

MARLOWE, PART ONE

A Play in Two Parts
(a work in progress)

By Simon Bowler Khan
9-8-23

<u>Cast:</u>	<u>Doubling:</u>
Christopher (Kit) Marlowe (20s) - poet, lover, spy	(1)
Archbishop Whitgift (40s) - head of the Church of England	(2)
Anne Whitgift (later Lady Anne Havenhurst) (20s) - Whitgift's daughter	(3)
Thomas Walsingham (20s) - nephew of Sir Francis Walsingham	(4)
Sir Francis Walsingham (50s) - Elizabeth's Spy Master	(5)
John Ballard (20s) - Priest and Catholic spy (and plays <i>Ghost</i>)	(4)
Robert Poley (30s)- Sir Francis' henchman	(6)
Philip Henslowe (40s) - owner of The Rose Theater	(6)
Judith Henslowe (20s) - husband of Philip	(7)
Lord Havenhurst (60s) - head of the Privy Council	(6)
Maunder (30s) - Whitgift's Sergeant	(4)
Jessica (20s) - Sir Francis' maid	(3)
A Collector (20s - 50s)	(4)
Elizabeth, Queen of England (40s)	(7)
Nun (20s),	(7)
<i>(various: priest, crowd, stage hand)</i>	
15 characters (10 male, 5 female). With doubling 7 actors (5 male, 2 female, note: male characters can be played by female actors)	

Running Time: 100 minutes - This play runs faster than plays of similar length.

Time and place: England and France - late 1500s

Sets:

Logline: The rise of the poet, lover, and spy, Christopher Marlowe.

Synopsis: When Bishop Whitgift expels aspiring poet Kit Marlowe from Cambridge for his outspoken views, Marlowe's aristocrat friend, Thomas, offers him work for Sir Francis, the Spy Master. Marlowe is sent to a seminary in Rheims, where he befriends Ballard, a priest, and discovers him to be a traitor. Marlowe betrays the priest to Sir Francis and is rewarded with an introduction to the London stage. Marlowe then struggles to get his plays accepted as Whitgift threatens to censor theater as dangerous free-thinking.

Writer Bio: After graduating in Film and TV from the University of Westminster, London, Simon produced at BBC World Service Television, then produced documentaries for Channel 4 and The World Bank. He produced the mockumentary feature film 'Man of the Year' and worked as an entertainment radio journalist in Los Angeles. He returned to television and produced multiple shows for Channel 4, the BBC, ABC, PBS, Discovery, Oxygen, Bravo, and Friends of the Earth. He has written several award-winning plays.

Reviews

"Masterfully crafted... impeccably written dialogue... compelling characters... keeps the audience engaged from the first to the very last page. It's the type of script that makes an audience excited to be in a theatre and it is strongly suggested to adapt this play into a screenplay." WeScreenplay

"Funny, hip, dramatic... sexy... and the main character is a tour de force for any gifted young actor." Manhattan Rep Theater

"Unpredictable and full of twists and turns. Kit is witty, romantic, intelligent, conflicted and relatable, revealed through rich dialogue and action. A strong voice for the time, place and the people - it all rings with authenticity. Impactful, inspiring... and highly entertaining." ScreenCraft

"Every character is so well developed actors will be chomping at the bit to portray them." New Play Exchange

"Marlowe is a really striking character: driven, dangerously charming, and frequently in over his head. The political maneuvers around him make for an extra morally dubious nature to his actions, and it's compelling to see Marlowe's single-minded desire to produce his play pitted against a political apparatus." Screencraft

Awards

Writemovies Play Writing Winner, Innovasian Writing Initiative Grand Prize, The Red List #1 Historical Stage Play, Dramatists Guild End of Play Readings, New Works of Merit Honorable Mention, American Community Theater New Play Finalist, Tru Voices Semifinalist, Screencraft Play Semifinalist, NexTV Script Semifinalist, Screenwriters and Co Semifinalist, American Theatre Group Playlab Semifinalist, Muse of Fire Atlanta Shakespeare Festival Shortlisted, London Playwrights Award - Shortlist

Awards from adapted Screenplay

Movie Deal Best Screenplay - NBC Writers Program Finalist - Cinequest Finalist - Writer's Network Honorable Mention - Academy Nichols Semifinalist - Universal/Chesterfield Semifinalist

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

At rise an empty stage. A sign reads, "Tavern", below the sign a pamphlet pasted to a door.

Enter a 'Collector' in ragged clothes and so weather beaten it's hard to tell his age. He wears a loose garland of flowers around his neck.

He SINGS a ditty and pushes a loaded cart covered by a blood-stained sheet.

COLLECTOR

*You gods that guide the ghosts
And souls, of them that fled,
Send sobs, send sighs, send grievous groans,
And strike poor Panthea dead.
Abradad, poor Abradad!
My spirit with thine shall lie.
Come death, alas, O death most sweet,
For now I crave to die.*

He stops, RINGS a bell, and calls out...

COLLECTOR

Hear ye, hear ye! The city council will pay a shilling to haul your dead away. Don't let them rot. Sixpence for a child.

He stretches and turns to us, the audience.

COLLECTOR

Oh, my poor aching back. *(turns to us, the audience)* Tis and endless cull I have to haul to their early graves; the good, the bad, and those between, which is us all, is it not? Oh, these are strange days, with the nation divided, Catholic and Anglican at each other's throats, and the plague, a sprawling miasma of sickness and decay. If that weren't hell enough, the Spanish, not a hundred miles away, are about to invade and put Mary, so-called Queen of the Scots, on Bess' throne.

Enter LILL (20s), a prostitute in a gaudy, revealing corset, struts by.

LILL

‘ello dear, want some of this?

She lifts her skirt revealing her leg.

COLLECTOR

Don’t tempt me.

LILL

That’s my business, sirrah, to tempt you and to... (*licks her lips*) ... relieve your ‘tension’.

COLLECTOR

I ain’t got the money or the time, and even if I did, you shouldn’t be out on the street.

LILL

A girl’s gotta make a living.

COLLECTOR

Don’t we all, but it’s spreading like wild fire.

LILL

The sickness?

COLLECTOR

And a vicious sickness it is too.

LILL

Some say it’s the end of times.

COLLECTOR

Yet here we are, surviving whatever God throws at us.

LILL

Well, if it ain’t got me now, then never, eh? (*laughs*)

COLLECTOR

You take care, dear, tis a perilous world where anyone you meet might make you sick.

LILL

Good fortune be with you, sir.

She walks on. He rings his bell.

COLLECTOR

(calls out) A shilling to haul your dead away. Sixpence for a child. Don't let them rot.

KIT (OFF STAGE)

Come on, Thomas, let's drink.

Enter Kit Marlowe (20s), long black hair, blazing eyes, wearing a student's gown, and Thomas Walsingham (20s), well dressed.

KIT

Will you make me beg to be let into your school?

THOMAS

Tis not only my decision.

KIT

Am I not intelligent enough?

THOMAS

Of course you are.

KIT

Am I not wealthy enough?

THOMAS

We care not for wealth, but truth.

KIT

Then I'm your man.

THOMAS

Kit, it's a matter of discretion. We cannot afford any undue attention.

KIT

So I'm not to be admitted?

THOMAS

I shall petition for you, but I cannot guess the others' opinion.

KIT

And I cannot get my play produced without patronage.

THOMAS

Be patient, Kit.

KIT

Fine, then let's drink to it. "Vita est appetitus". (*BANGS on the tavern door*) Open up, it's time to drink.

The Collector, a few yards away, looks over.

COLLECTOR

They're closed, sir.

KIT

Why, tis too early to be shut.

COLLECTOR

Rumor says it was a meeting place (*whispers*) for 'Free-thinkers'.

Marlowe rips the pamphlet off the door and reads.

KIT

"By order of the Crown, be it known that certain personages throughout the realm insult the truth of the Anglican faith." (*to Thomas*) There's a paradox, "true faith". (*continues reading*) "These excesses will be severely punished at the discretion of the Star Chamber."

THOMAS

Elizabeth expunges Catholic and Puritan alike.

KIT

Because they're both zealots.

THOMAS

And yet people flock to them as if it were their salvation.

KIT

If only instead they sought salvation from ignorance, we might live in a more perfect world, but alas, the enemy's our own stupidity.

THOMAS

Which we aim to correct with my school.

KIT

And I with my plays.

THOMAS

You finished Tamburlaine?

KIT

Part One.

THOMAS

There'll be a Part Two?

KIT

Yes and I have ideas for a dozen plays, but Tamburlaine will be the making of me. *(to the Collector)* Sirrah, where else might one find beer?

COLLECTOR

The King's Head's still open.

KIT

Here, paper for a fire, keep yourself warm.

Marlowe gives the pamphlet. The Collector drops it.
Enter Maunder, the sergeant.

MAUNDER

Tis church property you defile.

COLLECTOR

Tis not mine, sir.

MAUNDER

(pokes him with his sword) Pick it up.

KIT

He's innocent.

MAUNDER

And who are you?

KIT

I'm the one who took it down.

MAUNDER

Then you pick it up.

KIT

I will not, and I'll wager you won't poke me, for I'll bite you back.

Marlowe puts his hand on his sword. Thomas picks up the pamphlet.

THOMAS

Gentlemen, please. Your pamphlet, sergeant.

MAUNDER

Thank you, Mister Walsingham. I can smell the bad apples, he's Godless and rotten to the core.

THOMAS

Yes, sergeant, thank you for the advice.

Maunder exits.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Does he know you're an atheist?

KIT

No, of course not, a turn of phrase, that's all.

THOMAS

You're sure?

KIT

I'm sure.

THOMAS

These taverns bore me. Come, we'll drink at my place.

KIT

I'd love nothing more, but I'm afraid I've been summoned back to Cambridge.

THOMAS

(stern) For what?

KIT

I know not, but a summons from the dean.

THOMAS

If it's contrition they want, give it to them.

KIT

For what transgression?

THOMAS

Just don't make waves.

KIT

Come, we'll discuss further over a beer. *(to the Collector)* Goodbye, sirrah, be well.

COLLECTOR

Thank you, sir, and good fortune to you.

Marlowe and Thomas exit. The Collector turns to us.

COLLECTOR

Our story concerns an aspiring poet who'd climb from a humble origin as a shoemaker's son and reach to the firmament to grasp fame and fortune. But The Book of Jeremiah says, "The way of Man is not in himself nor is a man to determine his own steps." ? Seneca says, "fate leads the willing and drags the unwilling". I say life's a game, your friends your ladders and your enemies your snakes. That was him, Kit Marlowe, yearning to meet his future as young men do, oblivious of the trials and pitfalls he must endure. So I ask that join us in the prefect's office of Cambridge University, where young Kit is about to enter a fateful meeting..

He exits and the lights rise on...

SCENE TWO

The Bishop's office. A desk, a chair, a case of leather bound books, and a crucifix. BISHOP WHITGIFT (50s), a hawk of a man with a grave countenance, a piercing stare, a sanguine complexion, and a beard narrow like his face. He is dressed in robes, at the desk, writing.

WHITGIFT

Your Majesty, as you are well aware, there are in England Catholics who would tear down our Church and burn us at the stake. Therefore, I urge you to pass the Act as soon as possible.

Maunder enters.

MAUNDER

Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

What is it, sergeant?

MAUNDER

(hands over a letter) The report on Thomas Walsingham's school.

WHITGIFT

In summary?

MAUNDER

They talk of antique pagan philosophies, Your Grace. Plato, Pythagoras, and such, and my informants say they broach heretical notions, such as Bruno.

WHITGIFT

You have proof?

MAUNDER

All hearsay, Your Grace, but we're working on it.

WHITGIFT

These free-thinkers push the boundary of Christian liberty too far, but the Act of Supremacy will make Elizabeth the head of the Church, and so to be against us will be treason. Who else has joined?

MAUNDER

Sir Walter Raleigh.

WHITGIFT

A pirate who fornicates with natives in the New World.

MAUNDER

He did bring us the potato.

WHITGIFT

And Sir Francis?

MAUNDER

We're still investigating.

Marlowe BURSTS in.

KIT

Hello.

He sees the bishop in his robe and stops short.

WHITGIFT

Do you not believe in knocking?

KIT

I don't believe in anything..

Marlowe notices Maunder.

KIT (CONT'D)

... but God.

WHITGIFT

And the church? Are you faithful to her?

KIT

As to my mother.

MAUNDER

It's you again.

WHITGIFT

You know him?

MAUNDER

We had a tussle. Careful of him, Your Grace.

KIT

I was told to appear before the dean.

WHITGIFT

The dean's away on business, it's I who summoned you.

Whitgift waves to Maunder to exit.

MAUNDER

(to Marlowe) I've got my eye on you.

Maunder exits. Whitgift moves his hand out to Marlowe and on his bony finger is a large gold ring. Marlowe recognizes it and bows.

KIT

Bishop Whitgift. I apologize for being late.

The bishop reads a report.

WHITGIFT

Yes, well, you were found fraternizing with prostitutes in the taverns off campus.

KIT

(laughs awkwardly) We all have needs, eh? Tis only natural. I'm sure you do too, Your Grace.

The bishop continues scanning the report.

WHITGIFT

And you were caught dueling with a nobleman.

KIT

He was offensive to a young maiden. I had to protect her honor.

WHITGIFT

Hardly the concern of a junior priest. (*scans the report*) And you were absent six months this past year.

KIT

I was... writing.

WHITGIFT

Yes, your translation of Ovid. (*reads from a pamphlet*)
What arms and shoulders did I touch and see,
How apt her breasts were to be pressed by me?
How smooth a belly under her waist saw I?
How large a leg, and what a lusty thigh? (puts the pamphlet down)
 This is not literature, it is filth!

Marlowe straightens, visibly vexed.

KIT

Filth? All I did was translate the finest Roman poetry better than any before me.

WHITGIFT

That is debatable.

KIT

No, Your Grace, all of Cambridge agrees.

WHITGIFT

You question my judgment?

KIT

No, Your Grace, of course not, it's just that...

WHITGIFT

What?

KIT

What if we were to translate not just prayers, but the whole Bible into English?

WHITGIFT

And why would we do that?

KIT

So people could construe the truth for themselves.

WHITGIFT

(laughs) Your enthusiasm is commendable, but it's not the literal meaning that matters, it's the symbolic.

KIT

Yet the Bible was translated from Aramaic to Greek and then to Latin, the language and symbols much changed through each.

WHITGIFT

The ordinary person cannot comprehend the subtlety of scripture, which is why they turn to us.

KIT

"Regnum Dei intra est."

WHITGIFT

"The Kingdom of God is within". That may be, but it's our obligation, nay, our privilege, to be their shepherds. Anyway, we're not here to discuss theology. You're to become a priest of the English Church, but you neglect your duties, you rarely attend prayers, and direct your attention to this... *(waves the pamphlet)* ... degeneracy.

KIT

Your Grace, I passed the exams with ease, does that not suffice?

WHITGIFT

The priesthood is not about passing tests, it's a commitment to devotion.

KIT

But I cannot be a gentlemen without a degree!

WHITGIFT

You should've considered that before your sins.

KIT

Surely, you were young once.

WHITGIFT

And you've an outstanding buttery bill, but I'm not an unfair man, I'll allow you to scrub the rectory floors to pay your debt.

KIT

Like a peasant?

WHITGIFT

And take this smut with you.

He throws the pamphlet. Marlowe picks it up, turns to the door, and under his breath...

KIT

Fuck your church!

WHITGIFT

What was that?

KIT

Nothing, Your Grace.

Enter ANNE WHITGIFT (20s), pretty and fiery.

ANNE

Hello, father, you wanted to see me?

Marlowe's eyes flash, he bows low.

KIT

My lady.

ANNE

Haven't we met?

KIT

If so, I wouldn't have forgotten you.

ANNE

At the Dean's Readings, that's it, I remember.

Whitgift snaps...

WHITGIFT

Don't talk to him.

KIT

(to Anne) You've heard my poems?

ANNE

I've read them all.

WHITGIFT

(to Marlowe) Leave.

KIT

Yes, sire.

He bows again and whispers...

KIT (CONT'D)

Goodbye, sweet maiden.

ANNE

(whispers) Goodbye, sweet writer.

Their eyes connect, lost in each other for a moment.

WHITGIFT

Get out!

Marlowe exits.

WHITGIFT (CONT'D)

I've good news, my dear. A letter arrived from...

ANNE

(interrupts) His Amores is the most beautiful yet. It speaks in plain, bold English.

WHITGIFT

Finely wrought, I'll admit, but it is lurid.

ANNE

Why so? Is art not our highest aim?

WHITGIFT

Maybe for a woman of lower rank, but for a lady it is unseemly.

ANNE

Jane Anger and Isabella Whitney are writers and most respected for it.

WHITGIFT

One is a revolutionary and the other an impoverished spinster of bad repute. Is that what you want for our family name?

ANNE

You mean for your ambitions?

WHITGIFT

It's wonderful news, my dear, from Lord Havenhurst.

ANNE

Don't tell me, I'm going on one of Raleigh's expeditions to become a savage in the Americas.

WHITGIFT

Your humor's most strange, like your mother's.

ANNE

(crosses herself) Rest her soul.

WHITGIFT

Lord Havenhurst has agreed to take your hand.

ANNE

He's as wrinkled as a used bed sheet and older than Abraham.

WHITGIFT

He's not a day over sixty.

ANNE

He's poxed and palsied like a leper.

WHITGIFT

He will provide for your every comfort.

ANNE

I need little.

WHITGIFT

And he sits on the Privy Council, you'll not find a better husband.

ANNE

Father, I have greater dreams than a 'profitable' marriage.

WHITGIFT

He's requested that we visit for a formal introduction. I've arranged it for next week.

ANNE

(bitter) May I leave?

WHITGIFT

I'm trying to protect you, my dear. One day you'll understand.

ANNE

(sarcastic) Thank you, father.

She exits and SLAMS the door. A breeze blows the candle.

WHITGIFT

What ill wind is this?

He looks into the darkness. The flickering candle casts eerie shadows across the walls.

WHITGIFT (CONT'D)

Who's there? Show yourself. *(no reply)* If a devil, I banish thee.

He makes the sign of the cross, snuffs the candle, and quickly exits.

SCENE THREE

Sir Francis' Office. A grand desk, a chair, books, and a map of Britain on the wall, in a room of shadows..

Sir Francis, a dark man with deep-set eyes, an oily smooth voice, a deliberate manner. His beard neatly trimmed. He is at his magnificent desk.

He looks up from maps and letters splayed across the desk to Thomas, who stands opposite.

SIR FRANCIS

We've intercepted letters to Mary?

THOMAS

But she's under house arrest?

SIR FRANCIS

It appears to be an Englishman who carries her letters.

THOMAS

Of what nature are these letters?

SIR FRANCIS

They are all encrypted. Bacon is trying to decipher them. We've attempted to discover the carrier and thereby prove Mary's guilt to overthrow Her Majesty.

THOMAS

But?

SIR FRANCIS

My men were caught and tortured.

THOMAS

God rest their souls.

SIR FRANCIS

We need someone new. Someone they won't recognize.

THOMAS

A student, perhaps?

SIR FRANCIS

You have someone in mind?

THOMAS

Perhaps, but he's not easily bought.

SIR FRANCIS

I'll make an offer he won't refuse. And if he's successful, your inheritance will be certain. Her Majesty guarantees it.

THOMAS

And if he fails?

SIR FRANCIS

Your brother inherits all. Send him quickly, Thomas, we must find the letter carrier.

SCENE FOUR

Three columns center stage and we are in a Corpus Christi College corridor. Marlowe on his knees with a bucket and brush scrubbing the floor.

KIT

*(recites) We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine,
Threatening the world with high astounding terms,...*

Anne walks by, notices Kit, across the hall, stops, and regards him.

KIT (CONT'D)

(to himself) And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

He plunges the brush as if it were a sword.

ANNE

You thrust like you write.

He stops short, turns.

KIT

My Lady. (*bows*) And how is that?

ANNE

With passion.

KIT

(*smiles*) You find me at a disadvantage.

ANNE

There's no disgrace in standing for one's art, or in your case kneeling.

He stands up, hiding the bucket with his body.

KIT

My friends call me Kit.

ANNE

And I am Anne.

KIT

I remember you now.

ANNE

You said you wouldn't have forgotten me.

KIT

I didn't, it just took a moment.

ANNE

Are you an honest knave?

KIT

You think I lie?

ANNE

All men lie to lay with women.

He pulls the crumpled pamphlet from his tunic.

KIT

My lady, please accept this humble offering.

He gives her the pamphlet. She reads the front piece.

ANNE

“Poems of Love and Erotic Elegies.” Is it a gift or an invitation?

KIT

Both.

ANNE

We’ve only just been acquainted.

KIT

Then meet me tonight at the cloisters, or... decorum be damned, kiss me now.

She looks around.

ANNE

Here?

He leans in to her. She quavers. They are about to kiss...

THOMAS (O.S.)

Where’s Master Marlowe?

She pulls away.

ANNE

Someone comes. Goodbye, Kit. Til we meet again.

She exits. He watches after her, smitten.

KIT

(to himself) Thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.

Thomas enters.

THOMAS

There you are.

KIT

Oh, Thomas, how is it that a bastard can beget an angel?

THOMAS

Who is she?

KIT

Anne Whitgift.

THOMAS

The Bishop's daughter?

KIT

But they do say "roses rise from dung".

THOMAS

You stoke trouble with such an exploit.

KIT

Am I so low born never to taste her sweet love?

THOMAS

She's groomed to be a Lady-in-Waiting for Her Majesty. She's off limits.

KIT

You're jealous.

THOMAS

(laughs) Of a girl barely grown? Please.

KIT

Well, one day, my name shall rise and I shall meet her again, you'll see, but till then I'm chained to stones to pay my debt, like Sisyphus.

THOMAS

What have you done this time?

KIT

My poems offend.

THOMAS

I said don't be explicit.

KIT

You said keep writing and "you'll blaze like a shooting star." And now I'm expelled.

THOMAS

Expelled! Christ, Kit.

KIT

But I regret nothing, the priesthood is a prison. God, heaven, divinity, all lies.

THOMAS

And how will you survive?

KIT

I'll find a way. Meanwhile, perhaps you could lend me another twenty?

THOMAS

What of the twenty I gave you?

KIT

(sheepish) Spent. *(laughs)* You should've been there. Lill and her sister Beth, you remember what fun we had with them? And then a new girl, Marianne from Holland. Tits the size of melons. T'was heaven on earth encompassed in a bed.

THOMAS

Kit, you must be practical.

KIT

I won't grovel home with my tail between my legs to become a shoemaker bound to a bench like my father.

THOMAS

You do have a flair for the dramatic.

KIT

Well, unlike you, I have no inheritance to guarantee my future. I must flail with the flock.

THOMAS

Until my elder brother dies, my debts mount as yours do, but if you'll yield a little, there may be a way out.

KIT

Tell me how.

THOMAS

It's a few weeks work for my uncle.

KIT

(worried) Sir Francis?

THOMAS

He needs a man of specific qualities, and he can bestow high reward.

KIT

How high?

THOMAS

A production of Tamburlaine.

KIT

A full production. In London.

THOMAS

Why not.

KIT

Imagine it, Tamburlaine, by Kit Marlowe, on the London stage.

THOMAS

Your dream come true.

KIT

So is this your work, a recruiter for your uncle?

THOMAS

I make certain arrangements.

KIT

And am I a 'certain arrangement'?

THOMAS

If you don't want it, then continue scrubbing the damn floor.

KIT

Thomas, you heat too quickly.

THOMAS

Because you rub me to it.

KIT

You've not been honest with me, my friend. I believed you a man of leisure, but now I learn you're inveigled in intrigues.

THOMAS

All you talk of is your play and how it's your lifeblood, and here I give you an opportunity and you disdain my benefaction.

He walks away.

KIT

What can I, a poet, offer Her Majesty's Spy Master?

Thomas turns back.

THOMAS

You can act, you can fight, and you're broke.

KIT

Fine.

THOMAS

So you'll do it?

KIT

Though I know not what.

THOMAS

Meet at his office in the morrow and he'll explain.

Thomas removes a jewel from his finger.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Take this ring to seal our love. It was given me by my father and to him by his.

Marlowe slips the ring on his finger.

KIT

I wear it with pride.

Marlowe KISSES him, a passionate mouth to mouth kiss that becomes a writhing embrace.

Finally, they part.

KIT (CONT'D)

The night's young, I have wine from France, come to my room.

THOMAS

And what of your dues to the Bishop?

KIT

Let the pious prick clean his own floors.

He KICKS the bucket over and the filthy water spreads across the stone floor.

KIT (CONT'D)

"Audentis Fortuna iuvat", as Turnus says, "Fortune favors the bold."

They exit.

SCENE FIVE

Westminster Palace. A shadowy meeting room lined with portraits of the kings and queens of England, Henry VIII the most prominent. QUEEN ELIZABETH (50s), balding, her white-lead make-up barely covering her smallpox marked skin, but her eyes are sharp and penetrating. Whitgift and Anne enter.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Bishop Whitgift.

WHITGIFT

Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

Is this the daughter you've spoken of?

WHITGIFT

It is, ma'am.

Elizabeth scrutinizes Anne, who tries not to cower before that gaze which goes on an uncomfortably long time.

ELIZABETH

What's your name?

WHITGIFT

Anne.

ELIZABETH

I asked her.

WHITGIFT

Yes, Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

(to Anne) You wish to join my staff?

ANNE

It would please my father.

ELIZABETH

But would it please you?

ANNE

I'll do what's asked of me, no more and no less.

ELIZABETH

Oh?

ANNE

To do less would be remiss, to do more presumptuous.

Elizabeth regards her.

WHITGIFT

I apologize for my daughter's conceit. She meant no offense.

ELIZABETH

No, Bishop, we like that. You've raised a smart young woman.

ANNE

Thank you, ma'am.

WHITGIFT

It's not been easy as a widower.

ELIZABETH

Your wife is much missed.

WHITGIFT

Thank you, ma'am.

ELIZABETH

(to Anne) You remind me of her. I shall consider your appointment.

Anne curtsies.

ANNE

Your Majesty.

WHITGIFT

(to Elizabeth) May I ask who you're considering to replace Archbishop Grindal?

ELIZABETH

Patience, bishop.

WHITGIFT

But I was made to understand that I would be nominated.

ELIZABETH

You appear too eager.

WHITGIFT

Of course. I'm sorry, ma'am.

Sir Francis enters.

SIR FRANCIS

Your Majesty. (*dour*) Bishop.

WHITGIFT

(*begrudging*) Sir Francis.

ELIZABETH

Now, now, gentlemen. We're all on the same side. Anne, I look forward to you being on my staff.

ANNE

Thank you, ma'am.

ELIZABETH

(*to Whitgift*) You may leave.

Whitgift and Anne exit. Elizabeth stands, but she's weak.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Francis, take my arm, steady me. (*Sir Francis holds her arm*) You're adverse to him?

SIR FRANCIS

I don't like religious men with political ambitions.

They slowly walk towards an ante-chamber

ELIZABETH

It's a toxic mix, but inevitable. And you disapprove of my marriage to Francois?

SIR FRANCIS

I know the duke has sought your hand for years, and he may be heir to the French throne, but he's Catholic. The people would not be pleased.

ELIZABETH

It's my choice, not theirs.

SIR FRANCIS

I know, ma'am, but there'll be riots if you make such a match.

ELIZABETH

And what of my happiness? Am I never to have a husband?

SIR FRANCIS

I believe that's your burden, ma'am, and furthermore I must ask you again to sign the papers for Mary's execution.

ELIZABETH

I've told you, I will not execute a member of my family on mere rumor.

SIR FRANCIS

Your Majesty must accept that your cousin plots against you.

ELIZABETH

Bring me evidence, not gossip.

SIR FRANCIS

We're working on it, ma'am, but the Spanish...

ELIZABETH

Had their beard singed by Sir Francis in the Caribbean. When will they learn we are not to be bullied?

SIR FRANCIS

They are building an armada as we speak.

ELIZABETH

How advanced are they?

SIR FRANCIS

We believe they have a hundred frigates almost ready for war.

ELIZABETH

Is God against us, Francis?

SIR FRANCIS

I try not to guess His intentions, but I know we must terminate your cousin or there'll be insurrection upon invasion.

ELIZABETH

Then you'd better get the evidence quickly.

She lifts her skirt and enters the ante-chamber.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Unless you want to watch me excrete, you may leave.

SIR FRANCIS

Yes, ma'am.

Sir Francis shuffles away embarrassed.

SCENE SIX

A door to Sir Francis' house. Marlowe approaches the front door and swings the brass lion-head door knocker and straightens his hair.

JESSICA (20s), a maid, opens the door ajar. She looks him up and down. Likes what she sees.

KIT

I've come to meet Sir Francis.

JESSICA

Do you have an appointment?

KIT

It was arranged by Thomas Walsingham.

JESSICA

And you are?

KIT

Marlowe.

That name does it.

JESSICA

This way, sir, he's been expecting you.

She opens the door.

Across the stage, Sir Francis at his desk in the room of shadows. Thomas paces, anxious.

SIR FRANCIS

There have been outbreaks in France, Spain, and the Netherlands.

THOMAS

How many dead?

SIR FRANCIS

My sources say two hundred felled in a month in Paris.

THOMAS

But the Plague's been gone twenty years.

SIR FRANCIS

There have been two dozen taken in London. We're on the brink of another wave.

THOMAS

Which we bring upon ourselves with London more crowded than ever.

SIR FRANCIS

Aye, tis a brewing pot for the miasma.

THOMAS

What does Her Majesty intend?

SIR FRANCIS

She believes it'll dissolve away by God's grace.

THOMAS

(laughs) By faith alone?

SIR FRANCIS

Tis no laughing matter.

THOMAS

But it's a disease not a curse.

SIR FRANCIS

Bishop Whitgift whispers his superstitions.

Across the stage, Jessica knocks on the door.

JESSICA

(calls out) Sir, he's here.

Sir Francis presses a wax seal on to an envelope and calls out...

SIR FRANCIS

A moment.

At the door Jessica regards Marlowe.

KIT

What?

JESSICA

Your hair. It's a mess.

He spits in his hand and wipes down his hair.

KIT

Better?

She regards him.

JESSICA

Better.

KIT

What's your name?

JESSICA

Jessica.

He leans into her and whispers...

KIT

As unusual as you are pretty.

She blushes, coyly.

JESSICA

Thank you, sir, but I'm married.

Across the stage, at the great desk...

SIR FRANCIS

Do you trust this friend of yours?

THOMAS

With my life.

SIR FRANCIS

Will he be missed?

THOMAS

He has some family in Canterbury, but he's estranged from them.

SIR FRANCIS

Then he's dispensable. *(calls out)* Jessica, show him in.

Thomas looks worried.

Jessica leads Marlowe in. He stands at the door. Jessica exits.

SIR FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Don't loiter!

Marlowe ventures further in, intimidated.

THOMAS

Hello Kit.

KIT

Thomas. *(bows)* Sir Francis, it's an honor.

Sir Francis scrutinizes him.

SIR FRANCIS

So you're the writer of The Amores.

KIT

(proudly) I am.

SIR FRANCIS

It caused much ado...

KIT

About nothing, sir, it is a poem of antiquity.

SIR FRANCIS

Indeed. *Parlez-vous Francais?*

KIT

Mais oui, monsieur, et Latin, et Grec aussi.

Sir Francis smiles.

SIR FRANCIS

Do you think Mary, Queen of the Scots, has a rightful claim to the English throne?

KIT

I...

THOMAS

Be forthright, Kit, what you say is between us.

Marlowe looks from Thomas to Sir Francis, answers tentatively.

KIT

I think Elizabeth is for the good of England.

SIR FRANCIS

And Mary?

KIT

(bolder) And Mary wishes to convert us to her Catholic faith.

SIR FRANCIS

To which you're opposed?

KIT

I oppose all dogma, as I believe you do too.

SIR FRANCIS

It's not me we're discussing.

KIT

Yes, sir. I can be proud, bold, pleasant, and resolute.

SIR FRANCIS

Can you fight?

KIT

I can now and then stab, when occasion serves, and I can act a beggar or a prince or a priest. I can lie, cheat, and steal, and if pushed to it, pick pocket too.

THOMAS

It's true, Uncle, he's nimble.

Sir Francis' gaze probes Marlowe, who tries not to squirm.

SIR FRANCIS

My men have tried to infiltrate the seminary in Reims, and they have failed, so, I need you to worm into their confidence.

KIT

I've abandoned the cloth.

SIR FRANCIS

You said you can act, so become the part.

Sir Francis throws a bag of coins to Marlowe, who catches it and feels it's weight, not displeased.

KIT

And what of my play? Thomas said it'd be produced.

Sir Francis looks to Thomas.

THOMAS

The one I mentioned, Tamburlaine. Couldn't a production be arranged in the provinces?

KIT

(emphatic) No, it must be in London at The Rose Theater.

SIR FRANCIS

You're in no position to bargain.

KIT

But I can refuse.

Sir Francis hands Marlowe a parchment.

SIR FRANCIS

Will you sign?

KIT

My play will be produced?

SIR FRANCIS

Sign the contract!

KIT

At The Rose.

SIR FRANCIS

Sign!

Sir Francis' eyes narrow, but Marlowe stands firm.

KIT

Your word.

Sir Francis gives Marlowe a quill.

SIR FRANCIS

You have my word.

Marlowe signs.

SIR FRANCIS (CONT'D)

You travel first thing in the morning.

KIT

Thank you, Sir Francis, I will not disappoint you.

SIR FRANCIS

I sincerely hope not, for England depends on it.

SCENE SEVEN

An empty stage. The sound of seagulls and wind. Poley (40s), a rough-hewn man with a scar on his neck and in simple clothes.

Enter Marlowe, carrying a travel bag, and Thomas.

THOMAS

(to Poley) Is the boat ready?

POLEY

Aye, sir.

THOMAS

(hands Marlowe a waxed sealed envelop) This letter of introduction was forged as if by the hand of the Spanish Ambassador. It says you seek sanctuary at the seminary in Rheims where you'll pose as a disaffected Catholic.

KIT

And if they should question me?

THOMAS

Tell them you've been in hiding, our men ambushed you, but you escaped.

KIT

Will they believe?

THOMAS

Poley will see to it. Mention Richard Bancroft. He's a double agent who works for us. He'll corroborate your story. And mention the phrase 'imminent revelation'.

KIT

And if I'm caught out?

THOMAS

We never met.

KIT

You're serious?

THOMAS

Very. Once there befriend the priests and discover a letter from Spain being conducted to Queen Mary. We need that letter.

POLEY

Master Thomas, we cannot miss the tide.

THOMAS

(to Marlowe) From here on keep to yourself. I'll see you soon.

KIT

If the fates are with me.

Marlowe starts to leave. Thomas approaches him.

THOMAS

Kit! Bid me farewell. *(they hug)* Godspeed, my friend.

Thomas pulls away and exits. Poley gives Marlowe a piece of leather.

POLEY

Bite on this.

KIT

What for?

POLEY

You wanna keep those pearly gnashers of yours?

Marlowe bites on the leather.

POLEY (CONT'D)

Brace yourself.

Marlowe tenses. Poley PUNCHES him. Marlowe recoils, mouth bloody.

KIT

Jesus Christ!

Marlowe instinctively PUNCHES back, but Poley side-steps, LOCKS Marlowe's arm.

POLEY

You've got balls, for a poet. Now take your shirt off and lean to.

Marlowe takes off his shirt. Poley pulls out a baton.

POLEY (CONT'D)

I take no pleasure in this, but it's got to be convincing. Lean to.

Marlowe leans against the wall.

Poley STRIKES Marlowe's shoulder. Marlowe flinches, but remains silent.

POLEY (CONT'D)

Another.

KIT

Damn you. Just do it.

Poley STRIKES again. Marlowe groans.

POLEY

Done. Once you make land head straight south and you'll find the Reims road and you'll be there by nightfall. Put your shirt on and make haste.

Marlowe pulls his shirt over his wounds.

KIT

How many have gone before me and not returned?

POLEY

You don't want to know. Come, the tide will not wait.

Marlowe pulls his shirt over his wounds.

KIT

How many have gone before me and not returned?

POLEY

Don't worry, lad, you'll do fine.

KIT

Is that what you said to them.

POLEY

Come, the tide will not wait.

Poley and Marlowe exit.

The Collector enters the side of stage wheeling his cart covered in the blood stained sheet. He stops and turns to us.

COLLECTOR

Aye, the tide waits for no man and so Kit embarks across the English Channel to discover a spy and reveal a plot. *(the sound of wind and crashing of waves)* On horseback across the fields of France to the English College at the seminary at Rheims, a pit of snakes, if ever there was one; backstabbers, apostates, double-crossers, and recreants. *(wheels his cart off and sings)*

*Weep no more, thou sorry boy;
Love's pleased and anger'd with a toy.
Love a thousand passion brings,
Laughs and weeps, and sighs and sings.
If she smiles, he dancing goes,
And thinks not on his future woes:
If she chide with angry eye,
Sits down, and sighs "Ah me, I die!"*

He exits.

Lights down.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

SCENE EIGHT

Solemn tones of the Gregorian chant, *Libre Me, Domine*, off stage.

CHANT

*Libre me, Domine, de morta aeterna,
in dia illa tremenda,*

Lights up on a chapel in Rheims seminary. Marlowe enters wearing a coarse peasant robe. He looks around and regards a painting of 'Christ Before Pilate'.

A hooded Nun in a black habit (30s) appears from the shadows. Marlowe startled.

NUN

Forgive me, I didn't mean to scare you.

KIT

Sorry, sister, my nerves are jagged from the crossing.

NUN

You like art?

KIT

I like how the painter shows the anguish of Christ betrayed.

NUN

It is by Luis de Morales. It was a gift to the seminary from Philip.

KIT

A great honor.

NUN

Indeed. Who is it you wish to see?

KIT

I was sent by Richard Bancroft.

The nun scrutinizes him.

NUN

You will wait in the chapel.

KIT

Yes, sister.

Marlowe goes to the side of the stage and prays at the painting as the Gregorian chant continues.

CHANT (O.S.)

*Quando ceoli movendi suni et terra
Dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem.*

John Ballard (30s), a priest, rugged, handsome, with a scar across his cheek, enters and approaches the nun.

BALLARD

Has anyone else spoken to him?

NUN

Just the guard.

BALLARD

You say he was beaten?

NUN

Aye, father, so he said.

BALLARD

You may return to tending the sick, and tell no one of his arrival until I've talked to him.

NUN

Yes, father.

She exits.

KIT

(whispers praying) Pater noster, qui es in caelis...

Ballard kneels beside him.

BALLARD

Christopher Marlowe?

KIT

... sanctificetur nomen tuum.

BALLARD

You are Christopher Marlowe?

KIT

(eyes the priest cautiously) I am.

BALLARD

I have a message for you.

KIT

But none know I'm here.

BALLARD

It's from Sir Francis Walsingham.

KIT

(mind racing) You confuse me with someone else.

Ballard notices Marlowe's finger tapping nervously.

BALLARD

He bids you make a quick return to London.

Marlowe sees Ballard looking at his hand, and stops tapping.

KIT

I've been beaten and robbed and my life threatened for my beliefs. I know no Francis Walsingham and I have never been to London.

BALLARD

And yet you come to us in the dead of night.

KIT

They would've killed me had I not escaped.

BALLARD

Yet I see no scars.

KIT

I was set on from behind by three rogues in Dover.

Marlowe slides his shirt off his shoulder, revealing angry bruises.

BALLARD

We are assailed by Walsingham's men and cannot be too careful.

KIT

The cause seeks 'imminent revelation'.

Ballard regards Marlowe.

KIT (CONT'D)

My letter explains all.

He hands Ballard the letter, who opens it and reads. He is impressed.

BALLARD

(impressed) From the Spanish Ambassador. *(reads further, smiles and folds the letter)*
I'm sorry we had to arrange this deception.

KIT

I understand.

BALLARD

I'll take your petition for refuge to the Abbot, in the meantime, we shall find you a room, but *(indicates the dagger in Marlowe's belt)* we don't allow weapons.

KIT

Yes, of course, I only have it for protection.

Marlowe hands the dagger to Ballard, who regards it.

BALLARD

Tis a fine blade for a humble man.

KIT

I... won it. *(laughs)* Fighting a Protestant.

BALLARD

(stern) We are men of peace.

KIT

Father, I know it's wrong to be angry, but I cannot stand to see Queen Mary jailed like a common criminal... *(pauses)* I'm sorry, I go too far, but their heresy vexes me.

BALLARD

Your passion's commendable. *(a beat)* Are you resolved to act on it?

KIT

Every fibre of my being yearns for God's justice.

BALLARD

Then maybe we can help each other.

KIT

Tell me how.

Marlowe grabs Ballard's hand. They hold for a moment.
A church bell TOLLS.

BALLARD

The call for evensong. *(withdraws his hand)* We'll meet anon, and do not talk to others of this.

KIT

I am silence.

Ballard touches Marlowe's forehead tenderly making the sign of the cross.

BALLARD

Dominus vobiscum .

KIT

Et cum spiritu tuo.

BALLARD

Welcome to our seminary . We rise at four to scrub the floors, then prayer til noon.

KIT

(lying) I look forward it.

BALLARD

Come along, I'll take you to your room.

They exit.

SCENE NINE

An oversized portrait of Lord Havenhurst, a table, and upholstered chairs in a grand living room. Enter Havenhurst, Whitgift, and Anne.

WHITGIFT

You were married previously, my lord?

HAVENHURST

(sighs) Yes, Martha died in the last plague.

ANNE

How horrible.

HAVENHURST

Twas no great loss. She was a shrew.

WHITGIFT

I'm sorry to hear that, but Anne will make an exemplary wife and a fine companion.
Won't you, my dear?

Anne sullen.

HAVENHURST

Speak up, girl.

ANNE

Yes, my lord.

HAVENHURST

Turn around so I can get a good look at you.

ANNE

(indignant) Father?

HAVENHURST

If I'm to marry her, I want to see what I'm getting.

WHITGIFT

But, my lord, propriety calls for...

HAVENHURST

(interrupts) Are you arguing with me, bishop?

WHITGIFT

(humbled) No, my lord.

ANNE

It's all right, father.

Anne begrudgingly turns around. Havenhurst gazes lasciviously.

HAVENHURST

She's pleasing to the eye and has good child bearing hips.

ANNE

I am not a cow at market.

HAVENHURST

Pugnacious too.

ANNE

Nor am I nag to be broken.

WHITGIFT

I'm sorry, my lord, she will be obedient.

ANNE

I can talk for myself.

HAVENHURST

I like music in the evening. Do you play an instrument?

ANNE

No. I write poetry.

WHITGIFT

Girlish nonsense, nothing to worry about.

HAVENHURST

(to Anne) Who's your favorite writer?

ANNE

I'm partial to the work of Christopher Marlowe.

HAVENHURST

I don't know him.

WHITGIFT

A rebellious upstart from Cambridge.

Havenhurst ignores Whitgift.

HAVENHURST

But you deem him a talent?

ANNE

The best of his generation.

HAVENHURST

Then I look forward to you introducing me to his work.

WHITGIFT

Is the wedding set, my lord?

HAVENHURST

Yes, but it'll be a small affair. I dislike crowds, especially with the infection spreading.

WHITGIFT

Yes, of course. We shall make the necessary preparations. It's getting late, we should take our leave.

HAVENHURST

(to Anne) I think we'll make a fine couple, my dear.

Anne smiles, barely concealing her disgust.

ANNE

Yes, my lord. I hope we can both be happy.

Anne and Whitgift go to the door.

WHITGIFT

That went well.

Anne grimaces and they exit.

Sir Francis enters from an interior door.

SIR FRANCIS

Was that your new bride to be?

HAVENHURST

Do you think she could ever love me?

SIR FRANCIS

Given the size of your estates, I'm sure she could learn. My lord, I'm here to ask you to vouch for Thomas.

HAVENHURST

You mean his School of Atheists? Can they not change their name for God's sake? How about The School of Night or something innocuous?

SIR FRANCIS

They are our best philosophers and scientists. If we do not engender them the French and Spanish will surpass our technologies. Perhaps you could put in a word to Her Majesty.

HAVENHURST

She's not in good humor these days, but I'll mention it.

SIR FRANCIS

Thank you, my lord.

HAVENHURST

Any news of your man in Reims?

SIR FRANCIS

None yet.

HAVENHURST

We need to make a move, Sir Francis or we'll lose our links to the traitors.

SIR FRANCIS

Any day now.

SCENE TEN

A monk's cell in Rheims Seminary, a table, chair, and cot.
On the table a jar of ink, a quill and paper. Marlowe
editing furiously...

KIT

(reading to himself) Nature that framed us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have.... *(looks up)* reaching minds. No, damn it! *(scratches out the word)* Not 'reaching'... climbing... vaulting... aspiring, yes, aspiring minds.

A KNOCK at the door.

KIT (CONT'D)

A moment. *(continues writing)* Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds.
 Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend,
 The wondrous architecture of the world.
 And measure every wandering planet's course,

Another KNOCK at the door.

KIT

I'm coming. *(continues writing quickly)* Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
 And always moving as the restless spheres.

He hides the script under the bed and opens the door to...

KIT (CONT'D)

Father Ballard.

Ballard with a saddle bag, a flagon, and a bowl.

BALLARD

(re: the bowl) I brought water to wash your wounds.

KIT

You're most kind.

BALLARD

We Catholics must look after one another.

KIT

Indeed we must.

BALLARD

May I enter?

KIT

Please.

Ballard looks out to make sure no one sees, closes the door and enters.

BALLARD

Excuse my caution, but my being here could appear 'untoward'. Can I rely on your discretion?

KIT

If you so wish, then none shall know.

BALLARD

(looks around) I'm sorry the cell's not more comfortable

KIT

It's more than I could've prayed for.

BALLARD

Aye, tis shelter and safety.

KIT

Which is all I require.

BALLARD

Let's take a look at those wounds.

KIT

(dismissive) Tis nothing, they'll heal.

BALLARD

Don't be modest, I'm trained in the medical arts. Take off your shirt.

KIT

Do not trouble yourself, Father.

BALLARD

Tis no trouble. Come, let me see.

Marlowe turns away and takes off his shirt.

BALLARD (CONT'D)

(wets a rag) I hope I wasn't disturbing you.

KIT

I'm glad to have company.

BALLARD

(suspicious) Who were you talking to?

KIT

Sorry?

BALLARD

I heard you talking to someone.

KIT

I was performing The Examen of Conscious.

BALLARD

Ah, very good.

KIT

I find prayer meditative.

BALLARD

Yes, the contemplation of humility brings us closer to God.

Marlowe's shirt is now off, exposing his bare back and bloody welts. Ballard runs his fingers across the wounds.

BALLARD (CONT'D)

They beat you badly, it's still raw. Let me clean the wounds.

Ballard tenderly washes Marlowe's back.

KIT

(flinches at the pain) Ah!

BALLARD

I'm sorry.

KIT

It's fine.

BALLARD

Tell me where you're from?

KIT

Canterbury.

BALLARD

The Holy City.

KIT

But I was in Cambridge on a scholarship.

BALLARD

Then we are brethren scholars, for I was at Queens College.

KIT

And I was at Corpus Christie.

BALLARD

Whitgift was your tutor?

KIT

Unfortunately.

Ballard rubs Marlowe's neck.

BALLARD

He was a good man, devout and true, but after the Reformation he became bitter and his misguided beliefs twisted him.

KIT

(laughs) It's ironic we're opposed over the same God.

BALLARD

(offended) You think it humorous?

KIT

(grave) I do not think it humorous that Elizabeth has banned Mass and executed hundreds of our priests.

BALLARD

She's as sinful as her bastard father.

KIT

I believe there'll be no peace until the Anglicans' churches are burned to the ground.

BALLARD

(laughs) You are a true Catholic.

Ballard runs his hands down from Marlowe's neck to his chest. Marlowe puts his hand on Ballard's. Their hands embrace for a moment.

BALLARD (CONT'D)

Your touch quells an ache.

KIT

As does yours, Father.

Marlowe's hand leads Ballard's lower, towards his waist.

BALLARD

You can call me John.

KIT

My friends call me Chris.

Ballard's fingers stroke Marlowe.

BALLARD

Your body is beautifully lean.

KIT

A gift from God. *(turns to Ballard)* I see a scar on your cheek. Did they hurt you too?

BALLARD

(pulls away) Tis nothing.

KIT

I don't mean to pry.

BALLARD

Twas carved by Sir Francis under interrogation.

KIT

I'm so sorry.

BALLARD

(laughs) But I gave them nothing.

KIT

He's the devil who keeps Elizabeth enthroned.

Marlowe's hand reaches for Ballard's and they play
against each other.

BALLARD

To find a true friend is rare in this world.

Their entwined hands slide down below Marlowe's
waist, they lean together - then...

A blood curdling SCREAM off stage. Marlowe pulls
back abruptly.

KIT

Christ in heaven!

BALLARD

Don't be alarmed.

KIT

Who is it?

Marlowe scrambles to put his shirt on.

BALLARD

One of Sir Francis' spies. They would send us to burn on Whitgift's fires, but we ferret
them out.

The man off stage GROANS.

KIT

I shall pray for his soul.

BALLARD

(shocked) You'd pray for an apostate? The Anglicans inflict the same on us.

KIT

But aren't we all sinners before God?

The man GROANS pitifully.

KIT

(cringes) His cry wracks me.

BALLARD (cont'd)

You've not heard a man being tortured?

KIT

Thank God, no.

BALLARD

As the flesh burns and the bones break an intimacy grows between torturer and victim. There's a... passion to it that ... *(touches the scar on his cheek)* only lovers know.

KIT

Are you alone, Father? No family?

BALLARD

I was married, but my wife and children were taken by the plague.

KIT

How awful.

BALLARD

For a time I was in despair, but then realized God sent the disease to punish us for our false beliefs.

KIT

Divine retribution?

BALLARD

What else? For God is angry at our hubris. *(a beat)* Did you leave anyone behind, a sweetheart perhaps?

KIT

I'm also alone.

BALLARD

Then we're alone together. Would you join me in a drink?

He takes a wine bottle and two cups from his bag and fills them.

BALLARD

Spanish wine from my travels.

KIT

(impressed) You've been to Spain?

BALLARD

On occasion. *(passes a cup)* Here, it'll warm you on this cold night.

Marlowe takes Ballard's hand and puts it on his breast. Ballard pulls away, but Marlowe holds tight.

KIT

Be not afraid, for "Perfect love casteth out fear and he that feareth is not perfect in love."

BALLARD

(impressed) You know your scripture.

Marlowe leans into Ballard. They are about to kiss, but Ballard pulls back.

BALLARD

I must go to England.

KIT

When?

BALLARD

Tonight. For several months. *(a beat)* Will you wait for me?

KIT

Yes, and not a day shall pass that I won't think of you.

BALLARD

It's a blessing you were sent.

KIT

No, father, I am the fortunate one.

Marlowe takes his ring off and puts it on Ballard's finger.

KIT

Take this that was given me by my father, and his before him. Let it seal our love.

Marlowe leans into him. Ballard trembles, there is rising excitement. His lip quivers as he looks into Marlowe's eyes, seduced.

Marlowe presses his mouth over Ballard's and kisses him in a violent embrace. Ballard succumbs and KISSES BACK HUNGRILY.

A church bell tolls.

SCENE ELEVEN

A desk and books and a map of Britain and we are in Sir Francis' office. Enter Sir Francis and Thomas.

THOMAS

Did you talk to Lord Havenhurst?

SIR FRANCIS

He said Her Majesty will not lend her name to atheists.

THOMAS

Will you support us, uncle?

SIR FRANCIS

It'd be a conflict of interest.

THOMAS

The fire of the Enlightenment needs air to thrive.

SIR FRANCIS

I don't disagree, but I believe there's still a need for faith.

THOMAS

Surely not the extremes of the Papists or Puritans?

SIR FRANCIS

No, but God is not dead yet.

THOMAS

You overstate our intention.

SIR FRANCIS

I support your school, Thomas, but the fanatics have infiltrated the district councils and mean to purge the Humanists. I can no longer guarantee your safety.

Jessica enters.

JESSICA

Christopher Marlowe's returned.

SIR FRANCIS

Send him in.

She stands aside and Marlowe enters, dishevelled.

THOMAS

Kit!

KIT

Thomas, my friend.

THOMAS

You look terrible. *(they hug)* Whew! You stink of fish.

KIT

Twas a rough crossing and I haven't slept in two days.

SIR FRANCIS

(to Jessica) You may leave. *(Jessica exits)* *(to Marlowe)* Did you get the letter?

KIT

Er, no, sir.

SIR FRANCIS

(barks) You dare return empty handed!

KIT

(quickly) I know the carrier.

SIR FRANCIS

(intrigued) Really?

KIT

Which is more than your spies discovered.

SIR FRANCIS

You assume much.

KIT

Your men were racked in their dungeons.

THOMAS

You heard them tortured?

KIT

Their last pitiful screams and feared any moment I'd be next.

SIR FRANCIS

So who is the carrier?

KIT

John Ballard.

SIR FRANCIS

The priest?

KIT

Yes, sir.

SIR FRANCIS

No mention of Sir Anthony Babbington?

KIT

I believe he was there.

SIR FRANCIS

I knew it. When will this priest arrive?

KIT

In a week and he'll be wearing a jewelled ring.

THOMAS

(stung) So now a traitor wears my ring?

KIT

I had to improvise.

THOMAS

(disappointed) Kit.

SIR FRANCIS

(to Marlowe) You'll go with Thomas and Poley to identify this priest.

KIT

But my mission's accomplished, our bargain's fulfilled.

SIR FRANCIS

(sharp) It's fulfilled when I say so. Once you've identified this priest, your debts will be settled and your degree reinstated.

KIT

And my play?

SIR FRANCIS

Is that your only concern?

KIT

It is. Has Henslowe been informed?

SIR FRANCIS

All is set. England thanks you for your service. You're dismissed.

THOMAS

(goes to the door with Marlowe) It's good to have you home, Kit. I missed you. *(puts his arm around Marlowe)* You need a hot bath and a good meal.

KIT

I owe you, Thomas.

THOMAS

You owe me nothing but your love.

They exit.

Lights down.

End of Act Two.

ACT THREE

SCENE TWELVE

The sound of seagulls squawking and blustering wind. A dock side at Deptford, indicated by a gang plank.

Marlowe, Thomas, and Poley watch passengers disembark.

POLEY

It's been three days and still no sign.

KIT

(confident) He'll come.

THOMAS

Perhaps he was deceiving you.

KIT

Twas I who deceived him.

POLEY

You sure he didn't set you on a false trail?

KIT

He trusted me.

THOMAS

(bitter) You were... intimate with him?

KIT

I did what I had to.

THOMAS

You evade my question.

KIT

Twas for the good of England, Thomas.

THOMAS

(cynical) And you derived no gratification from it?

KIT

Are you jealous?

THOMAS

Curious, that's all.

KIT

If you must know, he disgusts me.

THOMAS

So there was no pleasure?

Thomas regards him sceptically.

POLEY

The ship's almost emptied, perhaps he slipped by?

KIT

There! *(points to a priest in a hooded gown)*

THOMAS

(to Poley) Get him!

Poley GRABS the man and RIPS back his hood. It is an old man.

POLEY

Is it he?

KIT

No.

POLEY

(to the priest) All right, move along.

The priest hurries off.

POLEY

(to Marlowe) We waited long enough. Your deal's off.

KIT

(to Thomas) Wait. He'll come, I'm sure.

POLEY

Thomas, we're wasting precious time.

KIT

The ship's not yet emptied. A few more minutes.

A few more passengers disembark.

THOMAS

Sorry, Kit, but your mission failed.

KIT

And my play?

THOMAS

I doubt my uncle will give something, for nothing in return. Let it go.

KIT

Never.

Poley and Thomas start to leave. A man disembarks, dressed in a cape and hat, and carrying a saddlebag. Marlowe approaches him.

KIT

Sirrah! Do I know thee?

THE MAN

(gruff) You're not familiar.

The man shuffles past and tips his hat hiding his face.

KIT

Can you say where you procured the ring you wear?

THE MAN

(hides his hand) Leave me alone.

KIT

Thomas! Tis he.

The man starts to run.

POLEY

(shouts to Marlowe) Take him down!

Marlowe LUNGES and GRABS the man. There's a STRUGGLE, Marlowe rips off the man's hat revealing..

KIT

John Ballard.

BALLARD

(bitter) Kit! What have you done?

THOMAS

(grabs him) Mr. Ballard, you're under arrest for colluding with enemies of the state.

BALLARD

(spits at Marlowe) Judas!

THOMAS

(to Poley) Hold him fast.

BALLARD

(to Marlowe) You betrayed me !

POLEY

Shut up.

Poley PUNCHES Ballard, who FOLDS. Poley retrieves a letter from Ballard's bag.

POLEY

(reads) The seal of Spain. *(opens it and scans)*

BALLARD

(to Marlowe) You'll be damned to hell for this.

KIT

The only hell is what you make, John.

POLEY

(to Thomas) The letter mentions Mary.

THOMAS

Anything else?

POLEY

(reading) Some dates, but no names.

THOMAS

(to Ballard) Well?

BALLARD

(terrified) I know nothing. I'm just the messenger. Tell them Kit.

Thomas produces a large KNIFE. Ballard pulls to get away.

THOMAS

Hold him.

Marlowe and Poley brace Ballard.

KIT

Tell him, John, for God's sake.

BALLARD

(pleading) Christopher, you know I'm innocent.

THOMAS

(to Marlowe) Is he lying?

KIT

(to Ballard) You'll be no martyr if none know that you're dead.

BALLARD

(pleads) Please, Chris.

THOMAS

(to Marlowe) Chris?

Thomas holds Ballard's hand up, the ring prominent.

THOMAS

I believe this is mine.

He tries to pull it off Ballard's finger, but it's stuck.

Thomas puts the knife over Ballard's ring finger.

THOMAS

(impatient) The name of the conspirator?

BALLARD

(sobbing) Have mercy.

KIT

Like you had mercy on those you tortured?

THOMAS

Your last chance, Ballard.

BALLARD

I will not betray Mary.

Thomas CUTS OFF Ballard's finger. Ballard SCREAMS, clutching his hand.

Thomas holds the bloody digit and slides the ring off it,
and gives it to Marlowe.

THOMAS

Do not give it away again.

KIT

Thank you.

Marlowe takes it squeamishly and slides it on his finger.
Thomas puts the blade over Ballard's next finger.

THOMAS

Mister Ballard, the name?

BALLARD

(groaning) I don't know.

Thomas SLICES the next digit off.

BALLARD (cont'd)

(screams) Babington!

THOMAS

Anthony Babington?

BALLARD

(holds his bloody hand, sobbing) Yes. Mother Mary forgive me.

THOMAS

(to Poley) Take him to the Tower.

BALLARD

(to Marlowe) I shall rise to heaven.

POLEY (cont'd)

Mister Ballard, you won't be rising anywhere because we're going to cut you up and scatter your parts.

BALLARD

(groaning) But I gave you the name.

THOMAS

And we thank you for it. *(to Marlowe)* Here. *(tosses a bag of coins)* Forty silver guineas.

KIT

In addition to my play?

THOMAS

A loan from me to help set you it up.

KIT

Thank you, my friend.

THOMAS

I believe in you and your writing, Kit.

KIT

And him? *(re: Ballard)*

THOMAS

He's no longer your concern. London's your oyster. Go and relish it.

BALLARD

(to Marlowe) You're time will come, Chris Marlowe.

Poley PUNCHES Ballard.

POLEY

Shut your hole and move along.

Poley and Thomas drag Ballard off.

Marlowe takes Thomas' ring off his finger, puts it in his pocket, and follows.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Lights up on a large gate to the city. The Collector dressed in rags wheels his cart on stage, the bloody sheet removed. On the cart a corpse of a young girl.

COLLECTOR

*(sings) All our pride is but a jest, None are worst and none are best;
Grief and joy and hope and fear, Play their pageants everywhere:
Vain Opinion all doth sway, And the world is but a play.*

Marlowe enters carrying a bag of clothes, drinking from a bottle of wine, looks up at the gate, and slumps.

KIT

Sirrah! It's you again.

COLLECTOR

Thank you for saving my bacon.

KIT

What?

COLLECTOR

With the bishop's man.

KIT

Oh, you're welcome.

COLLECTOR

Why so glum?

KIT

I was at the execution.

COLLECTOR

It was a grisly spectacle.

KIT

Does any man deserve to be hung, drawn, and quartered?

COLLECTOR

He was a conspirator.

KIT

His guts spilled, his limbs hacked, like a pig on the Feast of Trinity.

COLLECTOR

He was a friend of yours?

KIT

(snaps) No.

COLLECTOR

Then what's it to you?

KIT

Tis the principle.

COLLECTOR

He got what he deserved and everything passes and the world moves on.

KIT

Sic mundus Creatus est.

COLLECTOR

Say what?

KIT

Thus the world was created. *(a beat)* Is this the way to London?

COLLECTOR

It's the way to perdition.

KIT

Why so?

COLLECTOR

Sixty taken in the City in the last two days and a hundred in St. Clements.

Marlowe looks at the dead girl laid across, her skin with purple lesions.

KIT

Who was she?

COLLECTOR

The baker's daughter.

KIT

(lifts the girl's limp limb) Her hand so fragile, like a fallen bird.

COLLECTOR

Suffered horrible, she did, puss filled blisters, burning fevers, vomiting blood.

KIT

And died so young.

COLLECTOR

There's no rhyme or reason.

KIT

No heaven or hell?

COLLECTOR

If you want heaven look to Nature; the flowers, the trees, and the sky.

KIT

And hell?

COLLECTOR

(indicates the gate and laughs) Like I said, in there, sir.

KIT

And what of sin?

COLLECTOR

Murder one they call it a sin, murder a thousand they call you a king. The only justice is here, where we all end up; the virtuous and the vile; priests and soldiers, whores and children. None escape.

KIT

Where will you take her?

COLLECTOR

To the Church, they pay a shilling a corpse, "to save their souls" they say. A quick blessing, and then they're dumped in a pauper's pit, a dozen at a time.

KIT

An ignoble end.

COLLECTOR

Aye, stripped bare and piled like faggots.

KIT

(gives a coin) Lay her in a decent place with a view beneath a bower .

COLLECTOR

A guinea! Consider it done. *(starts to leave)*

KIT

One more thing.

COLLECTOR

Aye , sir?

KIT

Do you know of a Lord Havenhurst?

COLLECTOR

Who doesn't? Recently married at Whitechapel, big affair it was, even the Queen attended.

KIT

Who did he marry?

COLLECTOR

Lady Anne, I believe they call her.

KIT

The bishop's daughter?

COLLECTOR

That's the one, pretty as a rose, and newly appointed Her Majesty's lady-in-waiting.

KIT

Then my hopes dissolve. *(a beat)* How do I get to the Rose?

COLLECTOR

The theater? Head west past the graveyard, then down to the river. Good luck, sir.

KIT

Thank you.

Marlowe marches through the gate. The Collector wheels the cart and sings...

COLLECTOR

Were my heart as some men's are, thy errors would not move me,
But thy faults I curious find, and speak because I love thee;
Patience is a thing divine, and far, I grant, above me.

The Collector exits.

SCENE FOURTEEN

The Star Chamber Privy Council, an open room with a large desk.

Enter Havenhurst, Sir Francis, and Whitgift.

SIR FRANCIS

We can no longer ignore the spread of the disease or it'll ravage the country, again.

HAVENHURST

Bacon believes it may be carried by insects.

SIR FRANCIS

What proof has he?

HAVENHURST

Tis a theory.

WHITGIFT

And until proved we must crack down on dissidents and rumor mongers.

HAVENHURST

Meaning to impose your Code of Morals?

WHITGIFT

We must codify and enforce our values or we will descend back to the dark ages.

SIR FRANCIS

Does that include you proscribing what shall and shall not be read?

WHITGIFT

If necessary.

HAVENHURST

Or is it that you aspire to be Archbishop?

WHITGIFT

I am the logical choice.

SIR FRANCIS

Oh?

WHITGIFT

None are more qualified than I. Good day, gentlemen.

Whitgift exits.

SIR FRANCIS

If he ascends he will be trouble.

HAVENHURST

I fear there's no stopping him, for he has the queen's favor.

They exit.

SCENE FIFTEEN

A desk, a chair and a wall of masks and we are in the office of The Rose Theater. Phillip Henslowe (40s), sanguine, at the desk with Judith Henslowe (30s), choleric .

HENSLOWE

They've imposed a new license fee.

JUDITH

Who have?

HENSLOWE

The church.

JUDITH

How much now?

HENSLOWE

A pound a month.

JUDITH

On top of the city tax and crown tax?

HENSLOWE

They'll bury us alive in debt.

JUDITH

You said the queen favors theater.

HENSLOWE

But the bishop bends her to his Moral Code.

A stagehand hovers at the door with several wooden stage knives.

HENSLOWE

No, no, not knives, swords, the bigger the better.

The stagehand exits as Marlowe enters.

KIT

Mr. Henslowe?

JUDITH

Who are you?

KIT

Your new writer.

JUDITH

We already have Kyd and Watson. We don't need another. Try Lord Strange's Men, they might want a scribe.

KIT

Sir Francis said...

HENSLOWE

Sir Francis!

KIT

He sent you my play, Tamburlaine. He said you'll produce it.

JUDITH

A 'good afternoon' would be a more pleasant entry, young man.

KIT

Good afternoon.

HENSLOWE

Meet Judith, my wife.

JUDITH

(correcting) And partner.

HENSLOWE

(corrected) And partner.

KIT

(to Henslowe) And my play?

HENSLOWE

The war lord story in blank verse?

KIT

(proudly) Unrhymed iambic pentameter.

HENSLOWE

Very novel, but...

KIT

Yes?

HENSLOWE

... it's an unfamiliar tale.

KIT

As was Kyd's Hamlet when it was first produced.

JUDITH

That was an exception. Trust, me, people like familiar stories with simple morals and happy endings. That's the business.

KIT

But surely not the hogwash of Damon and Pythias, or whatever else you've been playing.

HENSLOWE

Edward's Damon, one of my favorites. (*recites*)

"Yet now I crave your friendship, which if I may attain,
Most sure and unfeigned friendship, I promise you again." It's a classic.

KIT

It's asinine.

JUDITH

It was the most popular play in London.

Enter the stagehand with a small wooden sword.

JUDITH

Big enough, Philip?

HENSLOWE

(*to stagehand*) Anything bigger?

KIT

Mister Henslowe, when?

HENSLOWE

When what?

KIT

(*urgent*) When will Tamburlaine be staged?

JUDITH

Pushy little fucker aren't you?

KIT

Must I inform Sir Francis you delay?

HENSLOWE

(placating) No need for that.

KIT

Perhaps I should ask him.

HENSLOWE

No, no. No need for that. Let's not perturb Sir Francis. After Damon, yours shall be the next production..

JUDITH

(reprimands) Philip!

HENSLOWE

Judith, we will need something new if we're going to compete with the Globe.

KIT

The Globe?

HENSLOWE

The Lord Chamberlain's Men are building a new theater on the South Bank, said to be the city's grandest. Once the plague recedes...

JUDITH

If it ever does.

HENSLOWE

... we'll need to woo the public, and Tamburlaine does have a certain sweep to it.

KIT

And there's a second part.

HENSLOWE

Excellent. If the first's a success, we'll have the sets and costumes for the second.

JUDITH

That'd save a pretty penny.

KIT

So it's settled?

HENSLOWE

We are in business, Master...

KIT

Marlowe. Christopher Marlowe, but my friends call me Kit.

They shake hands.

JUDITH

Right, Mister Kit, we'll get you started by sweeping the stage, shall we?

KIT

I'm not a cleaner, ma'am, I'm a writer.

JUDITH

And this is the theater, we all chip in, don't we, Philip?

HENSLOWE

Yes we do, Judith, there's no job too low for an actor.

JUDITH

Or writer.

KIT

(to Henslowe) I've some revisions to add to the play. Perhaps we could...

Judith gives him a broom.

JUDITH

(interrupts) Get along, lad, the floors won't clean themselves.

Marlowe and Judith exit.

The Stage Hand returns with a HUGE wooden sword.

HENSLOWE

Very good, and we'll need a gallon of pigs blood.

The stage hand exits.

SCENE SIXTEEN

Durham House, indicated by a candelabra, decorations, and three chairs.

At the side of the stage Thomas, well dressed, arranges the chairs in a row, whistling.

Enter Marlowe, wearing a new, colorful doublet.

KIT

The maid said you're having a party.

THOMAS

A dance after the meeting. You should attend, everyone will be here. How was it with Henslowe?

KIT

His wife dislikes me.

THOMAS

And Tamburlaine?

KIT

(gleeful) Will be produced in a month.

THOMAS

Did I not say that you'd blaze across the English firmament?

KIT

Not yet I haven't.

THOMAS

Tis but assured, and when you do, remember to tell them it was I who discovered you.

Enter Lord and Lady Havenhurst.

KIT

(under his breath) Anne!

THOMAS

Ah, Lord Havenhurst.

They approach Havenhurst and Anne.

THOMAS

What a pleasure, we rarely see you out.

HAVENHURST

We'll not stay long, Thomas, I dislike crowds.

THOMAS

May I introduce my dear friend and London's newest playwright, Christopher Marlowe.

HAVENHURST

Lady Anne speaks highly of your work.

KIT

(bows to Anne) I am but a humble wordsmith.

HAVENHURST

(regards Marlowe warily) I doubt that.

THOMAS

His Tamburlaine will astound you with a new type of poetry, and mark my words, among the Spencers, Peeles and Greenes, Marlowe's name will shine most bright.

HAVENHURST

(unimpressed) Indeed. *(to Marlowe)* Are you tragic or comic?

KIT

Sorry?

HAVENHURST

I prefer to laugh than cry.

KIT

I'd argue that in tragedy Man's character can truly be revealed. My lord, my plays will explore character, not just plot.

HAVENHURST

Sound audacious.

THOMAS

(to Marlowe) And this is Lady Anne Havenhurst, but I believe you've met.

HAVENHURST

(to Anne) You know this young man personally?

ANNE

I did, my lord, in Cambridge.

Havenhurst casts a suspicious glance at Marlowe.

KIT

(bows) An honor to meet you again, madam.

ANNE

Good afternoon, Master Marlowe.

Anne looks to Marlowe, who smiles.

ANNE

(to Thomas) I've heard much about your school.

THOMAS

As the daughter of a bishop you must find it nonsensical.

ANNE

Actually, I believe that men and women of your conviction are our best hope for an enlightened world.

THOMAS

Thank you, my lady.

MUSIC starts off stage.

THOMAS

A quartet I've hired for this evening. They're rehearsing in the study.

ANNE

Do you dance, Thomas?

KIT

(laughs) As if with two left feet.

THOMAS

He's right, I stumble more than dance.

KIT

(to Anne) Perhaps I could accompany you?

ANNE

(to Havenhurst) You don't mind, do you, dear?

HAVENHURST

If you must.

Lady Anne puts her hand out.

KIT

M'lady.

He bows, takes her hand, they dance across the room,
where he PULLS her in closer.

KIT

Do you love him?

ANNE

As a wife should.

KIT

So married not by choice?

ANNE

My father's idea of a profitable business.

KIT

And now you're mortgaged to an ancient lord.

ANNE

And you are still poor.

KIT

Yes, well, money can't buy love, *(laughs)* but it can improve your bargaining position.

ANNE

(rising anger) Is that all love is to you, a bargain?

KIT

I talk not of love but money and we should not be slaves to it.

He pulls her into to him, face to face.

ANNE

(protests) Kit! *(she tries to push him away)* His eyes are upon us.

Across the room Havenhurst and Thomas watch.

HAVENHURST

(dubious) One of your boys is he?

THOMAS

(regards him dubiously) What do you imply, my lord?

HAVENHURST

I know what you 'boys' get up to these days. Not that I approve, but be careful.

THOMAS

(curious) Yes, my lord.

Across the room, Anne and Marlowe dancing., very close.

KIT

Come meet me, where we can be alone and away from this pretense.

ANNE

(whispers) I hunger as you do, for there's no island lonelier than marriage.

KIT

(whispers) Then come .

ANNE

(whispers) I made a contract and I mean to keep it.

The music stops. They pull apart. Marlowe grabs her arm.

ANNE

(firm) Let. Go.

He release's her arm. She approaches Havenhurst.

HAVENHURST

What was that?

ANNE

Nothing, my lord. I stumbled and he aided me.

HAVENHURST

(sardonic) I'm sure he did.

KIT

(approaches) Your wife is an exemplary dancer, my lord.

HAVENHURST

Weren't you Sir Francis' man in Rheims?

KIT

I'm not at liberty to say.

HAVENHURST

We're grateful for your service nonetheless... *(leans in close)*...but do not take liberties with other men's wives. *(turns to Anne)* Come along, dear, accompany me to the card room.

ANNE

(to Marlowe) Good bye, I wish you well with your play.

KIT

(gazing after her) Thank you, my lady.

Havenhurst and Lady Anne exit.

KIT

Is she not a splendid creature?

THOMAS

With her you catch a tiger by the tail.

KIT

And where you see claws, I see wings.

THOMAS

She's no angel, I assure you.

KIT

Worry not, her heart's not mine.

THOMAS

And your heart is insatiable. Will you ever be content?

KIT

(sharp) I won't argue.

THOMAS

What? The great Kit Marlowe lost for words?

KIT

I must get back to my play.

THOMAS

(snaps) Let go of it for a single damn night and stay with me.

KIT

Sorry, Thomas. I must write.

THOMAS

Then go, but remember the only reason you're in London is because of my generosity.

Marlowe exits.

Thomas throws his glass. It SMASHES.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

The Rose theater stage. Judith and Henslowe dismantle a half-built set of a general's war tent.

JUDITH

I told this Tamburlaine was going to cause trouble.

HENSLOWE

What else could we do? Sir Francis insisted.

JUDITH

Sir Francis. Sir Francis. We should have done a nice English comedy. People want to have fun, not this dreary tragedy.

HENSLOWE

I don't disagree, my dear, but we are merely actors, higher powers determine our fate. So down it comes.

The continue taking the tent apart.

JUDITH

And where's the great scribe now, eh? Drunk in some alley?

HENSLOWE

No doubt.

JUDITH

Bloody writers will be the death of us.

Henslowe picks up a crown and puts it on his head.

HENSLOWE

I'd have made a good king.

JUDITH

Yes you would, dear, better than that peacock.

Henslowe takes a pose and begins...

TAMBURLAINE/HENSLOWE

*Nature, that fram'd us of four elements...
 Warring within our breasts for regiment,
 Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:
 Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend,
 The wondrous architecture of the world.
 And measure every wandering planet's course,
 Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
 And always moving as the restless spheres,
 Will us to wear ourselves, and never rest,
 Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
 That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
 The sweet fruition of an earthly crown. (to Judith) You have to admit it's rather magnificent.*

JUDITH

It's got a certain poetry, but what's it all about?

HENSLOWE

I believe it's a study of power.

JUDITH

But is Tamburlaine a hero or a villain?

HENSLOWE

I think that's the point, my dear, he's a bit of both.

JUDITH

So how do we know if we're 'sposed to like him or not?

HENSLOWE

I'm not entirely sure.

Enter Marlowe, in an expensive, gold embossed jacket,
 unbuttoned, dishevelled, and drinking from a wine bottle.

HENSLOWE

You're late.

KIT

Better than never.

JUDITH

It's past noon.

KIT

Is it?

Marlowe stumbles, almost falls, but sways back up.

JUDITH

(to Henslowe) Christ in heaven, he's pickled.

KIT

I'm fine.

JUDITH

Could've fooled me.

KIT

What's going on? Why do you dismantle the set?

HENSLOWE

The bishop closed us down.

KIT

What?

JUDITH

He said Tamburlaine is pagan.

KIT

Pagan? *(slurs)* It's the best fucking play since Sophocles.

JUDITH

Well he wants more 'Christian' fare.

KIT

Like what?

JUDITH

Like The Passion Plays.

KIT

They're five hundred years old! This cannot be.

JUDITH

Oh I assure you, it can. He was here himself.

KIT

Tamburlaine must be performed, even if just once.

HENSLOWE

Once! For the cost it must run a month at least.

KIT

One performance and it will sell itself and run for a full season. Tamburlaine must be seen.

JUDITH

(to Henslowe) Tis madness. After one day go dark? We'll be ruined.

KIT

(grasping at straws) What if Her Majesty were to attend?

JUDITH

And what if pigs could fly?

KIT

But what if?

HENSLOWE

You're inebriated.

KIT

She gave Edmund Spencer a life pension for The Faerie Queen.

JUDITH

But you're no Spencer.

KIT

I'm better.

JUDITH

Good God!

KIT

And if Tamburlaine pleases, the queen will check the bishop, and the play will run.

HENSLOWE

I don't know, Kit, it's a fanciful notion.

JUDITH

Forget it, Philip, it's inviting disaster.

HENSLOWE

Give me that. *(takes the bottle from Marlowe and drinks)* You may as well shoot an arrow to the moon as get to the queen.

KIT

I have a way.

HENSLOWE

How?

KIT

I'm intimate with a woman who can...

JUDITH

(to Henslowe) Don't listen to him.

KIT

... who will petition the queen.

JUDITH

You'd gamble our livelihood on one your whores?

KIT

She's no whore.

JUDITH

Then who is she?

KIT

I cannot say.

JUDITH

You're bluffing.

KIT

Give me a week and I'll provide the solution.

HENSLOWE

We only have two days to decide or all this (*indicates the set*) has to go.

JUDITH

Philip!

HENSLOWE

One performance, my dear. We've put so much work in already.

KIT

Finish making the scenery. We will be produced. I'll see you anon.

JUDITH

Where are you going?

KIT

To conjure a queen. (*he exits*)

JUDITH

O God help us. (*to Henslowe*) Give me some of that.

She takes a swig from the bottle.

Lights down.

End of Act Three.

ACT FOUR

SCENE EIGHTEEN

Lights up on Whitgift's office in Lambeth Palace - a simple desk, a large crucifix, and the red cross flag of England. Whitgift at his desk writing. Enter Marlowe.

KIT

Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

Ah, Marlowe, I've been expecting you.

KIT

Your Grace, please, (*kneels*) I beg you on bended knee, let us perform the play but once.

WHITGIFT

I've made my decision.

KIT

(*stands*) But Your Grace, I spent two years writing it and my whole life preparing.

WHITGIFT

Men dressed as women, fantastical tales, and distorted histories, it's all pomp and vanity.

KIT

No, Your Grace, it's an attempt to plumb the depths of a man's soul.

WHITGIFT

Only God sees the soul, that's not the purview of a mortal.

KIT

Then what of Sophocles? Do his plays have no value?

WHITGIFT

I won't be drawn into another of your wrangles. The Church has need of talented men, offer yourself back to God.

KIT

I've dedicated myself to the stage.

WHITGIFT

Then you are of no use to me.

KIT

Let us show it once, and if you deem it worthy, let us continue.

WHITGIFT

And if unworthy?

KIT

I give you my word, I will return to the church and fulfill my vows.

WHITGIFT

You believe in it that much?

KIT

I do, Your Grace, and a hundred workers rely on it for their livelihood. Cancel and they go hungry.

WHITGIFT

My concern is for their souls not their stomachs.

KIT

One performance to show that you are wiser than the priests of Spain, who banish and burn with no discretion.

WHITGIFT

(intrigued) Perhaps one performance.

KIT

Yes, Your Grace, one only.

WHITGIFT

With a limited audience.

KIT

But if we fill the theater, your wisdom will be more widely spoken of.

WHITGIFT

(considering) True.

KIT

Her Majesty would undoubtedly be pleased and would further your nomination for Archbishop.

WHITGIFT

You're most persuasive. One performance.

KIT

Thank you, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

And make sure it does not offend.

KIT

We'll be sure, nothing to offend.

WHITGIFT

I hold you personally responsible.

KIT

Of course, Your Grace. (*bows*) Thank you, you're most beneficent.

Marlowe bows and exits. Whitgift returns to his writings.

SCENE NINETEEN

Anne's bedroom, indicated by a four-poster bed and a door.

Lady Anne asleep.

The door handle TURNS. Anne sits bolt upright.

ANNE

Who's there?

She grabs a candlestick, gets out of bed in a nightgown and approaches, candlestick raised.

ANNE (cont'd)

Show yourself or I'll strike thee.

The door knob turns, the door opens ajar.

ANNE

I'm not afraid.

She is about to hit. Marlowe enters.

KIT

Don't strike!

ANNE

Kit! How did you get in? (*quickly closes the door*)

KIT

I climbed the drain to the corridor.

ANNE

Were you seen?

KIT

Tis pitch black and I was like a cat.

ANNE

So why do you intrude in the middle of the night?

KIT

Your father cancelled my play, but for one performance.

ANNE

Why?

KIT

He said it is pagan.

ANNE

Is it?

KIT

No. Well, maybe. Petition the queen to attend and if she likes it, ...

ANNE

(interrupts) I'm her maid not her confidant.

KIT

... if it pleases her, the play will continue, and I'll be saved.

ANNE

(smiles) Which would fluster my father.

KIT

If not, then I'm finished. My future is in your hands, sweet Anne.

ANNE

Your words cannot buy me.

He puts her hand on his chest.

KIT

Then listen to my heart.

He leans close to her. She loses herself for a moment, but pulls back.

ANNE

Surely you will write more?

KIT

If Tamburlaine fails I swore to your father I'd return to the priesthood.

ANNE

God forbid!

KIT

Is there no way you can...

ANNE

Not I, but perhaps my husband.

KIT

Why would he?

ANNE

For me, and he is close to Her Majesty.

KIT

I'll forever be in your debt and will dedicate myself to...

ANNE

Silence your words and let your tongue speak in love.

He leans in closer and THEY KISS.

After a moment, she pulls away.

ANNE

You must go.

KIT

You promise?

ANNE

No. I promise nothing.

She pushes him to the door.

ANNE

Get out the way you came and take care not to be discovered.

Half way out the door he turns back...

KIT

My dearest Anne, thank you.

ANNE

I can only try, but frankly I have little hope of success.

KIT

Thank you, nonetheless.

He closes the door and is gone.

SCENE TWENTY

The Rose Theater. Backstage, where Judith is dressed as princess Zenocrate.

Enter Marlowe, dressed in the warrior breastplate of Tamburlaine, followed by Thomas.

KIT

Thank you for coming, my friend.

THOMAS

Of course, I wouldn't miss it for the world.

KIT

I thought you were still angry with me.

THOMAS

I am, but I'm learning that no man can possess another, not if we're to live up to our ideals.

KIT

Very noble of you.

They approach Judith.

KIT

(putting on a crown) Has Her Majesty arrived?

JUDITH

(peering out at the audience) No, but I can see Lord Havenhurst and Sir Francis.

KIT

Damn, she must come.

THOMAS

Tis a precarious career you've chosen.

KIT

I had no choice. It chose me.

THOMAS

Well, good luck, Kit, and break a leg.

Thomas exits. Henslowe approaches, dressed as a general.

HENSLOWE

We must begin.

KIT

A moment more, she may yet come.

JUDITH

(looking out at us, the audience) Hold, a dignitary arrives.

KIT

(eager) Who?

At the side of the stage Whitgift enters and takes a seat.

JUDITH

(disappointed) It's Whitgift. Your plan wavers.

HENSLOWE

(to Marlowe) What makes you think the queen will attend?

JUDITH

Put a spell on her, did you?

KIT

She must come.

HENSLOWE

(looks out at the audience) The house is full and we're already half past the hour.

KIT

(despondent) Then let be what will be.

HENSLOWE

Come, Kit, buck up and give it your best.

They all exit.

SCENE TWENTYONE

Center stage is a war tent.

At one side of the stage are the crowd.

On the other side of the stage, Whitgift, seated, watches.

Henslowe, center stage, addresses the crowd.

HENSLOWE

My lords, ladies, and gentles all. We present for your entertainment, for one night only, "Tamburlaine The Great, The Conquering Warlord of Persia", who, from a Scythian shepherd, by his rare and wonderful conquests, became a mighty monarch, and for his tyranny and terror in war, was termed The Scourge of God.

He assumes a pose.

The lights dim and a spotlight finds him.

HENSLOWE

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threatening the world with high astounding terms,
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortunes as you please.

Henslowe exits.

A blast of horns and music off stage.

*Enchas'd with precious jewels of mine own,
More rich and valurous than Zenocrate's;*

A trumpet BLOWS off stage.

Judith and Henslowe kneel.

Marlowe turns and sees Queen Elizabeth, in white face and lace collar. She enters the side of the stage, followed by her Lady-in-Waiting, Anne.

The crowd, on the other side of the stage kneel and bow.

Marlowe kneels.

WHITGIFT

(aside) Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

Bishop Whitgift, I didn't expect to see you here.

WHITGIFT

I try to keep abreast of the agitators, ma'am.

ELIZABETH

(not impressed) With perhaps a little too much enthusiasm.

Elizabeth takes a seat next to Whitgift. The actors and audience rise. She turns to the actors.

ELIZABETH

Actors, you may continue.

At center stage...

TAMBURLAINE/KIT

*My martial prizes, with five hundred men,
Won on the fifty-headed Volga's waves,
Shall we all offer to Zenocrate.*

ZENOCRATE/JUDITH

*Well hast thou portray'd in thy terms of life
 The face and personage of a wondrous man:
 Nature doth strive with Fortune and his stars
 To make him famous in accomplish'd worth;
 And well his merits shew him to be made
 His fortune's master and the king of men.*

At side of stage Elizabeth watches intently.

WHITGIFT

(aside) Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

(distracted, watching) What?

WHITGIFT

(disgusted) There's a woman on stage.

ELIZABETH

(aside) Quiet, Archbishop. I'm listening.

WHITGIFT

I must object.

ELIZABETH

Sssh.

Center stage...

ZENOCRATE/JUDITH

*And such shall wait on worthy Tamburlaine.
 Our army will be forty thousand strong,
 When Tamburlaine and brave Theridamas
 Have met us by the river Araris.*

Marlowe addresses Zenocrate, but favors his speech to Elizabeth.

TAMBURLAINE/KIT

*And here we crown thee Queen of Persia,
 And all the kingdoms and dominions*

TAMBURLAINE/KIT

*Hang up your weapons on Alcides' posts;
 For Tamburlaine takes truce with all the world.-
 Thy first-betrothed love, Arabia,
 Shall we with honour, as beseems, entomb
 With this great Turk and his fair emperess.
 Then, after all these solemn exequies,
 We will our rites of marriage solemnize.*

Tamburlaine kneels at Zenocrate's feet in supplication.
 She lifts his chin and they KISS.

At the side of the stage the crowd CHEERS and
 WHISTLES.

At the other side of stage Whitgift stands and proclaims...

WHITGIFT

This seduction goes too far!

Everyone becomes still, all eyes on Elizabeth, waiting for
 her response. A crack of a smile spreads across her face
 and she CLAPS.

ELIZABETH

(aside) We approve, Archbishop. *(to the actors)* Very good, actors, very good.

Elizabeth CLAPS more enthusiastically.

WHITGIFT

(aside) But Your Majesty...

Elizabeth CLAPS more vigorously and then Anne and the
 crowd ERUPTS in APPLAUSE.

CROWD 1

(shouts out) Yay!

CROWD 2

(shouts out) Hurrah!

CROWD 1

(shouts out) More!

On center stage, Marlowe, Henslowe, and Judith bow.

HENSLOWE

(aside to Marlowe) You did it. Well done, sir.

KIT

(aside) It took us all.

JUDITH

(aside) No, lad, this is yours.

At the side of stage...

WHITGIFT

(over the cheers) It's the glorification of sensuality.

ELIZABETH

No, John, it's the finest poetry I've heard on a stage.

WHITGIFT

But idolizes infidels.

ELIZABETH

(sharp) You do protest too much. You may retire.

WHITGIFT

But Your Majesty!

ELIZABETH

Now, Whitgift.

Whitgift backs away. Elizabeth stands.

ELIZABETH

Bravo players, you entertain us most well.

HENSLOWE

Our chiefest aim is Your Majesty's pleasure.

ELIZABETH

Who's your writer?

HENSLOWE

One Christopher Marlowe. (*gestures to Marlowe to join him*)

KIT

That is I, Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

Come closer. (*Marlowe steps forward*) Do we know thee?

KIT

It's my first play, ma'am, but you may know my poem Hero and Leander?

ELIZABETH

"Lone women, like to empty houses, perish." It hath great understanding and has colored my own writing.

KIT

Then that is it's greatest honor.

ELIZABETH

And I like Tamburlaine, his certitude is most pleasing, I suspect there's much of him in you.

KIT

Thank you, but his strength's a mere shadow to Your Majesty's.

ELIZABETH

You flatter as well as you write.

KIT

I tell the truth where I see it.

ELIZABETH

Yes, and we need more like you. (*glances back at Whitgift*). What's your next play?

KIT

The story of a man who sells his soul to the devil.

ELIZABETH

Very good, Marlowe, we like tales of the supernatural. And what does he get in return?

KIT

You'll have to come see for yourself, ma'am.

Behind Elizabeth...

WHITGIFT

Your Majesty, I suggest...

ELIZABETH

Are you still here, Archbishop?

WHITGIFT

No, Your Majesty.

Whitgift exits in a huff. Elizabeth turns to the crowd and actors.

ELIZABETH

My loyal subjects, we live in a time of great troubles, but alive with new ideas and boundless horizons. As I supported Drake to circumnavigate the globe to increase our knowledge and our wealth, so I hereby decree the creation of a troupe of actors, who shall be called The Queen Elizabeth's Men, to enhance our culture and lift our thoughts towards a new age of exploration and inquiry. Master Marlowe, Henslowe, Mrs. Henslowe, you've done a great thing and we applaud you, and trust that you'll continue.

The actors kneel.

KIT

Your Majesty, may I have permission to speak?

ELIZABETH

You may rise.

KIT

(stands) We will endeavor to create mighty works told in sweet poetry that will make you proud of our English stage. We will write tales to shake you with fear, to warm you in love, to move you in compassion, and to reveal Man's turmoil, be he a peasant, a lord, or a queen.

ELIZABETH

We look forward to them all and I bid you God's blessings.

At the other side of the stage the crowd erupts in APPLAUSE. Elizabeth exits followed by Anne. The crowd applauds and Marlowe bows. Thomas shouts out from the audience...

THOMAS

Hurrah!

SCENE TWENTY-THREE

On the side of the stage The Collector is watching with his cart.

COLLECTOR

(to us, the audience) Perhaps this reasoning can lead us out of the ignorance that's driven us to the brink of disaster. We must try, because it's a dark world only getting darker.

He wheels the cart off and sings...

COLLECTOR

*What is our life? a play of passion:
Our mirth? the music of division.
Our mothers' wombs the tiring-houses be
Where we are drest for this short comedy:
Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is
That sits and marks whoe'er doth act amiss:
Our graves, that hide us from the searching sun,
Are like drawn curtains when the play is done:
Thus march we playing to our latest rest,
Only we die in earnest, that's no jest.*

Lights down.

End of Play.