, but I cannot defend my own and England's honour anywhere but in England. If my king condemns me for my captainship I would rather sink with my ship than abandon it for another.

*Bacon* You have no chance if the king insists on a private trial.

*Raleigh* That would be on the king's responsibility.

*Bacon* Not even I could save you if you persist in refusing to save yourself out of the country.

*Raleigh* Bacon, you are honest enough not to give me a promise that you anyway never would be able to keep. You have learned. When you gave me the fleet and safe conduct to Guyana you promised me that the death sentence fifteen years ago no longer was valid and that I could return safely to England no matter if the enterprise succeeded or not. When I come home I am brought back to my prison with the message that my old death sentence on parole now is reinforced.

*Bacon* The express condition for the journey was that the Spanish colonies would not be disturbed.

*Raleigh* Spain attacked us. We were not forbidden to defend ourselves.

*Bacon* But Spain claims the opposite and has produced evidence that we were the attackers.

*Raleigh* I had given captain Keymis express orders not to awake any sleeping Spaniard. He was forced to counter attack when Spain on British territory attacked him from behind.

*Bacon* That story does not satisfy the king. There are no witnesses.

*Raleigh* No, because captain Keymis shot himself, who was the only one who knew the truth.

*Bacon* Which makes him the more suspect.

*Raleigh* Sir Francis, my son died in the fight. No one wanted that, not even king James.

*Bacon* Don't be too sure. Perhaps the king wanted some revenge for the loss of his own best son.

*Raleigh* Sir Francis, what insinuation is that?

*Bacon* Just a loose thread without an end which we can never find, for no one can do anything about the king's supremacy, not even justice or the law. You have no chance, Sir Walter, if you remain. That was actually the only thing I wanted to tell you.

*Raleigh* I thank you for your warning but regret that you have engaged yourself in the corrupt regime of our king.

*Bacon* As long as it is possible I shall keep some back door open to you. Marlowe could be saved. Also you can be saved.

*Raleigh* Not without the sacrifice of my honor. I would rather preserve my honour. Even if I would survive, this life in this new world without honour would not suit me. I would rather die honourably with the old one.

*Bacon* Be it as you wish.

*Raleigh* No, the king's wish, which you blindly obey and follow like this whole blinded corrupted nation. Only he can save his and England's honour by not sacrificing me for their sins.

*Bacon* Have you never realized that your pride and unbearable haughtiness is impossible in this world?

*Raleigh* Sir Francis, in a world where honesty is impossible I don't want to live.

*Bacon* I have done all I could, and I will continue doing so in spite of the king's and your own unreasonably obstinate will.

*Raleigh* Do so, until you fall with your king and his house. Farewell.

*Bacon* Farewell. (*leaves*)

He is lost, blinded by his power binding him in bondage to a hopeless king's narrow-mindedness and stupidity. I can't do anything to save them. My death may be that of a hero and martyr, but their fates will end in the bleak terror of pathetic cowardice with no human dignity left. – Who is there?

*Derby* A nightly visitor.

*Raleigh* Bacon just left. You missed him with a minute.

*Derby* That was intended.

*Raleigh* William Stanley, you puzzle me.

*Derby* That's also intended.

*Raleigh* Don't say that you are also here to tell me that I must escape to the continent.

*Derby* You must escape to the continent.

*Raleigh* That's all we wanted. Have then all my old friends turned against me? Doesn't anyone grant me the preservation of my honour?

*Derby* Walter, listen. We are getting more and more scarce. Soon the Elizabethans will be extinct. I don't want to be left the last man standing.

*Raleigh* I am afraid you have no choice. You are the toughest and most cautious of us all. You always kept backstage and refused to enter the stage. Bacon is also left.

*Derby* Bacon is entirely at the king's mercy. He has sold his soul to politics and doesn't realize that the king, as soon as he doesn't need his bacon any more, will exile him to the eternal limbo of disgrace.

*Raleigh* Poor Bacon, the cleverest and most powerful but also the weakest of us all. But also Marlowe is left.

*Derby* Marlowe has retired and turned to religious broodings. He will never surface again.

*Raleigh* But he lives.

*Derby* Only as a ghost. He leads an underground existence one storey further down than the Catholics.

*Raleigh* Isn't there anyone left then to carry the wonderful cause and glory of the Elizabethans into the future?

*Derby* You are the last rock, Walter. A ship is ready to take you to France. No one wants you beheaded except the king.

*Raleigh* Bacon said the same thing. Will, I don't care what happens to me. Save me if you want. This world is of no matter to me. After my son's death I have become like a dead fish myself just floating mainstream with the others. I am old now. If it pleases the king's vanity to execute an old symbol, I can't grudge him that pleasure. If you want to save an old broken man with only death for his future, I have no strength to stop you. But I don't want to part from life or from England without a prayer, that only you could convey to our pride, our poet.

*Derby* Let's hear it.

*Raleigh* He must give us justice, because only he can do it.

*Derby* It looks bleak, for the future just keeps on darkening. Many clouds must be dispersed before the truth will be able to prevail. But I will convey your message, your last wish, your testament, if you wish. And he will do us all justice, even if it will take four hundred years.

*Raleigh* Better late than never.

*Derby* Exactly my own view.

*Raleigh* Leave now, Will. Our time is out. Let's hibernate and meet again on the other side of winter.

*Derby* Farewell, Sir Walter Raleigh. You can trust my discretion. When winter comes, and it will come soon, all our secrets will be buried with us, but when spring comes, no one will be able to suppress their marvellous discovery. Not even if we remain buried alive for four hundred years, the secret will have lost nothing of its inner life, which only belongs to eternity. Part of that is also Oxford's powerful pioneering as a theatre personality, Essex' Hyperion saga, your indomitable spite against the miserable world order, Thomas Kyd's martyrdom with the strange tale of the arrangement of Marlowe's faked murder as a result, the sound of Shakespeare's name as a symbol of eternity for the free word of the theatre, my brother Ferdinando's contributions and perhaps even my own cautious maintenance of the steadfast continuity of the theatre. We all live in our silent truth, Sir Walter, forever.

*Raleigh* That's my only wish. Against that fulfillment even life itself becomes immaterial, at least for my part.

*Derby* Live, Sir Walter, as long as possible, for that is our highest responsibility towards life. We receive it to maintain it, and it is our duty to handle it well.

*Raleigh* Tell that to the king.

*Derby* Alas, he is a greenhorn who doesn't understand anything. We old souls can never expect to be comprehended by careless youth with no other sense of the power of life than that it can be wasted.

*Raleigh* Perhaps someone will realize that some day.

*Derby* Perhaps in four hundred years. Farewell.

*Raleigh* Farewell, Sir William Stanley. (*Derby leaves.*)

### Scene 3.

*James* Let's hear the conclusions of the committee.

*Bacon* The investigation of the committee has led to the following results. Since the pronounced death sentence against Sir Walter Raleigh for high treason never has been recalled or executed it is still juridically valid. Sir Walter Raleigh cannot be prosecuted for anything else as long as this earlier sentence holds legal force. Subsequently the issue of the failed expedition and the attack against the Spaniards in San Tomé as a crime of insubordination has no bearing since the old sentence for high treason has a priority.

*James* Stop babbling in your beard about dusty paragraphs of law and speak out clearly what you mean practically. Does this mean that we at last could execute the incorrigible pirate and hopeless rebel without obstacles?

*Bacon* Yes, your majesty, according to the law.

*James* So be it. Thanks, Sir Francis Bacon, for delivering the traitor's head on a silver plate.

*Bacon* With the reserved warning, your majesty, that you will have the opinion of the entire people against you if you carry out the sentence, since Sir Walter Raleigh is a man of the people.

*James* The more important to have him liquidated. A man of the people is always dangerous to the established order, since no one knows what the people might be up to, and since a man of the people tends to lead the people to their own perdition. So we pronounce the death sentence. May nothing postpone its execution.

*(Bacon and the other members of the committee bow in silence and walk out.)*

One scoundrel less. Then there is only Bacon left. How shall we get rid of him?

*Southampton* Your majesty, it's among the chancellor's privileges to accept gifts from grateful clients. This could easily be translated into bribery.

*James* Is it that simple?

*Southampton* It couldn't be simpler, your majesty.

*James* We'll wait some years to establish the prosecution against him, so that his fall and disgrace will become total, so that nothing could save him any more after that.

*Southampton* He brought about the fall of his benefactor the earl of Essex and was the decisive vote in the death sentence against Sir Walter Raleigh. It's no more than right.

*James* His punishment will be worse than those of his previous victims, for in contrast to them he will keep his life and be forced to live with his dishonour unto his natural death.

*Southampton* It's not more than right.

*James* Get away now, Wriothesley. I have to confer with my friend Sir Lewis here.

*(Southampton bows and leaves.)*

So you know that there are plans for Raleigh's escape to France?

*Sir Lewis* Everything is clear. He only needs to give his consent, and everyone will stand up for him.

*James* I want you to do something for me, my friend. You have the occasion to make your life's fortune.

*Lewis* Your majesty, it is well known and approved, that anyone will be bribed to anything, as long as the bribe is big enough.

*James* Bang on, my friend. I ask you to be Raleigh and his friends helpful in his escape. Not until he has agreed to be taken to his ship we will strike and have him nailed not only for a definite high treason but also his friends.

*Lewis* My price is high.

*James* My friend, no price is high enough to have Raleigh sentenced and executed and dishonoured as well. Caught red-handed on a disgraceful flight from the country, he must lose all the respect he has left. Then even his reputation would no longer be any threat to me.

*Lewis* Your majesty, I am at your service but must ask for a warrant.

*James* You'll have all the warrant in the world if we just get Raleigh with his hands in the pasty pot.

*Lewis* You are not alone in having envied him all your life, your majesty.

*(bows and leaves)*

*James* He is my last terror. If he dies with his head carried high as a martyr for the lost cause of the Elizabethans I am lost. But if I get him at an attempt to leave the country, no one can any longer doubt his treacherous double play. Raleigh, it's you or me, and I have no choice, and nothing must survive you, not even your honour.

Scene 4.

*Agent* You are free, Sir Walter, but you must hurry.

*Raleigh* I strongly doubt your word, my friend.

*Agent* How is that?

*Raleigh* My freedom is no longer mine to choose. I am just a fallen withered autumn leaf, ruthlessly tossed about by the winds of destiny, which only longs for a moment's peace to lie down and die. You say that you give me my freedom to live, you give me this ship for an escape in exile for the rest of my life in France, the safe resort for every British subject that is cast out in the dark by his cruel mother England's bitter hardness, violated beyond recognition by her stupid autocrats confused beyond reason by their power complex. William, I am afraid that I must decline this time. I want to die free and not as a sad pathetic prisoner in exile. Allow my king to have his high pleasure of chopping my head off. The self-destructive pleasure of his vanity will be something for me to laugh at, and this my homericly supreme laughter of scorn will follow him unto his death. May that fool have my head on his plate. My blood will then never be washed out of his regime.

*(enter suddenly guards)*

*guard* Sir Walter Raleigh?

*Raleigh* Yes?

*Guard* You are under arrest.

*Raleigh (hardly surprised)* You don't say?

*Guard* For an attempt to escape from your legal sentence and punishment.

*Raleigh* My king's stupidity excels itself. What is his latest prank? Am I to be decapitated immediately and have a nameless grave in Deptford?

*Guard* Don't protest, Sir. Your conspiracy is betrayed, your friends have deceived you, and the one who offered you this opportunity was only after the king's money. He has had his wages for having betrayed you.

*Raleigh* I see. The usual procedure, the normal routine of power operation, where everyone bribes and betrays one another, and thus they all end up as prisoners of power and corrupt traitors. My friend, it will give me pleasure to get off the miserable merry-go-round.

*Guard* Don't thank me but the king.

*Raleigh* Yes, we are all deeply indebted to the king's justice.

*(exit with the guards)*

Scene 5. A library in Oxford.

*Burton* My son, what more can I do for you? My library is at your service with all its treasures, since you more than anyone have showed the proper piety to its contents. All that is mine is yours. What more do you desire?

*Marlowe* I am writing a book.

*Burton* And you need my help?

*Marlowe* I need your help to have it published. I would thank you by having it published in your name.

*Burton* That is, I assume, your great work about the anatomy of melancholy?

*Marlowe* My last and definite work.

*Burton* And there is no way for you to publish it in your own name?

*Marlowe* All too early I had to face the hard experience that I could only work as a writer under the names of others. I started working with Thomas Kyd, but he failed me and betrayed me to the inquisition. Then I had to disappear altogether, and to protect my fellow friends of free thinking I had to renounce my name for good to sustain the myth that I was dead. For many years my works could safely be presented without difficulty in the name of William Shakespeare, an honest theatre businessman from Stratford, who made good business by the arrangement. After his retirement I continued with John Webster, but with him and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher I have bid the theatre adieu. In my old age I have returned to my childhood interest in religion. I was given my education with the intention to make of me a theologian, but instead I turned a rebel and started my career as Martin Marprelate.

*Burton* Yes, you were the leading rebel, the most challenging of them all. The puritans made loud cheer of triumph and negative joy when the news came from Deptford that you had been killed, but few were those who believed in it. You were wiser than to start a tavern brawl.

*Marlowe* The official truth was the only important one, so that I could go on working in peace without trouble with the authorities. But much has happened since then. My first patron Sir Walter Raleigh was executed by the king in a judicial murder after he had kept Sir Walter in prison for thirteen years. Now Sir Walter's memory has become the war banner of the puritans against the royal power. Even Sir Francis Bacon has fallen, dishonoured forever, a victim to the same king but proved guilty of corruption, a worse death than actual death.

*Burton* So you now wish to join the puritans and give them your full personal support by this remarkable religious work on the anatomy of melancholy?

*Marlowe* Yes, but I need someone's name. I can't abandon my course to let Christopher Marlowe be dead for the best of all.

*Burton* I never wrote anything sensible and have the most harmless reputation in England of a bookworm, scholar and cleric. You couldn't have any safer name than mine.

*Marlowe* That's why I ask for it.

*Burton* So the devil finally turned religious when he grew old. Why not. Faustus grew repentant at last. I like your idea. So you join hands with the puritans against royal power, an incurable rebel in spite of all. Your ways were always difficult, my son, but you always made them more so.

*Marlowe* I guess it's in my nature. As long as it carries me on I will not flinch at any difficulties.

*Burton* The freedom of the word, of thought, of conscience, perhaps the puritans might lead us there, but the road there will be long and difficult.

*Marlowe* The more important not to back down from it.

*Burton* You have my imprimatur. Write, poet, in freedom and eternity.

*Marlowe* I thank you. That was all I ever wished from life: to be able to work in peace, and that was the one thing life always tried to deny me.

*Burton* Your work is the most difficult in the world since it only consists of concentration. Supreme concentration means life's highest responsibility.

*Marlowe* Thank you, my friend, for allowing me this responsibility with your help.

*Burton* I regard it as an honour. All the gratitude is on my side with the pleasure of putting bees in the bonnets of scholars for centuries ahead and many generations.

*Marlowe* That's the sport of creating, for all lasting products of creative power means unsolvable mysteries.

*Burton* Your hand, my friend. I am sure we shall get along. No one can work all alone, and you have once more found a right hand and right partner.

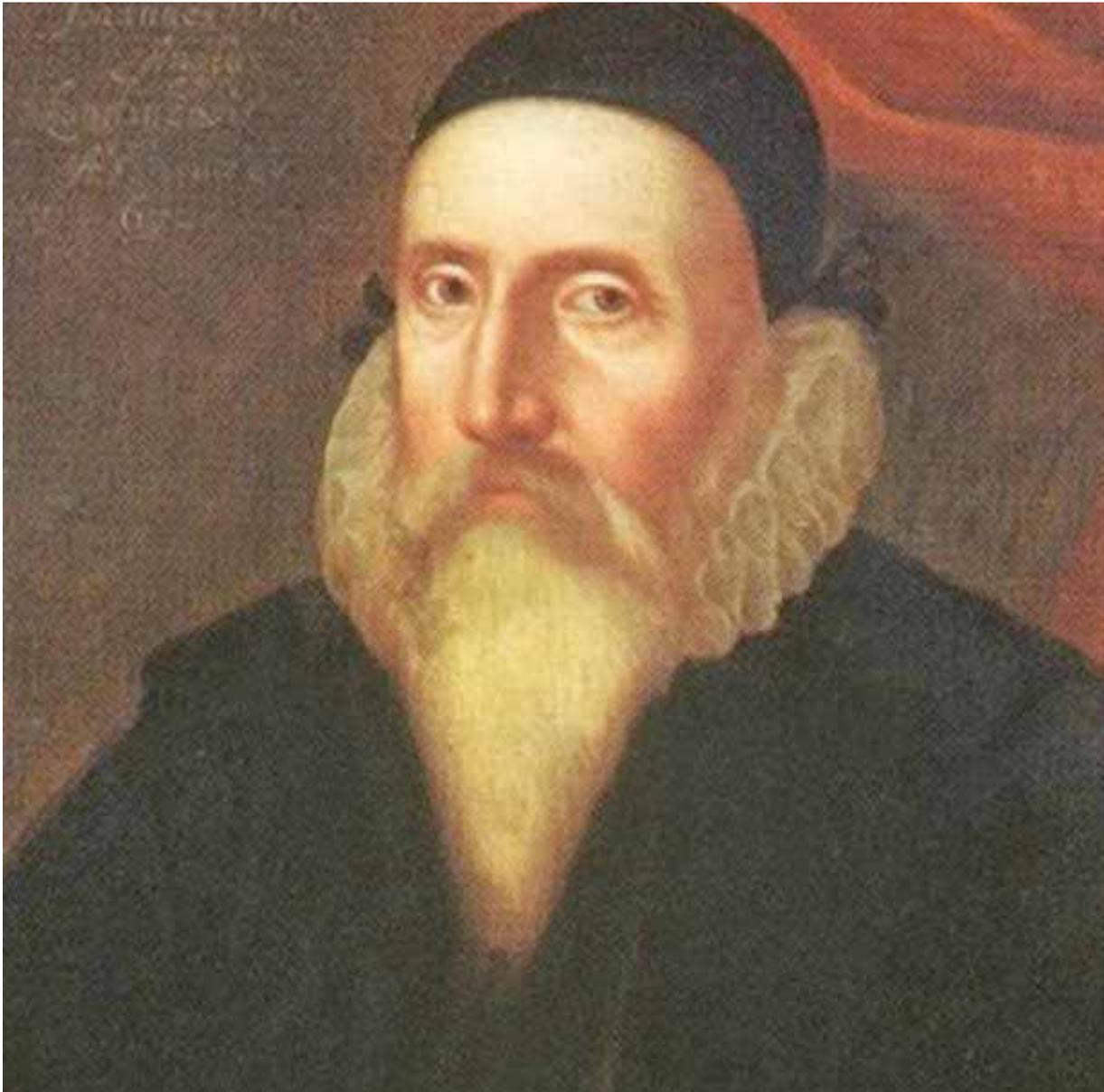
*(shakes Marlowe's hand cordially)*

Now you can start working.

*(Burton leaves. Marlowe sets down to work.)*

*The End.*

*Verona, 6.11.2002,  
translated January 15th, 2019.*



# *The Dishonour*

*Epilogue to Shakespeare*

by Christian Lanciai (2014)

*Dramatis personae:*

Lord Francis Bacon  
Christopher Marlowe  
John Dee  
Mary Sidney  
Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford  
Robert Devereux, earl of Essex  
Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton  
Roger Manners, earl of Rutland  
Elizabeth Sidney  
William Stanley, earl of Derby  
Robert Cecil, Lord Burleigh  
Guard  
Sir Walter Raleigh  
King James I  
Ben Jonson

Judges and lords of England

The action takes place in England, 1593-1618.

*The Dishonour*

Act I scene 1.

*Bacon* But you must understand, my friend, that it will not do to go on like this.  
*Marlowe* What then have I made myself guilty of except honesty?  
*Bacon* You can't be honest in politics. Then you make enemies, and that's the last thing any honest man deserves. There is something called diplomacy which you must learn.  
*Marlowe* What is diplomacy except lies, excuses and covert cowardice?  
*Bacon* But it is necessary. You can't just challenge the entire establishment with their moral grounds and biblical standard, as you have done, without reactions.  
*Marlowe* The more important then to stand up to what you are.  
*Bacon* No one likes being baited, and you have raised everyone's irritation.  
*Marlowe* No, it wasn't me. It was Baines who degraded himself to a base informer!  
*Bacon* And you did nothing to provoke him?  
*Marlowe* Very little. I never liked him, but I had to tolerate him. Then he could also have tolerated me.

*Bacon* Your aggressive obstinacy has vexed him. If you hadn't insisted on your demonstrative heresy he would not have been provoked to take measures.

*Marlowe* Would I then hide my intentions after having presented them so openly at the theatre?

*Bacon* The theatre is quite another thing. It can still be saved. But you can't be saved.

*Marlowe* What do you mean?

*Bacon* You have demonstrated your heretical views on the Bible and depicted Jesus if not as a homosexual then at least as good an impostor as Moses. You have claimed that you have as good a right to coin money as the Queen of England. That's something the Queen cannot accept.

*Marlowe* If you are without money you have to do something about it.

*Bacon* You must go underground. Let Marlowe disappear and never let him be seen again. That's our only possibility to save him. Leave England for some time, and you could surely find yourself at home in Italy or Spain or with Henry IV until you are forgotten. But you can never return as Marlowe. Go on indeed writing your excellent plays, we can always find other names to conceal them under, but Marlowe can only survive if he is dead. We will all seal your secret with our silence. But you can never appear again except in disguise.

*Marlowe* So you grant me full liberty to continue working as a poet in disguise.

*Bacon* Yes, provided that you keep it.

*Marlowe* I wouldn't be a dramatist if I couldn't sustain a dramatic part.

*Bacon* Exactly. That's what you must do. Go underground, and carry on from there the more actively but without identity in concealment.

*Marlowe* Then at least I must be allowed to direct my exit myself, to give it credibility.

*Bacon* The more credible, the better.

*Marlowe* Walsingham's friends will assist me. That will be my best intrigue. Then the puritans may go on scolding and abusing me to damnation and reveal themselves through their negative pleasure of scorn over a dramatist's fearful demise.

*Bacon* The last laugh is what counts.

*Marlowe* That's what I mean. We will fool them all, Sir Francis, and the whole world with them!

## Scene 2. At home with John Dee in his study.

*Dee* You are dead, but you live. That's something to be grateful about.

*Marlowe* But what kind of life is that in limbo? I am neither dead nor alive but left hanging in the air like some nonentity, but still utterly conscious and aware.

*Dee* It's your life's chance. Being officially dead, no one can touch you any more. You'll be rid of all your enemies and envious competitors at the theatre, Thomas Kyd's pathetic whining and baseness, the puritan attacks and persecutions

and such as Richard Baines with all the baseness in the world. You are free and have a firm ground to stand on by the English drama you already created. It's mature, you have found and mastered its perfect form, and you are free to just go on expanding it without any restrictions. I almost envy you. I have to stay on as a celebrity as a target for the blind firing by the ignorant.

*Marlowe* But I am all alone. It's only special individuals like you who can be initiated in the complexity of my difficult fate.

*Dee* But you have influential and powerful friends in Francis Bacon and Thomas Walsingham.

*Marlowe* I don't wish to be dependent on their grace nor expose them to unpleasantness by using their friendship.

*Dee* So the best thing for you to do is to go away.

*Marlowe* The farther the better, and the longer I stay away, the better.

*Dee* And there you can in peace and quiet go on writing inspired plays.

*Marlowe* But it is very frustrating not to be able to inform Anthony Munday, Thomas Nashe and other friends of what has happened.

*Dee* Isn't it enough with me, Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh, the three leading Elizabethans?

*Marlowe* I never want to risk Raleigh's position by resuming our friendship. And you are old, John Dee.

*Dee* Don't you think I am aware of it? But it is actually an advantage. The young may slander and scorn the old for their conservative slowness and old-fashioned ideals, but that maturity beats everything else. My erudition may be mouldy, but it is superior to all the world by its detached wisdom, reducing all immature youths to dwarfs. We are more than anyone can realize by knowing more than anyone else can know. Scorn is ignorance, and to scorn wisdom and knowledge is idiocy. Let the world perish in its foolish simplicity and futile hunt for pleasures, which only is a self-destructive self-consumption for fools to perish by and disappear in, but we shall remain and prevail. The highest compliment I ever received was your own play *Doctor Faustus*. It will be presented and remain actual forever in showing how learning, the constant quest for knowing more, is superior and more right than God himself, who is wrong. Your Faustus is a martyr to the highest ideal, the quest and search for constantly higher forms of truth and beauty, overcoming the world order and God's injustice by his martyrdom. Go on composing such tragedies. They will become immortal just by their heroes' deaths in proving they were right, just as you did by staging your own death.

*Marlowe* You are the most respected man in the kingdom.

*Dee* And the greatest fool and clown, since I rather associate with spirits than with mundane men. Go thou and do likewise. People the theatre and your plays with ideal people, and you will find yourself overcoming and transcending the world.

*Marlowe* Thank you, master John Dee.

Act II scene 1. Wilton House. A dinner.

*Mary Sidney* I bid you all welcome. We are here to carry on the play, which never must be finished. We are almost only poets here, and we have all one interest in common – the continuity of poetry, whatever happens. And we have found the right formula, which my brother left behind – total anonymity.

*Oxford* That's all right with me. It works.

*Essex* As principal heir to Philip Sidney, and as having the incomparable honour of receiving his wife for my own, I feel chief responsible for the poets of the new generation, and bid welcome to my two best young friends, earl Henry Wriothesley of Southampton and Roger Manners, earl of Rutland.

*Southampton* Rutland is much more a real poet than I, who is content enough with just going to the theatre.

*Mary* What would the theatre be without its audience? And who is leading and tempting the audience there if not leading enthusiastic noblemen, like you both?

*Rutland* My modesty forbids me to ever appear as a poet.

*Elizabeth* And still you are perhaps the foremost poet of us all.

*Mary* Let's stick to the subject. We are a number of poets and dramatists, among which the earl of Oxford should be the leading front-rank figure, but we all have one collective name that we chose to use as our protective identity.

*Oxford* Our man Shakespeare.

*Mary* Yes, that's the name of our play.

*Essex* But can we trust him?

*Mary* He is perfect as a neutral signature. He is a talented businessman whose only interest is to make money and will do anything to expand his private fortune, so that he will keep any deal that he is paid for.

*Essex* And what are we paying him for?

*Mary* To keep quiet about our use of his name as a trademark for our poetical activity.

*Oxford* Let me remind you that we were compelled to this secrecy by the Marlowe crisis.

*Essex* What happened to Marlowe?

*Mary* He was too outspoken as a free-thinker. He made dangerous enemies by openly preaching atheism and denounce Moses and Jesus as deceivers. His boldness provoked a report to the Privy Council against him as an atheist, homosexual and coiner of money. Since he was employed in Walsingham's secret intelligence directly under the Queen he had to be taken off the stage and removed.

*Southampton* Who really arranged his faked death?

*Mary* Don't you know? He staged the whole performance himself, and the Queen assisted by contributing her own coroner with a documentation that can't be called into question.

*Rutland* So he is officially dead but can still carry on writing under our protective cover?

*Mary* He has made Shakespeare famous.

*Essex* For which Shakespeare is grateful in earning money from it.

*Mary* We are all winners of it. Thereby my brother's activity is carried on. He showed us the way, and we follow it by consistently observing the same anonymity.

*Essex* May I crown our literary meeting by announcing a literary union? My beloved stepdaughter, Elizabeth Sidney, has accepted Roger here for her future husband.

*Mary (delighted)* It is too wonderful to be true.

*Oxford* You certainly never suffered any lack of suitors, Elizabeth. Why did you choose him?

*Elizabeth* Because he is a poet.

*Essex* All her other suitors were only earls.

*Rutland* I am one of you and follow Sidney's line and will rather remain an anonymous poet than become an earl.

*Mary* Then I understand why you chose him, Elizabeth.

*Elizabeth* I will never love anyone else.

*Oxford* Do you love her, Roger?

*Rutland* I could hardly love anyone else. It's she or no one.

*Southampton* You could not have made a better choice.

*Derby* I recommend for a suitable wedding play to their festivity the comedy with which I crowned my own wedding, the enchanting fairy play "A Midsummer Night's Dream" about the wedding between Oberon and Titania.

*Oxford* And a number of others.

*Rutland* What is more becoming to a wedding than a nuptial play?

*Elizabeth* And a Shakespeare play at that.

*Derby* Exactly.

*Mary* This was really a happy occasion.

*Essex* Can we expect a continuous production of Shakespeare plays?

*Mary* I really hope so, for as long as possible, preferably forever.

*Derby* I think I can warrant that prospect. Marlowe is under my protection, as he earlier was under my brother's.

*Mary* Who was poisoned to death. We can't afford any more losses like that, Stanley.

*Derby* I mobilise all safety precautions to ensure diplomatic discretion.

*Oxford* We trust you.

*Essex* But can we trust Marlowe?

*Derby* As long as he lives. He already died once, so he could hardly die any more.

*Southampton* His disgrace was terrible. He could only abscond it by death.

*Mary* And so he did with honour.

*Oxford* He is also one of us.

*Rutland* And retains perhaps the greatest experience of all of us.

*Essex* From his journeys and missions abroad?

*Rutland* Not only that, but most of all from his own death.

*Southampton* He is the more alive for that.

*Derby* And has become the more liberated as a poet. Nothing can stop him now.

*Essex* As long as we protect him.  
*Mary* Exactly. I suggest a toast to the Shakespeare enterprise and its continued theatrical and poetical activity to never be discontinued.  
*Oxford* And to Philip Sidney's!  
*Southampton* And to Roger's and Elizabeth's wedding!  
*Rutland* Cheers to us all!  
*Mary* And Shakespeare!  
(*They all drink together to each other in a comprehensive toast.*)

## Scene 2.

*Bacon* It worries me that you are so pledged to Essex. How dependent are you on him actually?  
*Rutland* We are all dependent on him.  
*Bacon* What do you mean by all?  
*Rutland* Me and Southampton and all our following. Aren't you also?  
*Bacon* I served and helped him enthusiastically like all of us did, as did also the Queen until recently, but he has gone too far. He is turning against the crown and thinks he can bring all England with him.  
*Rutland* Is it true?  
*Bacon* It is regrettably true. She has withdrawn her graces alarmed by his actions, and I must unfortunately desert him.  
*Rutland* But he is the leading hero of England to almost the same degree as Philip Sidney!  
*Bacon* Unfortunately he has lost his way. His cause is doomed, and I might be obliged as the Queen's prosecutor to take him to court.  
*Rutland* For what?  
*Bacon* High treason.  
*Rutland* It can't be true! It would make everyone lose the ground under his feet! It would be a disaster to England and especially to the Queen and her entire epoch!  
*Bacon* You are like a son to me. I have done what I could to give you the best possible education, you are number one in erudition in our country, and I wish to protect you at any cost. Your only chance is to stand up as the Queen's witness and reveal everything about Essex' schemes.  
*Bacon* There is not much I know.  
*Bacon* But you know something. You were with him in Ireland.  
*Rutland* So was Derby and Southampton and many others.  
*Bacon* And you are all at risk if you continue to support him.  
*Rutland* But you can't betray a friend!  
*Bacon* But if he has betrayed the nation and the Queen?

*Rutland* We will never get through this scatheless without scars leaving us branded and crippled for life.

*Bacon* Not if you detach yourself from him.

*Rutland* Yes, by the dishonour of having to desert a friend.

*Bacon* I am sorry. I have warned you. Do what you can to save yourself. (*leaves*)

*Rutland* It's unthinkable! The Queen's absolute favourite! I can't believe it! Could he really have lost his judgement? And heir to Philip Sidney and my beloved's mother! That would be the absolute disaster! (*is in complete despair*)

Act III Scene 1. Westminster, the House of Lords.

*Bacon* My honoured friend and lord Devereux, earl of Essex, you stand trial for high treason before nine judges and 25 noblemen of the highest rank. How do you answer the charge?

*Essex* That you, lord Bacon, whom I have helped more than anyone else and who owes me all your success in your career, would stand as my prosecutor is more than I have deserved.

*Bacon* That is no answer to the charge. How do you answer the accusation?

*Essex* I never wanted any harm to come to the Queen. I only wanted to relieve her of her worst counsellors.

*Bacon* And who were her worst counsellors? All her ministers or just someone or a few?

*Essex* They know themselves who they are.

*Bacon* So you will not mention any names?

*Essex* No.

*Bacon* The fact remains that her counsellors are her government, and since your aim was to relieve her of some or someone of her counsellors you rebelled against her government. Is that conclusion of your argument correct?

*Essex* I assume full responsibility for my actions.

*Bacon* Which consisted of arming 300 men to follow you to a meeting with the government. This could only be apprehended as a use of force against the government.

*Essex* I wanted to guard and protect myself by support.

*Bacon* What did you expect, when you so massively mobilised yourself for a meeting with the Queen? Did you intend to take hostage of her and the council?

*Essex* I have been under arrest at home all since my return from Ireland after having been relieved of my command.

*Bacon* You intruded on the Queen's private chambers with muddy boots while she was still dressing for the morning. Was that a proper and practical way to regain her confidence after your defeat in Ireland with your consecutive degradation?

*Essex* That's why I had reason to expect the worst.

*Bacon* Did you wish to take revenge for her having bereaved you of your wine import monopoly?

*Essex* Certainly not, although the loss of that income ruined me.

*Bacon* We fully understand that you did not wish to harm the Queen but have no understanding for your conspiracy against the government. May I ask my lord Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton, to take the witness stand. (*He appears and takes the stand.*)

*Southampton* I have nothing to regret. I have served the earl of Essex all the way as my benefactor and best friend.

*Bacon* Were you aware of his rebellious plans?

*Southampton* Not until they went too far.

*Bacon* Still you did not desert him even then.

*Southampton* No. I never desert a friend.

*Bacon* I was also his friend but refused to follow him when his plans turned against the government.

*Southampton* I never had any interest in politics.

*Bacon* No, you never had. Still you were not wise enough to refrain from following your friend down into a political abyss. May I ask the earl of Rutland to take the witness stand. (*Rutland takes the stand.*) You were also with the earl of Essex until the end.

*Rutland* I did not know about his plans.

*Bacon* Not even when he implemented them?

*Rutland* I thought only the best of him.

*Bacon* He was your idol, wasn't he, like he was the idol of all England?

*Rutland* Yes.

*Bacon* So you were as uncritical and unaware as Southampton?

*Rutland* Yes.

*Bacon* You joined Essex' Irish campaign against the Queen's will.

*Rutland* No, she allowed me to follow him but then recalled me.

*Bacon* Did you obey her command?

*Rutland* Yes, after the earl's great victory at Cahin Fortress.

*Bacon* His only victory. How was it with Southampton? Did he spite the Queen's order and follow Essex?

*Rutland* Essex made him commander of the cavalry, which angered the Queen, who cancelled the promotion.

*Bacon* Still Southampton remained in the service of Essex?

*Rutland* Yes.

*Bacon* Was his loyalty absolute until the end?

*Rutland* I can't deny it.

*Southampton* Only he who betrays a friend is a traitor!

*Rutland* I haven't betrayed you, Henry.

*Southampton* No, only all the others did.

*Bacon (to the judges)* Do we need to hear any more, my lords?

*One judge (rising)* The treason by the earl of Essex against the state and government is unquestionable, since he doesn't even deny it himself. The earls of Southampton and Rutland admit to their share in his rebellion. All three must therefore be sentenced to death by the sword together with five of his other closest men.

*Robert Cecil* There have been some petitions though, with appeals for Southampton and Rutland, which have been granted by the Queen, since their youth and political unawareness speak for their innocence. Their death sentences have been commuted to life sentences.

*Southampton* They could just as well have cut our heads off. We are lost anyway.

*Rutland* No nobleman can survive his own dishonour.

*Bacon* The sessions are concluded. Bring out the prisoners.

*Essex* No one worshipped the Queen more than I!

*Bacon* Why then did you rebel against her and call her an old hag?

*Essex* Did she hear it?

*Bacon* That's what condemned you, Robert, in her eyes.

*Essex* Alas, her favouring me became my destruction!

*Bacon* No, Robert, you let yourself be blinded and seduced by the power her favours gave you and turned presumptuous, so that not even she finally could control you, and you yourself least of all.

*(The prisoners are taken out. Rutland is devastated.)*

*Bacon (to a guard)* Keep an eye on Rutland, so that he doesn't do anything foolish.

*Guard* He is only twenty-four.

*Bacon* Exactly. We will surely get him out, and Southampton as well.

## Scene 2. Belvoir

*Elizabeth* Take it easy, Roger. You are at home now.

*Rutland* How could I ever take it easy any more? I am a broken man, and have lost my best friend. Southampton is still behind bars.

*Elizabeth* He will probably get out as well.

*Rutland* And we are ruined. My penalty is to pay thirty thousand pounds to the state.

*Elizabeth* Bacon has put in a good word for you to the new king. He will surely realize that you will never be able to pay.

*Rutland* It doesn't matter. I was never interested in money. It's the same to me if we are ruined or not. Everything is insignificant to the fact that we are broken, not only me and Southampton but all the best of the nobility, all who believed in Essex and were enthusiastic about him, all who shared the enthusiasm for our age and our realm.

*Elizabeth* There are reasons for that now when England and Scotland are united.

*Rutland* We are still lost. We have lost our ideals. What does it help that the king now shows us grace, when instead he has imprisoned Sir Walter Raleigh?

*Elizabeth* What has he done?

*Rutland* Nothing. He was Queen Elizabeth's greatest, most enduring and last favourite. He was probably too powerful, too proud and dashing and too Elizabethan to appeal to the taste of Robert Cecil and the new king.

*Elizabeth* There is always someone getting into trouble.

*Rutland* But why always the best? And why always so undeservedly? Christopher Marlowe was our first and greatest dramatist, and he was forced to drop off because of his outspokenness, which was not politically correct. Thomas Kyd was tortured to silence so that he lost his guts and died. The earl of Essex was too flamboyant and adored to be permitted to live. And now Raleigh.

*Elizabeth* We still have our love to live for.

*Rutland* Absolutely, but, my love, I can give you no children. I am impotent. I am too weak and suffer from bad health, especially after my turn in the Tower, the dishonour of which I will never get over, I can't love you enough, and I will probably die prematurely, for I have given up already.

*Elizabeth* My love will sustain you. Think of all our friends, your theatre, your colleagues in the fine arts and everything we have to live for.

*Rutland* Yes, we are too well off and too fortunate. I was born in a greenhouse, which must fashion me into a fragile plant. And then I had you on top of it, the noblest flower of the country, daughter of our national saint and with the world's most formidable aunt.

*Elizabeth* You must not let her down. She is looking forward to your next play.

*Rutland* From now on I can only write tragedies, crushing tragedies overwhelming with despair.

*Elizabeth* They are outstanding as well. The point is that poetry does not die and that the show goes on at the theatre goes on.

*Rutland* I will live for it as long as I live.

*Elizabeth* And I will live only for you.

*Rutland* I don't deserve it.

*Elizabeth* Yes, for you are a poet.

*Rutland* And incorrigible as such.

*Elizabeth* For that we are only grateful. The whole world is your stage.

*Rutland* It became so since I travelled so desperately. I got to know the world too early and too well for my own good, which was my curse, branding me with the stain of too much knowledge about it.

*Elizabeth* Don't regret that our marriage never can be consummated. We have what's better.

*Rutland* What are you thinking of? Art?

*Elizabeth* Poetry. Truth. Beauty. All what matters in life.

*Rutland* Your love will add a few more years to my life. Or else I would have died in the Tower.

*Elizabeth* You will never die.

*Rutland* Neither will you in that case.

*Elizabeth* We'll see who dies first. If it's you I will follow at once.  
*Rutland* Don't do that. You must live. You must not waste yourself on me.  
*Elizabeth* I already did.  
*Rutland* You don't know what you are doing.  
*Elizabeth* Yes, I know exactly what I am doing.  
*Rutland* Alas, we are too sensitive for this world. It must stifle us by its frustrating insufficiency and bothersome presence as just an intrusive annoying burden in our lives.  
*Elizabeth* Sooner or later we'll be rid of it.  
*Rutland* The sooner, the better.  
*Elizabeth* You still have much to write.  
*Rutland* Yes, more vanity for the actors to make nothing of.  
*Elizabeth* Your art is more than just theatre.  
*Rutland* For Marlowe the theatre became more than the world, and therefore he had to leave it.  
*Elizabeth* He lives in you.  
*Rutland* It's he who is living, not I, who am just the shadow of a fool.  
*Elizabeth* But you write beautiful poetry.  
*Rutland* I am sorry. I can't help it.  
*Elizabeth* That's the way you are. Just carry on and live forever.  
*Rutland* No thank you.  
*Elizabeth* We'll see.  
*Rutland* Thank you for existing. Or else I would never survive.  
*Elizabeth* Neither would I without you.  
*Rutland* Come, my love. I can always give you one more kiss.  
*Elizabeth* I always dreamt of dying in a kiss.  
*Rutland* That would be something for the stage.  
*Elizabeth* You always get new ideas.  
*Rutland* No, I am only making use of old ones of others.  
*Elizabeth* But your versions always surpass the originals.  
*Rutland* That's not intended.  
*Elizabeth* But that's the result.  
*Rutland* Come, my love. Let me give you a kiss for eternal life instead of death.  
*Elizabeth* In that case I beg to indemnify you in the same way.

*(They recline together in a kiss.)*

Act IV scene 1. The Tower.

*Raleigh* Very nice of you to come and visit me, old boy. Is there any reason?

*Bacon* I have greetings to you from Oxford. He is dying.

*Raleigh* Yes, he was good at drinking. Has he done anything else the last ten years?

*Bacon* Not much.

*Raleigh* I thought so. We were not always the best of friends, but if we didn't heartily hate each other, we could actually heartily love each other.

*Bacon* Yes, that was in the good old days, when the Queen made rivals of us all.

*Raleigh* And she least of all could accept that anyone worshipped anyone else. All of us who dared to marry committed deadly sins in her eyes and had our careers bluntly put an end to. Is there anyone left now, if Oxford is finished?

*Bacon* Only the two of us.

*Raleigh* No one else? No regrowth?

*Bacon* Not under the present king. He is protective but not inspiring. He only likes Shakespeare and the darkest tragedies.

*Raleigh* So at least that activity is carried on. How about Southampton and Rutland?

*Bacon* Both were dishonoured for life by the Essex debacle. Both married and fell out of grace with the Queen. You know. They had life sentences but were pardoned by king James and had their exorbitant penalties remitted. It could happen to you as well.

*Raleigh* I don't think so. The king hates me.

*Bacon* Why?

*Raleigh* Because there is no reason. I must have said something sometime, like when the Queen learned that Essex had called her an old hag. I am better than he, and he just can't forgive me for it. He will never give up seeking my destruction until I am dead.

*Bacon* I am trying to make him interested in sending you on another Eldorado expedition. Then he would both be rid of you, and you would be free. You could stay in America then, if you wanted.

*Raleigh* He would only send me away if he could be certain that I would never come back. On the other hand, there is a future in America. Here it ended with Essex, when the Queen died and we became one with Scotland. The Stuarts will only cause problems with bad ends, like they always did in Scotland.

*Bacon* James V managed all right.

*Raleigh* The exception confirming the rule.

*Bacon* Have patience, my friend. I will never give up before the last Elizabethan is free at large again.

*Raleigh* He could not breathe in the climate of the Stuarts. That freedom will be his death. But on the other hand, it is better to be free and dead than buried alive.

*Bacon* You were prosecuted without binding evidence and interned here without legal grounds.

*Raleigh* The king is too powerful when he ignores the law and takes it for granted that he can do whatever he wants. If he didn't, I would tolerate him.

*Bacon* If you didn't have that objection against him, he would tolerate you.

*Raleigh* Locked positions, in other words.

*Bacon* No deadlock is hopeless. Locked positions exist to be unlocked.

*Raleigh* And you grow constantly more powerful. How can you bear it?

*Bacon* I regard power as a means for constructiveness.

*Raleigh* Sooner or later you will become corrupt, like everyone in any position of power, and then you are done for.

*Bacon* We'll see when that day comes. Until then, it's just to carry on.

*Raleigh* Good luck. Thanks for the visit.

*Bacon* Till we meet again.

*Raleigh* By the way, how is it with my devil's disciple Marlowe?

*Bacon* He has given up. He has accepted his non-existence in a world of shadows where his only breathing-space is to stick to the anonymous tradition from Philip Sidney and continue producing plays under a false name.

*Raleigh* Shakespeare?

*Bacon* The name they all use.

*Raleigh* Only you stick to your own name.

*Bacon* I am no poet.

*Raleigh* All our misfortunes started with Marlowe. If he had been allowed to carry on, we could all have kept on our heads tall on our shoulders.

*Bacon* He was too out-spoken. He challenged all society.

*Raleigh* And by right. It could only improve with criticism and only deteriorate without.

*Bacon* It's still not wise to challenge it when you know it could reactively harm yourself.

*Raleigh* He was not afraid of taking initiatives by risking his life. That's the mark of us Elizabethans.

*Bacon* If you lose everything in the bargain, your wings will then be clipped, and you have lost the power of initiative.

*Raleigh* It's still more important to be right and do right than to win.

*Bacon* I hope I will never be obliged to prosecute you, like I had to prosecute Essex.

*Raleigh* Essex was rash and had no realistic judgement. You had no choice. I don't think you need to fear me. My wings are already clipped.

*Bacon* For the moment. They could grow again. All you need is freedom.

*Raleigh* Thanks, old boy. You are my only hope.

*Bacon* And of the nation. Without me, it would be lost to corruption, arbitrary recklessness and injustice.

*Raleigh* I hope you will make it.

*Bacon* We shall see. (*leaves*)

Scene 2. Westminster.

*James* You must accept the case, Lord Protector.  
*Bacon* You must understand my reluctance.  
*James* You have no choice. If you don't accept it, I must regard you as partial to the defendant.  
*Bacon* Consider then that he is an old man who was unlucky by a disaster that was not his fault in which he lost his son.  
*James* The man is an affront to my whole government. He had his chance and failed. He could even have stayed over there and found himself a new home in his own colony of Virginia, and yet he was foolish enough to return home.  
*Bacon* Wasn't that if anything loyalty to the crown?  
*James* Rather the contrary. He violated my orders and knew that he could only expect a trial if he returned.  
*Bacon* There are many question marks about his expedition.  
*James* The man went against me and was a traitor from the start. All that was missing was the final evidence. That's why he was put in prison for the time being. The choice is yours, Sir Francis. Either you prosecute him for me and may keep your position as second only to me in power, or you will be sorted out of the government.  
*Bacon* You actually coerce me.  
*James* Yes. We must get rid of him once and for all. He is inconvenient.  
*Bacon* Can we afford to lose more Elizabethans? After Rutland's death and his widow Elizabeth's suicide to follow him, Philip Sidney's only child, Sir Walter Raleigh is almost the only one left from the great age.  
*James* Don't mention her suicide. That's a state secret. It even appears that it was Sir Walter who provided the poison. No one must ever know that the daughter of Philip Sidney, our national hero, took her own life. No social scandal could be worse than if it became publicly known. – And is my age then a lesser age?  
*Bacon* You give me no choice.  
*James* No, I don't.  
*Bacon* Is it really worth while executing such an old man?  
*James* That's the only thing missing from his career of failures, vanity and intolerable haughtiness.  
*Bacon* He gave you America, like Elizabeth gave you England.  
*James* That was my right by birth. We would have had America anyway. Don't defend him, Sir Francis. Accuse him.  
*Bacon* Then I must have something to accuse him of.  
*James* That's no problem. We have been building up his case for the prosecution during all his fifteen years in the Tower.

Act V scene 1. Wilton House.

*Mary Sidney* Tell me all about the end of Sir Walter Raleigh.

*Ben Jonson* He was the last Elizabethan, and the king would not give in until he at last succeeded in having him executed, for which he made such an indefatigable effort ever since he took power as if it was the main purpose of his government.

*Mary* There were rumours about Sir Walter's administration of poisons.

*Jonson* False rumours all of them. He was very knowledgeable in herbal medicines, he introduced both whisky from Ireland and tobacco from America, but he never caused anyone's death by poison. He never had any motive. Prince Henry adored him and tried to plead with his father to set him free, and when he suddenly fell ill, Sir Walter wished to assist him with his medicinal expertise, but his medicines were stopped, and it is highly probable that prince Henry died for that reason, to the inconceivably fatal loss of England. Instead there were rumours that Sir Walter had poisoned him. But Sir Walter was a man of the people, and that's why king James always nourished a mortal almost superstitious fear of him that also spilt fuel on his hatred.

*Mary* Why did Sir Francis Bacon accept to prosecute him?

*Jonson* I guess he had no choice. The king coerced him by extortion. He would never have accepted it voluntarily. I assume that the king threatened him with dismissal if he would not accept the case. Sir Francis is too powerful to afford losing anything.

*Mary* In time he will probably also be annihilated like all the others who dared to be something. I wonder how he feels now when he has seen both Essex and Raleigh beheaded as a result of his prosecutions. Do you think Sir Walter had any part in the death of my niece?

*Jonson* She wanted it herself, and nothing could have stopped her. If Sir Walter was of any assistance, it was from mercy to make her death as painless and agreeable as possible. It's called euthanasia.

*Mary* It's a well kept secret. No one knows anything about it, except the closest ones in our own circle of poets.

*Jonson* Is it all over now with Shakespeare for good?

*Mary* Of course. He was thanked and roundly paid for his silence after Rutland's death and disappeared to Stratford where he died four years later in all obscurity but with his great fortune as proof that money was the only success he was interested in and lived for. It only remains for us to finish our work. We are most grateful for your help. I will make sure that *The First Folio* will be a permanent success both literarily and economically. Only half of the plays were published during his lifetime and that in rather poor editions. My poem to the couple will end the enterprise.

*Jonson* Who actually wrote the plays? Was it Roger or Elizabeth or both? Was it you or Marlowe or Oxford or Derby?

*Mary* It doesn't really matter. My brother established the procedure. He published nothing himself except anonymously. Sir Walter Raleigh followed his example implicitly. The plays and poems had already been published under the name of Shakespeare, and he was paid well for it. We might as well keep the name, which anyway doesn't mean anything, since the man was just a puppet.

*Jonson* Even the sonnets?

*Mary* They are too personal for their originator's name ever to be revealed.

*Jonson* Of course we will all consistently respect and follow your discretion.

*Mary* Thank you, Ben Jonson. Your help is invaluable.

*Virhamn 13-16.6.2014,  
translated February 1st 2019.*

