



ÆTATIS SVÆ 34

AN° 1588

AMOR ET VIRTUTE

The Ghost Writer

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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 Wriothsesley 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 Shakspere*) Yes, what is it, master Shakspere?

Shakspere The Queen has requested a play.

Bacon Has the Queen requested a play? That is unusual. Is she not satisfied with what she gets?

Shakspere 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 Shakspeare 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 Shakspeare?

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.

Essex There was never any stability in Ireland.

Burleigh Let me finish! You wasted your pound and can't have it back. England is through with you.

Essex You bereave me of my command?

Burleigh Yes, Essex. You give us no alternative.

Essex You recall me before I have had time to finish the war and imagine that you in that manner will have a happy end to the war. What logic is that?

Burleigh Lord Essex, you are appearing before the Queen.

Essex Don't you think I am aware of it, you blooming bummers? We are all appearing before the Queen and are ashamed of our Irish failure. Sir Walter Raleigh, did you succeed any better? Go over yourself to that rainy swamp in the west and

see if you can dry it out of marsh muskrats and bog bugs! They will just crawl up your sleeves and start swarming in your beds when you sleep! They will hide behind you and stick their knives into your backs all the time while you will not even see them! I accepted the Irish command because I wanted to do something about it. Maybe it was wrong, but I haven't failed any more than anyone before me.

Elizabeth Lord Essex, go home and wait until we call for you.

Essex Have I done anything wrong? Have I broken my faith? Have I compromised anyone? Let me know if I have, so that I may know where I stand, and don't stick knives in my back without showing who you are.

Elizabeth Go home, Essex. (*Essex kneels, bows and leaves.*)

Lord 1 He hasn't settled with the Queen yet. He still has some ammunition left.

Lord 2 If there will be a break between them, who will then profit by it?

Lord 1 The struggle has only started. It will be fierce and break them both.

(*As soon as Essex is out of sight, the Queen falters.*)

Robert Cecil Look to the Queen there!

Southampton Are you not well, your majesty?

Elizabeth (tired) I am just so tired out by all these quarrels and disputes! Why can't you gentlemen ever keep your gentle peace? I can't stand any more arguments!

Robert Cecil Help the Queen out if here. (*The Queen is walked out with some support.*)

Southampton (to Bacon) everybody knows that you are behind the disgrace of Essex.

Bacon Am I? I didn't know.

Southampton You can't fool us, Sir Francis. You may be the most influential man in the country, but you can't fool us. You could possibly fool yourself. But Essex would never have fallen if you hadn't tripped him.

Bacon He has not fallen yet, and the crisis of his career is entirely of his own making.

Southampton We both know better than that, Sir Francis, and we both know that you pretend. (*leaves*)

Bacon Is this court play transforming into a lower grade of insidiousness? I did report and prosecute Essex, but that was my duty to the crown, and I cannot regret it.

Oxford Bacon, I heard you. You are incorrigible, but you will never be king after Gloriana.

Bacon I never even thought of any such thing. You are absurd.

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. Wriothsley 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?

Willingham 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 encumbrance, 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 Shakspere, 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, Wriothoesley. 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 Wriothesley 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.

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