

THE TRAGICAL HISTORY OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

(a work in progress)

By Simon Bowler Khan

1-5-24

<u>Cast:</u>	<u>Doubling:</u>
Christopher (Kit) Marlowe (20s) - poet, lover, spy	(1)
Archbishop John Whitgift (40s) - head of the Church of England	(2)
Lady Anne Havenhurst (20s) - Whitgift's daughter	(3)
Thomas Walsingham (20s) - head of The School of Night	(4)
Sir Francis Walsingham (50s) - Elizabeth's Spy Master	(5)
Robert Poley (30s)- Sir Francis' henchman	(6)
Philip Henslowe (30s) - owner of The Rose Theater	(7)
Judith Henslowe (20s) - husband of Philip	(8)
Lord Havenhurst (60s) - head of the Privy Council	(9)
Lill (20s) - a prostitute	(3)
Maunder (30s) - Whitgift's Sergeant	(6)
Eleanor (20s) - tavern owner	(8)
The Collector (male) (20s - 50s) - a body collector	(2)
Thomas Kyd (20s) - a writer	(7)
William Bradley (30's) - a fop	(6)
Andrew Perne (30s) - Chancellor	(5)
Soldier (20s)	(9)
Susan (20s) - a maid	(3)
Sir Walter Raleigh (30s) - statesman, captain, pirate	(7)
Thomas Harriot (30s) - scientist	(6)
Various: Crowd 1 and 2, Frizer	
20 characters, 15 male, 5 female. With doubling - 9 actors (6 male, 3 female)	

Running Time: 120 minutes. The dialogue should be quick and snappy, so this play runs faster than plays of similar length. Time and place: London, England late 1500s

Synopsis: Playwright Christopher Marlowe is the most celebrated writer in England and a member of the School of Atheism, a secret society of intellectuals. His increasingly provocative plays draw the attention of Archbishop Whitgift, who begins a campaign of censorship to destroy the School and Marlowe.

Sets: A tavern (chairs and tables), Whitgift's office (a desk and a crucifix), a bedroom (a four post bed), Marlowe's apartment (one desk, two beds), Rose Theater stage, Rose Theater office (a desk and chair), Durham House (a candelabra and portrait), London street (a doorway and a wall), Parliament corridor (columns and flag), Tower jail cell (manacles and rack), dockside (crates).

Author Bio: Simon produced documentaries for Channel 4 and The World Bank, the mockumentary feature film *'Man of the Year'*, and multiple shows for the BBC, ABC, PBS, Discovery, Bravo, among others. He has written several award-winning plays.

Awards

Writemovies Play Writing Winner,
Innovasian Writing Initiative Grand Prize,
The Red List #1 Historical Stage Play,
London Playwrights Award,
Dramatists Guild End of Play Readings,
New Works of Merit Honorable Mention,
Screencraft Stage Play Finalist, American Community Theater New Play Finalist, Dramatists
Guild National Virtual Fellowship Semifinalist, 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,

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

"Engaging and emotionally satisfying. The central character of Marlowe is irresistibly compelling, brilliant and fearless, sardonic and kind but without one single speck of self-preservation in his soul. The play is well structured, never flagging in pace but always taking the time to focus on its characters. The writing and dialogue itself has an innate poetry to it." Screencraft

"There's an insatiable appetite for Marlowe and Shakespeare, especially when it's as strong as this one in character, story, and dialogue." WeScreenplay

"A strong exploration of the almost-mythical ambiguity around Christopher Marlowe's fall and death. From the play within a play to gothic portents of Kit's fate through the role of the Collector and ominous weather—heighten this drama while mirroring the style of plays from the time. This effectively creates a sense of life imitating art and vice versa." Austin Film Festival

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ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

At rise, an empty stage, except for a sign that reads 'The Fox Tavern' over a doorway. A man sings...

COLLECTOR (OFF STAGE)

*You gods that guide the ghosts
And souls, of them that fled,
Send sobs, send sighs, send grievous groans,
And strike poor Panthea dead.*

Enter a figure in a black cloak and a macabre beaked mask, wheeling a cart piled high and covered with a blood stained sheet. He wears a black gown with a garland of flowers around his neck. He continues singing..

COLLECTOR

*Abradad, poor Abradad!
My spirit with thine shall lie.
Come death, alas, O death most sweet,
For now I crave to die.*

He stops the cart, rings a bell, and shouts out.

COLLECTOR

Hear ye, hear ye! The city council will pay a shilling to haul your dead. Don't let them rot in the street. Sixpence for a child. Give your loved ones a proper Christian burial.

A blistered arm falls out from under the sheet. He tucks it back under.

COLLECTOR

*(continues singing) No grief is like to mine,
Which naught but death can 'suage.
My help is hurt; my weal is woe;
My rest is ruthless rage.*

He turns to us, the audience, and puts the garland of flowers to his face.

COLLECTOR

The stench of death hangs in the air, sticks to your throat like mold, as the plague spreads through England. They believed their prayers'd save them, (*laughs*) ha, they never had a chance.

He rolls his shoulders and stretches and groans.

COLLECTOR

Oh dear, tis strange days indeed, the nation divided, Catholic and Anglican at each other's throats, while the nations vie for The New World.

He huddles tight and blows into his clasped hands.

COLLECTOR

Now winter bites and food is scarce with the Spanish War and the church clamping down. Whatever resentments we have, we keep to ourselves, but here in London a few voices rise, namely Kit Marlowe, who in a few short years has conquered the London stage, his plays heralded, and his star shines brighter than any writer before him.

Enter Christopher 'Kit' Marlowe (20s), long black hair, blazing eyes, wearing a black and gold thread waistcoat.

COLLECTOR

Ah, it's the playwright fellow.

KIT

What monstrosity are you?

COLLECTOR

No monster, sir, just a man.

KIT

Men are monsters behind their masking smiles.

COLLECTOR

Aye, sir, for there's no animal as bad as us.

KIT

So they say.

COLLECTOR

You don't believe it?

KIT

I believe what I see, not what I'm told.

The Collector takes the mask off. He is so weather beaten and ragged it's hard to tell how old he is.

KIT

(recognizes) I know you, but it's been a few years since we last met.

COLLECTOR

Aye, sir, and look at what you've become, the talk of the town.

KIT

I've made my mark.

COLLECTOR

More than that, sir, you're the big man of the London stage. What is it, four plays?

KIT

(proudly) Five.

COLLECTOR

Tis a string of pearls you wrote.

KIT

I have my detractors.

COLLECTOR

Ah, yes, your 'controversies', but personally, I love *Tamburlaine*, one and two, and *Dido*, and *The Massacre at Paris*, I saw that one several times over.

KIT

Thank you, you're very kind.

COLLECTOR

But perhaps you should leave London.

KIT

Why so, at the height of my fame?

COLLECTOR

Fame comes and goes, sir, but we only live life once, and there are two hundred dead, a thousand infected, and it'll be twice more by the full moon.

KIT

The plague again?

COLLECTOR

Aye, sir, another wave.

KIT

God in heaven!

COLLECTOR

Seems to me God's given up.

KIT

You're an interesting man. Do have you no greater ambition than to collect the dead?

COLLECTOR

I worked in an convent once, but found it more like a prison.

KIT

And now?

COLLECTOR

My walls are the trees and my ceiling the sky. No church for me. Speaking of which, have you seen this? *(gives Kit a pamphlet)*

KIT

(reads) "God is dead... The church moribund.... religion outmoded." *(worried)* Where did you find it?

COLLECTOR

Plastered on the church walls in Covent Garden. Look at the bottom.

KIT

(reads) Signed 'Tamburlaine'.

COLLECTOR

Yours?

KIT

Of course not, tis some fraud to discredit me. Did you see who posted it?

COLLECTOR

No, sirrah, but Maunder was asking questions.

KIT

Maunder?

COLLECTOR

The Bishop's man.

KIT

What kind of questions?

COLLECTOR

About your reputation for whores and wine and such.

KIT

(worried) What did you say?

COLLECTOR

That you seemed a decent Christian fellow.

KIT

"Blessed are the righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

COLLECTOR

The Gospel of Matthew.

KIT

You know your bible.

COLLECTOR

Bits and pieces.

He goes to the side of stage, where there is a dead body.
He drags it to the cart. It is a young girl, blood splattered
over her clothes, her skin blistered 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

(hoists the dead girl onto the cart) Suffered horrible, she did, puss filled blisters, burning fevers, vomiting blood.

KIT

And died so young.

COLLECTOR

There's no rhyme or reason.

KIT

And what of sin?

COLLECTOR

Murder one they call it a sin, murder a thousand they call you a king.

KIT

Where will you take her?

COLLECTOR

To the church yard, they pay a shilling a corpse, "to save their souls" they say, but it's a quick blessing and 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

No heaven?

COLLECTOR

If you want heaven look to Nature.

KIT

And hell?

COLLECTOR

(laughs) Other people.

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)* One more thing. Keep an eye on your enemies.

KIT

Why say you such?

COLLECTOR

Tis treacherous times we live in.

KIT

I will remember it. Thank you, sirrah.

Enter Thomas Walsingham (20s), poised, well dressed.

KIT

Thomas, you're late.

THOMAS

Sorry, business to attend.

KIT

Come, I'm buying.

THOMAS

(sarcastic) Miracle of miracles. Kit Marlowe paying.

KIT

Now, now, Thomas, sheath your cynicism.

THOMAS

Tis well earned.

KIT

You've been more than generous, my friend, but I pay my own way now.

THOMAS

Good, because a bottomless well of beer would not quell your thirst.

KIT

But one beer will calm you. You're all... jagged.

THOMAS

(deadly serious) We believe the school is being spied on.

KIT

By who?

THOMAS

Listen, *(he pulls a scroll from his jacket and reads)* "By order of the Church, be it known that certain personages throughout the realm insult the truth of the Anglican faith."

KIT

There's a paradox, "true faith".

THOMAS

(continues reading) "These excesses will be severely punished." Whitgift expunges Catholic and Puritan alike.

KIT

Fuck him, we'll not be silenced, will we, Thomas?

Marlowe and Thomas enter the tavern.

COLLECTOR

(rings a bell and calls out) By order of the council. A shilling a corpse. Sixpence for a child. Don't let 'em rot. We'll give 'em a proper Christian burial.

He wheels his cart off stage. A church bell tolls in the distance.

SCENE TWO

A simple tavern, a few tables and chairs, and the bar.
Scraggy Tom Kyd (20s), is at one of the tables with a mug of beer, a quill, and an ink bottle, feverishly writing in a notebook. A buxom bar lady, Eleanor (30s), cleans glasses and sings *Greensleeves*...

ELEANOR

*Alas, my love, you do me wrong,
To cast me off discourteously...*

She lifts Kyd's arm, who is absorbed in his writing, and wipes the table.

ELEANOR

Are you gonna pay for that? (*re: his drink*)

KYD

I'm waiting for my friend.

ELEANOR

*(carries on cleaning) (sings) For I have loved you well and long,
Delighting in your company.*

Enter Marlowe with Thomas.

KIT/ELEANOR (TOGETHER)

*(joins in singing with her) ... Your vows you've broken, like my heart
Oh, why did you so enrapture me?
Now I remain in a world apart,
But my heart remains in captivity.*

KIT

The euphony of your voice shames the sweet dulcimer, Eleanor.

ELEANOR

And your silver tongue won't hook you free beer, if that's what you're fishing for.

KIT

Worry not, fair maiden, I wouldn't dream of it.

ELEANOR

(nods to Thomas) My Lord Walsingham.

THOMAS

Eleanor.

KIT

(approaches her, looks down into her cleavage) What's this I spy?

ELEANOR

(looks down) What?

With a sleight of hand, he pulls a coin from her bosom.

KIT

A half guinea. That should cover my chit.

ELEANOR

(laughs, takes the coin) Get away with you and your stage tricks. And I'll take that, if you don't mind.

She points to his sword.

KIT

But a man unarmed is as good a naked.

ELEANOR

House rules.

KIT

Fine. *(He hands is sword to her.)*

ELEANOR

Right, I got work to do. *(She puts the sword on the bar.)*

KIT

Tis an unjust world where the poor sweat, while the rich idle, eh, Thomas?

THOMAS

If the world were not such, then who'd be your patron?

KIT

Ah yes, the patron and the ever-beholden writer. For what separates one man from another but title and wealth?

THOMAS

Your reasoning sounds of jealousy.

KIT

Because where your wealth lands you privilege, I have to climb the ladder of respectability.

THOMAS

(indignant) I work for my living.

KIT

Cavorting at court is hardly work.

THOMAS

But rooting out interlopers isn't? You know better.

KIT

Touche. I stand corrected.

Eleanor approaches.

ELEANOR

So what will it be?

KIT

Two of your finest brandy.

ELEANOR

And his bill? *(re: Kyd)*

KIT

Include it. *(to Kyd)* When you've sold your *Hamlet*, you can buy.

Enter William Bradley (30s), a staggering drunken fop dressed in soft velvet.

ELEANOR

Ah, Mister Bradley, Lill's not quite ready yet, sir.

BRADLEY

Then bring me ale, woman. (*flops down at a table*)

ELEANOR

I'll be with you in a minute.

She exits.

KIT

(*to Thomas*) You were saying that Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Bacon, and Thomas Harriot are afraid of me?

THOMAS

Not afraid as such, but...

KIT

Then what?

THOMAS

You disturb.

KIT

It's time we stop fearing sanctimonious priests and their superstitions.

THOMAS

And so you provoke and stand out like a nail.

KIT

That's the whole point, to jigger people awake.

THOMAS

Your *Edward the Second* portrayed the king as a lover of men!

KIT

Because, according to Holinshead's history, he was, and if you think that disturbed, my next play shall shock the shit out of them.

THOMAS

(serious) Kit, listen to me, the bishop's regained Her Majesty's favor.

KIT

Then the queen's a fool.

THOMAS

(looks around nervous) Sssh! Keep your voice down.

KIT

Why?

THOMAS

Because what you write in plays is one thing, but your words off stage are dangerous.

KIT

Like?

THOMAS

(mimics Marlowe) "The Pope's an asshole through which God shits." *(Marlowe laughs)*
It's not funny.

KIT

At least I say it without shame, whereas you skulk like some wraith in the shadows.

THOMAS

Where it is safe.

They take a seat at the table with Kyd, who is still writing intently.

KIT

(to Kyd) Tom, meet Sir Francis' nephew, the honorable Lord Walsingham.

KYD

(to Thomas) Kit *(stutters)* t... talks of you often. *(puts his hand out)*

THOMAS

I don't shake hands.

KIT

Why not?

THOMAS

Tis a theory about the transmission of the plague.

KIT

Based on?

THOMAS

Francis Bacon says it's spread by touch.

KIT

(laughs) And not by Jews or the devil, as the church would have us believe?

THOMAS

And you are?

KYD

(stutters) T...Thomas Kyd.

KIT

My roommate and fellow playwright.

THOMAS

(to Kyd) Ah yes, your *Spanish Tragedy* was enthralling, and I particularly liked the play-within-a-play used to trap the murderer. Very clever.

KYD

Thank you, my lord. Stories of dysfunction and betrayal are much in vogue.

THOMAS

I think it's the best new play since...

KIT

Tamburlaine.

THOMAS

(sarcastic) Obviously not to your Homeric standards.

KIT

Yes, well, mine aren't just plot, they have poetry.

KYD

Iambic-fucking-pen... (*stutters*) t... tameter!

Bradley calls over from his table.

BRADLEY

Tamburlaine is over-stuffed and godless. It should be banned.

KIT

(*stands up*) Who are you?

KYD

Don't bother, he's not worth the (*stutters*) t... trouble.

Across the room Eleanor approaches Bradley with a beer.

BRADLEY

Where's Lill?

ELEANOR

Be patient, Mister Bradley, she'll be down in a minute.

BRADLEY

It's not professional to keep a gentleman waiting.

ELEANOR

Don't worry, she'll make it up to you, she's a very imaginative girl.

She mimics giving fellatio. Bradley smiles lasciviously and glugs his beer.

At the other table, Eleanor brings their drinks.

ELEANOR

There you are boys.

KIT

(*takes a sip*) Mmm, nice warm ale.

THOMAS

(*stands up*) I must go.

KIT

You're always running off mysteriously.

THOMAS

Her Majesty's service.

KIT

Well then, send her my regards.

THOMAS

(ironic) Ha. Ha. I'll see you anon.

Thomas and Marlowe hug and KISS. Kyd looks away embarrassed.

KIT

(aside) Trust me, my friend, I can be discreet.

THOMAS

(aside) Try. *(to Kyd)* A pleasure to meet you Tom. Perhaps I could help you gain a commission for your next play.

KYD

I'd be honored, my lord.

Thomas exits. Kyd scowls.

KIT

(to Kyd) You disapprove?

KYD

A man who's way is paved by family wealth cannot be *(stutters)* t... trusted.

KIT

You and I are from humble backgrounds, but if we're to rise we must embrace those above us.

KYD

You mean sell ourselves to the highest bidder?

Enter Lill (20s), in a revealing dress and lurid makeup.

LILL

Evenin' Kit.

BRADLEY

(stands and wobbles) There you are, Lill. I've been waiting.

LILL

I'll be with you soon, Bradley. Finish your beer.

KIT

(to Lill) Tom was saying that money corrupts. What think you?

LILL

I wouldn't know. I never had any.

KIT

He thinks there are two choices: rotten and rich, or pure and poor. Which would you be?

LILL

I'd be rotten and rich.

KIT

Because?

LILL

If rich you can repent, but if poor you're screwed.

KIT

(raises his glass) Darling Lill, you have the wit of a Cynic.

Bradley approaches.

BRADLEY

I'm waiting.

LILL

Then wait a bit more. I'm busy.

She sits on Marlowe's lap.

BRADLEY

(rising anger) I'll not take second place to this... *(indicates Marlowe)* peasant. Come, I've paid in advance and your time is mine.

SNATCHES Lill from Marlowe.

LILL

(fends him off) Get your grubby 'ands off me!

BRADLEY

Come with me, wench.

KIT

(stands up) The lady said wait.

BRADLEY

She's no lady, she's a harlot, and I'll do with her as I please.

Marlowe stands face to face with Bradley.

KIT

(to Bradley) You bully a woman, but how about a man?

BRADLEY

I'm more than happy to teach you a lesson.

ELEANOR

Please, Mister Bradley, I beg you, not in here.

KIT

(to Bradley) Let's take this outside.

BRADLEY

Lead the way.

Marlowe heads to the door. Bradley follows, pulls a hidden DAGGER, and makes a THRUST.

KYD

Kit!

Marlowe turns and BARELY MISSES Bradley's blade.

Conniving bastard!

KIT

Bradley LUNGES, swiping his knife. Marlowe PUSHES a table over to block him.

ELEANOR

Lill, come quick, fetch the constable.

Lill and Eleanor exit. Bradley RUSHES Marlowe and NIPS him in the arm.

KIT

Ahr,you fiend!

BRADLEY

Now I will kill thee.

He THRUSTS drunkenly, but Marlowe side-steps, CRASHING over a table.

BRADLEY

Stand still, varlet.

Bradley SWIPES. Marlowe ducks and weaves.

KYD

Kit! Catch!

Kyd , at the bar, THROWS Marlowe's sword. Marlowe CATCHES it. Bradley pauses.

KIT

Come, rogue, now I'll show you how to fight.

BRADLEY

(slurs) I'll teach you yet, you cock sparrow.

Bradley LUNGES into Marlowe and they FALL into a heap.

Marlowe twists and they roll across the floor, Marlowe beneath the man's drunken weight.

KYD

Kit?

Bradley yelps then becomes strangely STILL.

KYD

Kit, are you all right?

KIT

(from under Bradley) Get him off me.

Kyd drags Bradley, who turns over, his own sword through his chest.

KYD

Christ, he stabbed himself.

KIT

Bloody idiot.

Marlowe scrambles up, his arm bleeding.

KYD

You're wounded!

KIT

Just a scratch. What of him?

Kyd prods Bradley, who WHEEZES hideously. Kyd jumps back.

KYD

He's alive.

Kit puts the back of his palm to Bradley's mouth.

KIT

No, just expelling air. He's gone.

KYD

(panicked) We must flee.

KIT

Wait, less haste.

KYD

Let's go, before they come.

KIT

To flee is to admit guilt.

KYD

(terrified) I won't go to jail, not again. I couldn't t *(stutters)* ...t.. take it.

KIT

You won't, it'll be my word, you were no part. Be calm, Tom.

Maunder, a burly sergeant at arms, enters, sword drawn,
followed by Eleanor and Lill.

MAUNDER

You two, stand back.

Marlowe and Kyd raise their hands.

MAUNDER

Who started it?

KIT

He attacked me.

MAUNDER

And who are you?

KIT

The one who felled him.

MAUNDER

(to Kyd) What about you?

KYD

I... I had nothing do with it.

KIT

(to Maunder) I fought the rascal alone.

MAUNDER

(to Eleanor) What say you?

ELEANOR

I didn't see nothing, sir.

MAUNDER

(to Lill) And you?

LILL

Nor I, but Kit's no killer.

KIT

Thank you, Lill. *(to Maunder)* You should know I am under Sir Francis Walsingham's protection.

MAUNDER

(impressed) The Queen's spy master?

KIT

(proud) The same.

MAUNDER

Where is he? *(looks around)* I don't see him about.

KIT

He's obviously not here now.

MAUNDER

So you're not under his protection are you? What you are, is under arrest. *(grabs Marlowe)* Now move along.

KIT

(to Kyd) Tell Thomas I'm taken.

MAUNDER

(to Kyd and Lill) You two get the body out for the collector.

LILL

That's not my job.

MAUNDER

(barks) Just do it or I'll arrest you as accessories. *(to Marlowe)* You. Out.

Marlowe exits, with the Maunder's sword at his back.
Lill and Kyd approach Bradley's body.

LILL

Hold on a minute. *(digs out a few coins from Bradley's pocket)* Here you go, Ellie, your cut.

She throws a coin to Eleanor.

KYD

You'd rob the dead?

LILL

He don't need it. Here.

She gives Kyd a coin. He ponders.

KYD

It seems wrong.

LILL

Please yourself.

She withdraws her hand, but Kyd quickly takes the coin.

KYD

What will they do to Kit? Do you think they'll rack him?

LILL

He's got rich friends, he'll be fine, but this, this is a shame. *(re: Bradley)*

She picks up Bradley's leg.

KYD

He was a drunken lecherous pig.

LILL

All men are lecherous pigs, but he's one less customer. Come on, grab his foot, maybe we can get a shilling for his body.

They drag Bradley off.

SCENE THREE

The Privy Council. A large table, a coat of arms above, and a flag of the English cross. Enter Whitgift (50s), hawkish, wearing bishop's robes, followed by Maunder.

MAUNDER

(hands over a letter) Your Grace, the report on Thomas Walsingham's school.

WHITGIFT

In summary?

MAUNDER

They discuss the heretical notions of Giovanni Bruno, who claims the universe is infinite and that the earth orbits the sun.

WHITGIFT

The Vatican deems Bruno a heretic, one of the few things we agree on. Do you have proof of these discussions?

MAUNDER

Only hearsay, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

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.

Enter Lord Havenhurst (60s), a dried branch of a man,
and Sir Francis Walsingham (50s), neatly trimmed.
Maunder exits.

WHITGIFT

Speak of the devil. Lord Havenhurst, good afternoon.

HAVENHURST

The Puritans petition for the release of their priest.

WHITGIFT

His case is being reviewed.

HAVENHURST

It's been three years and will incite rebellion unless resolved swiftly.

SIR FRANCIS

Some are fleeing to the New World to start a new nation, independent of England.

WHITGIFT

Good riddance.

SIR FRANCIS

They are Englishmen.

WHITGIFT

They are zealots and open our borders to foreign miscreants and nonconformists.

They sit at the large table.

SIR FRANCIS

England is not the tyranny of Spain and prides itself on being a sanctity for the oppressed of Europe.

WHITGIFT

England is for English Anglicans, not dissenters, and that is why I introduced the Code of Morality.

SIR FRANCIS

Push it too far and you'll have the disaster of Calvin's reformation.

WHITGIFT

A worthy risk to protect the Holy Church.

Enter Maunder with Marlowe handcuffed.

MAUNDER

My Lords, Your Grace, I present Christopher Marlowe.

KIT

(bows) Sir Francis.

WHITGIFT

You two are familiar?

SIR FRANCIS

We've crossed paths.

WHITGIFT

(suspicious) I see.

Maunder hands a report to Lord Havenhurst.

MAUNDER

It's all there, my Lord.

HAVENHURST

(scans the report and regards Marlowe) You appear before this council for the murder of a Mister William Bradley. Who is he?

SIR FRANCIS

I believe he's a bankrupt merchant.

HAVENHURST

So of little importance.

SIR FRANCIS

I'm sure he'd disagree.

HAVENHURST

But none-the-less tis murder.

KIT

I did not kill him.

WHITGIFT

You deny the charge?

KIT

He was a drunken fop and fell onto his own sword.

WHITGIFT

Were there witnesses?

MAUNDER

Three souls, my lord. A writer, a whore, and a barmaid.

WHITGIFT

Hardly reliable.

KIT

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

WHITGIFT

Yes, well, *(to Havenhurst)* the rise in murders is a plague unto itself, but the new Code will cleanse the city of these drunken rakes. *(to Marlowe)* You shall be punished accordingly.

KIT

Ben Johnson killed the actor Gabriel Spencer, and yet Ben is free.

HAVENHURST

It was a duel, a legal distinction you do not fulfil.

SIR FRANCIS

(to Havenhurst) I remind you, my lord, that Marlowe did us great service in the revealing of Mary's conspirators.

HAVENHURST

Yes, he did play a part, for which we are grateful.

KIT

Thank you, my lord.

WHITGIFT

But that does not obviate him from the law. I can smell the bad apples and he's rotten to the core. He must be punished accordingly.

SIR FRANCIS

I suggest he be put on probation.

HAVENHURST

For the sake of expediency, I agree. You're out-voted, Archbishop. Marlowe, you may leave.

KIT

(bows) Thank you, my lord. *(exits)*

HAVENHURST

(to Whitgift and Sir Francis) Our immediate concern is the Spanish fleet blockaded in the Gironde estuary. *(to Sir Francis)* How long can we keep them pinned there?

SIR FRANCIS

A few months, until they gather their forces, which we estimate at three hundred frigates.

HAVENHURST

Jesus Christ! *(to Whitgift)* Any response from the Pope?

WHITGIFT

Clement wishes England to fall and continues to encourage Spain.

HAVENHURST

We must accelerate the building of our ships. We'll have to levy a tax.

SIR FRANCIS

The people are already much pressed.

HAVENHURST

Then we'll tax the church.

WHITGIFT

(laughs) The Church does not pay tax.

HAVENHURST

It will now.

WHITGIFT

I understood we were on the same side, but I see now your true colors. Good day to you both. *(exits)*

HAVENHURST

Religion hath made him mad. You should warn Thomas.

SIR FRANCIS

He believes his school is protected by Raleigh.

HAVENHURST

Raleigh bends with the wind.

They exit.

Lights down to the Collector on side of stage.

COLLECTOR

(sings) My prime of youth is but a frost of cares, My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,
My crop of corn is but a field of tares, And all my good is but vain hope of gain;
The day is past, and yet I saw no sun, And now I live, and now my life is done ...

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

SCENE FOUR

Durham House. A ballroom lit in a magical aura of candles and tapers. On the walls maps of "the Americas" and a large pyramid in a circle with an eye at the pinnacle with the words "NUVOS ORDO SECLORUM" in a banner beneath, which we recognize as the image on the modern US dollar bill.

Around a grand table - Sir Walter Raleigh, puffing on a pipe, Thomas Harriot, and Anne Whitgift (20s), elegantly dressed and free-flowing hair.

RALEIGH

Mr. Harriot, I'm honored to present our benefactor, Lady Anne Havenhurst.

HARRIOT

It's an honor to meet you in person, Lady Havenhurst, we rarely see you out.

ANNE

Discretion is the better part of valor.

HARRIOT

Aye, we live in dangerous times.

ANNE

I hear your maps and navigations have brought us great wealth.

HARRIOT

We each do our part.

RALEIGH

As you know, Mister Harriot accompanied me to the New World, where he spent considerable time with the Algonquian Indians.

ANNE

Is it true they are savages?

HARRIOT

Quite the contrary, they have councils of 'elected' representatives.

ANNE

How novel.

HARRIOT

And what they call a 'league of nations' among the tribes.

ANNE

There's much we could learn from them.

HARRIOT

You know, I believe their civilization goes back at least ten thousand years.

ANNE

And yet the Bible says the world is but six thousand. When will we break this curse of superstition?

RALEIGH

Tis a kind of hysteria.

ANNE

Which I fear my father will use as a pretext for repression in England.

RALEIGH

And yet you associate with us?

ANNE

I will not be ruled by any man's dogma.

On the other side of the stage enter Marlowe and Thomas.

THOMAS

(aside) Welcome to The School of Night, our humble academy of free thought.

RALEIGH

(notices Thomas and Marlowe) Thomas, who's this?

THOMAS

Sir Walter, Mister Harriot, Lady Anne, I'd like to introduce Christopher Marlowe for your consideration.

KIT

(bows to Anne) My lady.

ANNE

(smiles) Master Marlowe.

RALEIGH

(puffs on his pipe, exuding a cloud of smoke) Our members are the most eminent astrologers, scientists, and philosophers. What do you bring to the table, besides swordsmanship?

ANNE

His plays are most excellent.

RALEIGH

Plays?

ANNE

You must have seen them, Sir Walter? *Tamburlaine. Queen Dido.*

THOMAS

Edward the Second.

RALEIGH

(puffs on his pipe) I suppose I've been in the New World too long. *(Marlowe coughs)*
Does this offend you?

KIT

No, Sir Walter.

RALEIGH

Tis a weed I brought back from Virginia. The Indians call it tobacco. *(takes another puff)*

ANNE

(to Marlowe) What are you working on presently?

KIT

Faustus, the story of a German necromancer .

RALEIGH

Risky.

KIT

But already a popular legend.

ANNE

And how does this *Faustus* end?

KIT

He's taken by the devil.

HARRIOT

Hardly the sort of superstition we want to promote.

KIT

That part is merely a parable to appease the censor.

ANNE

And the real story?

KIT

Man's unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

ANNE

It sounds intriguing. *(to Raleigh)* I think he'll be an excellent addition to the school.

RALEIGH

(to Marlowe) What family are you from?

KIT

My father is a shoemaker.

RALEIGH

(laughs) A cobbler! How charming, *(to Anne)* but hardly of our class.

ANNE

I was also humbly born, Sir Walter, as I believe Mister Harriot was too.

HARRIOT

A scholarship got me to Oxford.

ANNE

I don't believe the school should reject any just because they are low born. Is it not intelligence we celebrate?

RALEIGH

Very well, point taken, but the other members will have to ratify.

ANNE

Of course.

RALEIGH

(to Marlowe) And what of your recent arrest?

KIT

You know of that?

RALEIGH

Thomas keeps me informed.

Marlowe casts a wary look at Thomas.

KIT

I'm on probation.

RALEIGH

So under government watch?

KIT

No, Sir Walter, tis a technicality. If I hadn't intervened it my friend would be dead.

RALEIGH

I see, then twas nobly fought. *(a beat)* We look forward to your... insights.

KIT

I'm most grateful and will strive not to disappoint.

Marlowe bows.

SCENE FIVE

Lights up on The Rose Theater stage, parts of the Faustus set erected - a desk, jars of fetuses, and a globe.

Henslowe, wearing thick make-up and in the star sequined gown of Dr. Faustus, reads a manuscript, going over his lines. Judith reads a text next to him.

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command...* Prompt.

JUDITH

Emperors...

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*... emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
Nor can they raise the wind, or rend the clouds;
But his dominion that exceeds in this,
Stretcheth as far as doth...* Prompt.

JUDITH

The mind of man.

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*The mind of man.
A sound magician is a mighty god:
Here, Faustus, tire thy brains to gain a deity.
(to Judith) You have to admit it's rather magnificent.*

JUDITH

It's got a certain poetry, but is he the hero or villain?

HENSLOWE

I'm not entirely sure.

JUDITH

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

HENSLOWE

I think that's the point, my dear, it's ambiguous.

JUDITH

Then it's more a puzzle than a play.

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

JUDITH

It's past noon.

KIT

(stumbles, almost falls, but sways back up) Is it? I just got up.

JUDITH

You were 'sposed to be here three hours past.

Marlowe belches, trying not to be sick.

JUDITH

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

KIT

I apologize profusely. *(he picks up a manuscript and opens it)* Where have you got to?

JUDITH

You'd be late for your own bloody funeral. And there's a problem.

KIT

What problem?

JUDITH

Faustus. It's pagan.

KIT

So?

JUDITH

The church wants more Christian fare.

KIT

Fuck the church.

HENSLOWE

Now, now, Kit. Temper thy tongue.

KIT

(slurs) *Faustus* is the best fucking play since Sophocles.

HENSLOWE

(to Judith) It is rather good.

JUDITH

Who's side are you on?

HENSLOWE

No sides, my dear, but we need something 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 *Faustus* does have a certain sweep to it.

KIT

And the religious plays are just bloody boring.

JUDITH

How about a comedy? *Damon and Pythias*, that was funny and our actors still remember it. *(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. *Faustus* 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. *Faustus* must be seen.

JUDITH

But it's... supernatural.

KIT

As was Spencer's *Faerie Queen*, much loved by Her Majesty.

JUDITH

Because it was knights and fairies and gave no offense, where *Faustus* is all devils and necromancy.

KIT

Good, shake the audience awake.

JUDITH

You're impossible.

HENSLOWE

My dear, the *Faustus* sets are made, the actors cast, we must proceed.

JUDITH

Open your eyes, Phillip, Puritans and Catholics are being rounded up and taken God knows where, people arrested for blasphemy. The fanatics will be at our doorstep with this one, I'm telling you.

HENSLOWE

Yes, my dear, but we have a production to put on. *(to Marlowe)* Page thirty.

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

(mimics a growling devil voice) Thou traitor, *Faustus*, I arrest thy soul
For disobedience to my sovereign lord.
Revolt, or I'll in piecemeal tear thy flesh.

Henslowe picks up on Marlowe's energy and emotes...

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*Sweet Mephistopheles, entreat thy lord,
To pardon my unjust presumption...*

*And with my blood again I will confirm
My former vow I made to Lucifer.*

Judith shakes her head and makes the sign of the cross.

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

*Do it, then, quickly, with unfeigned heart,
Lest greater danger do attend thy drift.*

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*One thing, good servant, let me crave of thee,
To glut the longing of my heart's desire,—
That I might have unto my paramour
That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,
Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clean
Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,
And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer.*

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

*Faustus, this, or what else thou shalt desire,
Shall be perform'd in twinkling of an eye.*

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*(approaches Judith) Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium—
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.—
[Kisses her.]
Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!—
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helen...*

He trails off, looking at the side of stage, where Lady Anne, elegantly dressed and bejewelled, is watching with her servant, Susan (20s).

HENSLOWE

My lady. *(he bows)*

KIT

(turns and sees...) Anne.

ANNE

(to Susan) Wait here.

SUSAN

Yes, ma'am.

Anne approaches.

HENSLOWE

For what do we owe the pleasure of your company, Lady Havenhurst?

ANNE

I came to wish you luck.

HENSLOWE

We're most grateful. Will you and your husband be attending?

ANNE

His lordship says plays are for simpletons.

KIT

Then he's the fool.

ANNE

(a little stung) He is what he is.

HENSLOWE

I think what Kit means is that plays aren't everyone's cup of mead.

KIT

(to Anne) Perhaps you'd attend alone?

ANNE

It would be unbecoming for a lady of my rank, but I've read all of your plays.

KIT

(shocked and delighted) You have?

ANNE

Every one.

KIT

Did any stand out?

ANNE

I particularly liked your *Jew of Malta*. To write of a Jew is one thing, but to make him somewhat sympathetic, quite brilliant.

HENSLOWE

Forgive me, my lady, we're under great pressure to get *Faustus* up and running.

ANNE

I understand. I shan't delay you any further. Susan, fetch my carriage.

SUSAN

Yes, ma'am. (*she exits*)

HENSLOWE

Our best wishes to his Lordship.

ANNE

I'm sure it'll be another success. Goodbye, Master Marlowe.

Anne starts to leave. Marlowe follows.

KIT

Anne, wait. (*she turns back*) You didn't come to wish us luck.

ANNE

Then why am I here?

KIT

To see me.

ANNE

I think that it's by chance.

KIT

I don't believe in chance. (*pulls a crumpled pamphlet from his tunic*) 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

You think too highly of yourself.

KIT

Have I not earned it?

ANNE

Whatever intimacies we shared before I was married should be forgotten.

KIT

T’would be a kind of murder.

ANNE

How so?

KIT

To forget would kill the love within me for thee.

ANNE

Kit, you’re head is in the clouds.

KIT

And your life cannot be hemmed in by a raddled lord.

ANNE

Yes, well money can’t buy love, but it improves your bargaining position.

KIT

Well said. My lady, stay awhile, I beg you, it’s my best yet, the story of a man who’d know the secrets of the universe.

ANNE

I cannot.

KIT

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

He moves in to kiss her, she moves back.

ANNE

I hunger as you do, for there's no island lonelier than marriage, but I made a contract and I mean to keep it. *(she moves away, but Marlowe grabs her arm)* For God's sake, Kit, I won't be treated like one of your tavern whores.

Marlowe lets her go. Henslowe approaches.

HENSLOWE

I'm sorry, my Lady. Kit, we really must rehearse.

ANNE

Farewell, the best of luck to you all.

KIT

(to Anne) Not farewell, but anon.

She exits. He watches after her, smitten.

KIT

*Thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.*

JUDITH

For God's sake, Kit, she's the Bishop's daughter.

KIT

How is it that such a bastard can beget such an angel?

JUDITH

You stoke trouble with such an exploit.

A stagehand hovers with a wooden stage-knife.

HENSLOWE

No, no, not a knife, a sword, the bigger the better. *(the stagehand exits)* Anyway, back to work. *(as Faustus to Judith)* I will be Paris, and for love of thee, Instead of Troy, shall Wertenberg be sack'd; And I will combat with weak Menelaus,

*And wear thy colours on my plumed crest;
And then return to Helen for a kiss.*

Enter Ma under.

MAUNDER

(barks) Marlowe. A word.

JUDITH

For the love of God, now what?

KIT

Give me a moment.

He approaches Ma under at the side of the stage.

KIT

(impatient) Yes?

MAUNDER

You must attend Bishop Whitgift, at his office, at seven in the morrow.

KIT

I can't, I have a play to...

MAUNDER

(interrupts) And do not be late.

Ma under exits. On the other side of the stage Henslowe and Judith trade worried looks.

Marlowe approaches, sullen.

KIT

(reads as Mephistopheles) Now, Faustus, ask what thou wilt.

JUDITH

Philip?

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

Not now, dear, we must press on. *(continues)* First will I question with thee about hell.

JUDITH

(shakes her head at Henslowe) Fine, don't listen to me. You know best. *(she exits)*

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

Tell me, where is the place that men call hell?

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

*Under the heavens,
Within the bowels of these elements,
Where we are tortur'd and remain for ever:*

The Stage Hand returns with a HUGE wooden sword.

HENSLOWE

(to stagehand) Very good, and we'll need a gallon of pigs blood.

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

*Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place; (pauses as he looks to the door, nervous)*

HENSLOWE

Your mind's elsewhere. You'd best be sharp on the night. Perhaps no drink til then?

KIT

(defiant) I'll be fine. *(continues)* "for where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be:

SCENE SIX

The Bishop's office. A crucifix and the Crusader's red cross flag. Whitgift at a desk writing.

Enter Andrew Perne, (50s), gray bearded and gowned.

PERNE

John?

WHITGIFT

(looks up) Andrew.

PERNE

I hope I'm not disturbing you.

WHITGIFT

What brings you on a cold night from the comfort of home?

PERNE

I was wondering... (*cautiously*) will you be putting my name forward for the bishopry?

WHITGIFT

We've been over this a number of times.

PERNE

But I cannot just live in hope. I must have some certainty.

WHITGIFT

Is not Chancellor of Cambridge reward enough?

PERNE

Yes, of course, I don't mean to be ungrateful,

WHITGIFT

Allay your fears, Andrew, I will make you a bishop yet.

Whitgift continues with his papers. Perne walks behind and rubs Whitgift's shoulders.

WHITGIFT

Oh, I'm as stiff as a tree.

PERNE

You work too much, John.

WHITGIFT

No, we must be yet more vigilant. Lord Havenhurst has 'sueded the queen to tax our church.

PERNE

God forbid!

WHITGIFT

There'll be no peace until we're free from state control, that's why we must align with the queen..

Perne runs his hands down from Whitgift's neck to his chest.

PERNE

Forget all that for a moment.

Whitgift puts his hand on Perne's. Their hands embrace.

WHITGIFT

Your touch quells an ache.

PERNE

As does yours, John.

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

PERNE

Christ in heaven!

WHITGIFT

Don't be alarmed, Andrew, tis but a Spanish spy.

PERNE

I shall pray for his soul.

WHITGIFT

(shocked) You'd pray for a Catholic?

PERNE

We were both Catholic once.

WHITGIFT

Until we saw the true light.

The man GROANS pitifully. Perne grimaces.

WHITGIFT

You've not heard a man being tortured?

PERNE

Thank God, no.

WHITGIFT

As the flesh burns an intimacy grows between torturer and victim. There's a... passion to it that ... (*touches Perne's hand*) only lovers know.

Enter Maunder. Perne quickly moves away.

WHITGIFT

(*irritated*) Yes?

MAUNDER

Christopher Marlowe's here.

WHITGIFT

Send him in. Excuse me, Andrew, and don't wait up.

Perne exits, passing Marlowe entering.

KIT

You summoned me, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

Indeed. You were a student of divinity, were you not?

KIT

Yes, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

At the church's expense?

KIT

I won a scholarship, yes.

WHITGIFT

Which you squandered on translations 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!

KIT

Filth? All I did was translate the finest Roman poetry, and what if we were to translate not just prayers, but the whole Bible into English, so people could construe the truth for themselves.

WHITGIFT

The ordinary person cannot comprehend the subtlety of scripture, which is why they turn to us, and it's our obligation, nay, our privilege, to be their shepherds.

KIT

Have they no free will?

WHITGIFT

We're not here to discuss theology. I'm well aware of your espionage for Sir Francis.

KIT

Your Grace, you mistake me for...

WHITGIFT

(interrupts) I know of you exploits in France, discovering the agents of Mary Queen of the Scots.

KIT

Yes, Your Grace, I am merely a writer now.

WHITGIFT

(snaps) You will report to me on Thomas' School.

KIT

But Your Grace, I cannot just attend at will.

WHITGIFT

Then inveigle your way into their confidence.

KIT

And if I refuse?

WHITGIFT

You shall be imprisoned, but if you agree you may remain free to produce your 'entertainments'. You have a week.

KIT

But, Your Grace, I'm in the midst of putting on a production.

WHITGIFT

I expect your first report by the next Sabbath. Now get out.

KIT

(defeated) Yes, Your Grace.

Marlowe exits.

Whitgift kneels before the crucifix and prays.

WHITGIFT

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from false choices, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

He makes the sign of the cross.

A church bell TOLLS in the distance.

SCENE SEVEN

Spot light on a table at the tavern. Marlowe writing.

KIT

*Oft have I levell'd, and at last have learn'd
That peril is the chiefest way to happiness,
And resolution honour's fairest aim.
What glory is there in a common good,
That hangs for every peasant to achieve?
That like I best, that flies beyond my reach.
Set me to scale the high Pyramides,
And thereon set the diadem of France;
I'll either rend it with my nails to naught,
Or mount the top with my aspiring wings,
Although my downfall be the deepest hell.
For this I wake, when others think I sleep;*

*For this I wait, that scorn attendance else;
 For this, my quenchless thirst, whereon I build,
 Hath often pleaded kindred to the king;
 For this, this head, this heart, this hand, and sword,
 Contrives, imagines, and fully executes,
 Matters of import aimed at by many,
 Yet understood by none;
 For this, hath heaven engender'd me of earth;
 For this, this earth sustains my body's weight,
 And with this weight I'll counterpoise a crown,
 Or with seditions weary all the world;*

Lights up on Eleanor behind the bar, Lill leaning on it.

ELEANOR

Business slow, dear?

LILL

They're all scared of getting the sickness.

ELEANOR

You're better off without 'em.

LILL

But a girl's got to eat.

ELEANOR

Come work for me, I'll see you're all right.

LILL

I can make more on the game.

ELEANOR

But it'll be the death of you.

Marlowe looks up from his writing.

KIT

Lill, will you spread a rumor for me?

LILL

What rumor?

KIT

Some of your clients are members of Parliament, are they not?

LILL

That's supposed to be secret.

KIT

And I shall keep it, but let it be known that Andrew Perne, the Chancellor of Cambridge, is in unholy relations with Bishop Whitgift.

LILL

Is it true?

KIT

Does it matter?

LILL

Why would you want to mess with him? They hang men for less.

He holds out a coin. She snatches it and bites it.

LILL

Seems real enough.

KIT

So will?

LILL

(pockets the coin) Fine, consider it done.

Enter Thomas.

THOMAS

Kit, there are you. I've been looking all over. Where were you?

KIT

Oh, running errands.

THOMAS

My man saw you in Lambeth.

KIT

Ah, yes, I was purveying the quills at the scrivener's on Marsh Lane.

THOMAS

Akin to the Archbishop's palace.

KIT

Is it? Yes, I suppose it is.

THOMAS

Did he approach you?

KIT

Whitgift? No, why?

THOMAS

He hopes to snare us through you.

KIT

(laughs) No fear there.

THOMAS

Yes, well, be circumspect from here on in. We'll talk anon.

KIT

Before you go, perhaps you could lend me another twenty?

THOMAS

Weren't you paid for *Faustus*?

KIT

Not until it's run.

THOMAS

And what of the twenty I gave you?

KIT

(laughs) Beth and her sister, 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

You must quell your desires.

KIT

You sound like my father.

THOMAS

A practical man.

KIT

A shoemaker bound to a bench.

THOMAS

I will not lend you more.

KIT

Are you enjoying this, Thomas, debasing me in my hour of need?

THOMAS

Until my elder brother dies, my debts mount as yours do.

KIT

But then you'll be rich and I'll still be climbing.

THOMAS

Speaking of which, Henslowe tells me Lady Anne came to the Rose.

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

Be careful, that's all.

KIT

Fear not, her heart's not mine, tis still yours.

Marlowe pulls him for a hug.

KIT

Why so stiff? It's like hugging a tree.

THOMAS

(pulls away) I'll see you anon.

Thomas exits. Eleanor approaches Marlowe.

ELEANOR

What's his beef? I thought you were friends.

KIT

We are. Another beer please, Eleanor.

Lights down to a spot as he returns to his writing.

KIT

*Ah, fair Zenocrate!--divine Zenocrate!
Fair is too foul an epithet for thee,--
With hair dishevell'd wip'st thy watery cheeks;
And, like to Flora in her morning's pride,
Shaking her silver tresses in the air,
Rain'st on the earth resolved pearl in showers,
And sprinklest sapphires on thy shining face,
Where Beauty, mother to the Muses, sits,
And comments volumes with her ivory pen,
Taking instructions from thy flowing eyes;*

Lights down to the Collector on the side of the stage.

COLLECTOR

(to us) To lie like a cur or dare to speak truth, that is the question? Which is the wiser?
One brings ruin, the other disrepute, but to survive we must thread the needle of both,
and by doing so risk all.

(sings) *Good friends and companions, come join me in rhyme
Come lift up your voices in chorus with mine
Lets drink and be merry, all grief to refrain
For we may and might never all meet here again.*

He exits.

SCENE EIGHT

One side of the stage a bedroom with a curtained four-poster bed, and a bedroom door. From behind the closed curtains...

KIT (HIDDEN)

Come with me and be my love,

ANNE (HIDDEN)

(panting) Don't stop.

KIT (HIDDEN)

And we will (moaning) all the pleasures prove,

ANNE (HIDDEN)

Ah. *(about to climax)* Keep going.

KIT (HIDDEN)

The hills and fields and (moans) valleys...

ANNE (HIDDEN)

Oh, deep in there. Harder. Harder.

KIT (HIDDEN)

Or steepy mountain (climaxes) yields...

ANNE (HIDDEN)

(climaxes) Aahhhhh!

KIT (HIDDEN)

(climaxes) Oh.

ANNE (HIDDEN)

You must go.

KIT (HIDDEN)

Another kiss...

ANNE (HIDDEN)

My husband will come.

The curtain whips back revealing Marlowe, hair dishevelled, and Anne, flushed, both half naked.

KIT

(leans back into her) ...of your divine lips...

ANNE

Enough. *(pushes him away)* You're insatiable.

KIT

... to taste you once more.

Her pushing softens and they are about to kiss. He notices something on her neck.

KIT

What's this?

ANNE

(pulls back) Nothing.

KIT

(touches a dark spot on her neck) A bruise is not nothing.

ANNE

Kit, I'm not yours.

She turns away and dresses.

KIT

He abused you.

ANNE

In this world to be a woman is to be abused.

KIT

(starts to dress) So come, be with me unchained from that ogre.

ANNE

You are tied to the stage and have no means without it.

KIT

Love will prevail.

ANNE

And go where? To the Puritans in the New World? They are even worse.

KIT

How much longer will you suffer?

ANNE

Not long.

KIT

Are you Apollo that you can see the future?

ANNE

Havenhurst is rotten through with gout and will die soon enough.

KIT

Ah, the rich man's disease. Perhaps there is a kind of justice.

ANNE

And I'll inherit his estate. Will you wait for me?

KIT

Oh, Anne, don't make me make promises I'll break.

ANNE

So your affection lays elsewhere?

KIT

(leans in to her) No, my sweet Anne.

ANNE

(she pulls back) I've seen you with Thomas. Perhaps your friendship is like your play of Edward.

KIT

Because I write of men who love men, does not mean I am one of them, and besides, love will love what it loves.

ANNE

And like you, I am beholden to none.

They KISS.

On the other side of the stage, enter Havenhurst, using a walking stick, waking in pain, followed by Susan, Anne's servant. They approach the bedroom door.

HAVENHURST

Where is she?

Susan runs in front of the door.

SUSAN

I haven't seen her, my lord, maybe she's in the garden.

HAVENHURST

I swear I heard voices.

SUSAN

Tis just the wind, my lord.

HAVENHURST

Out of my way, wench.

He pushes past her, opens the door and sees Anne and Kit kissing. They pull apart.

HAVENHURST

(to Marlowe) You bastard. I'll have you flayed alive.

ANNE

Be calm, good husband.

HAVENHURST

Get out! I'll deal with you momentarily.

Anne buttons up her dress and scurries to a side room.

KIT

My lord, it's not as it appears.

HAVENHURST

You had your tongue half way down her throat!

KIT

Yes, but...

Havenhurst JABS Marlowe with the walking stick.

HAVENHURST

You've sullied that which is mine.

Marlowe steps back. Havenhurst JABS him again.

HAVENHURST

You must desire death?

KIT

(backing away) I beg your pardon. I meant no insult.

HAVENHURST

(fuming) Meant no insult? To be cuckolded is the most pernicious insult to a man's honor.

He RAMS the walking stick into Marlowe's throat, pinning him against the wall.

KIT

(choking) My Lord.

HAVENHURST

I'll have you hung in a gibbet for the crows to peck out your eyes .

KIT

(on his toes backed against the wall) I... I can help you.

HAVENHURST

You can barely help yourself.

KIT

(blurts) I can spy.

HAVENHURST
 Spy? On who?

KIT
 The bishop.

HAVENHURST
 Whitgift?

KIT
 I'm in his confidence.

HAVENHURST
 What mischief are you up to?

KIT
 I'm to report on Thomas' school.

HAVENHURST
 So you're a traitor to your friends? I should have known. (*prods Marlowe with the stick*)

KIT
 Ah, my lord, I was forced to it, but I mean to misguide him.

HAVENHURST
 How so?

KIT
 Lead him away from, and not to the school. My lord, we're both opposed to his suppressions. You were one of the few who dared vote against his code.

HAVENHURST
 You're well informed.

KIT
 I pledge myself to you, my lord.

HAVENHURST
 I suppose you could be useful.

KIT
 I'll be your ears and eyes on the bishop and glean what I can from him.

Havenhurst lowers his walking stick.

HAVENHURST

I'm sure your fertile imagination can foresee the consequence of betraying me.

KIT

Yes, my lord.

HAVENHURST

Now get out before I decide it's better to have you flayed.

KIT

Yes, my lord.

Marlowe exits.

HAVENHURST

(shouts) Anne! In here now!

Anne runs in from the side room.

ANNE

(terrified) My lord, I beg your forgiveness.

HAVENHURST

Sssh.

ANNE

(confused) My lord?

HAVENHURST

(opens his arms) Come. *(she cautiously approaches)* I understand your revulsion to me. I'm old and you're in the bloom of youth.

ANNE

I was weak, my lord, I admit it.

HAVENHURST

Come closer. *(opens his arms)* It was your father's decision we wed and not your desire.

ANNE

I will learn to think differently.

He wraps his arms around her, she reluctantly leans in.

HAVENHURST

There, you see. We can be close. Kiss me and fulfill your vows. *(he leans in, they are about to kiss, but she turns away)* Do I disgust you so much?

ANNE

No, my lord, it's just that...

HAVENHURST

You harlot!

He GRABS her hair and RIPS her head back and THROWS her to the ground..

ANNE

(screams) My Lord!

HAVENHURST

That's right. I am your Lord, whereas you are nothing but the spawn of a lowly Bishop and my vassal to do with as I please.

He is about to STRIKE her, but she's doesn't cower. She STANDS UP and faces him.

ANNE

Do your worst, sir, but I swear on my holy soul, *(crosses herself)* I'll never betray you again.

HAVENHURST

(lowers his hand) Then dissociate from the School and become a good wife.

ANNE

I will be your wife, my lord, but I cannot relinquish that which feeds my mind.

HAVENHURST

(angry) You would oppose me? *(SPASMS and drops the walking stick)* Ah! My... heart.

ANNE

What's wrong, my lord?

Havenhurst catches his breath.

HAVENHURST

If you cannot love me, then at least show me the respect I deserve.

ANNE

Yes, my lord, you have my word.

HAVENHURST

Then you may attend the School, but I forbid you to see that bastard or his plays again.

He exits.

Anne sits on the bed and sighs.

ANNE

Oh, Kit, what have you done.

End of Act Two.

ACT THREE

SCENE NINE

Lights up and we are on The Rose Theater stage, set as the studio of Dr. Faustus - a globe, candles, a pentagram and a large gilded book.

At the side of the stage 'the crowd' (2-3 actors) watch the show.

Enter Henslowe as Doctor Faustus, a high collar gown, eyes blackened.

FAUSTUS / HENSLOWE

*(stentorian) Now that the gloomy shadow of the earth,
Longing to view Orion's drizzling look,
Leaps from th' antartic world unto the sky,
And dims the welkin with her pitchy breath,
Faustus, begin thine incantations,
And try if devils will obey thy hest,
Seeing thou hast pray'd and sacrific'd to them.*

Faustus regards a circle on the stage where names are written in chalk.

At the side of the stage the crowd "Ooo's" and "Ahhs".

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*Within this circle is Jehovah's name,
Forward and backward anagrammatiz'd,
Th' abbreviated names of holy saints,
Figures of every adjunct to the heavens,
And characters of signs and erring stars,
By which the spirits are enforc'd to rise:*

Faustus moves his hands in circles casting a spell. Fog billows across the stage.

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*Then fear not, Faustus, but be resolute,
And try the uttermost magic can perform.
(raises his arms, incanting) Belzebub, inferni ardentis monarcha,*

On the side of the stage...

CROWD 1

(shouts out) Tis sorcery!

CROWD 2

Black magic!

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

et Demogorgon, propitiamus, vos, ut appareat et surgat Mephistophilis.

A FLASH OF LIGHT and enter Mephistopheles, a
horned devil, played by Marlowe.

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

(growling voice) Now, Faustus, what wouldst thou have me do?

CROWD 1

The devil himself.

CROWD 2

We're cursed.

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

(to the crowd) Fear not, friends, tis only make believe.

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

(aside to Henslowe) Keep going. We have them.

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,
To do whatever Faustus shall command,*

Whitgift and Maunder enter the side of the stage.

WHITGIFT

(aside) Are your men ready, sergeant?

MAUNDER

Yes, Your Grace, the entrances are covered.

On center stage...

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*Be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,
Or the ocean to overwhelm the world.*

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

*I am a servant to great Lucifer,
And may not follow thee without his leave:
No more than he commands must we perform.*

One of the crowd stands up and shouts out...

CROWD 1

Tis worship of the devil himself.

CROWD 2

Sorcery!

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

Did not he charge thee to appear to me?

MEPHISTOPHILIS

*No, I came hither of mine own accord.
For, when we hear one rack the name of God,
Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ.
We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul;*

CROWD 1

The black arts!

CROWD 2

It's against God.

MEPHISTOPHELES/KIT

And pray devoutly to the prince of hell.

FAUSTUS/HENSLOWE

*So Faustus hath
Already done; and holds this principle,
There is no chief but only Belzebub;
To whom Faustus doth dedicate himself.*

CROWD 1

God save us, he is a devotee of the devil.

CROWD 2

Blasphemy!

WHITGIFT

(aside to Maunder) This has gone far enough. Put an end to it.

Maunder BLOWS a WHISTLE. Henslowe pauses and looks to Maunder.

MAUNDER

(to the audience) The play is now done.

The crowd stand and shout...

CROWD 2

Tis Lucifer's work!

CROWD 1

It's Satan himself.

MAUNDER

(shouts) The show's over. Go to your homes.

CROWD 2

Burn the place to the ground.

CROWD 1

Tis a pit of devils.

MAUNDER

(to the crowd) There's no magic. Be calm and go about your business. That is an order.

KIT

I must away.

HENSLOWE

Then go, while they're distracted. I'll cover for you.

KIT

I'm sorry.

Marlowe disappears in the fog. Whitgift approaches Henslowe.

WHITGIFT

Where is he?

HENSLOWE

Gone, Your Grace, I know not where.

Judith approaches.

JUDITH

We warned him, didn't we, Phillip?

HENSLOWE

Yes, we did.

JUDITH

But he wouldn't listen.

HENSLOWE

Our gravest apologies, Your Excellency.

WHITGIFT

Where does Marlowe reside?

HENSLOWE

(nervous) I... I don't know, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

(to Maunder) Take him.

Maunder GRABS Henslowe.

JUDITH

Wait.

HENSLOWE

(reprimands) Judith!

JUDITH

I'm not risking your neck for his. *(to Whitgift)* He shares rooms with Thomas Kyd, in Holborn, next to the Swan Tavern.

WHITGIFT

(to Maunder) Bring me Marlowe and this Thomas Kyd. *(to Henslowe)* Your theater is hereby closed. Indefinitely.

HENSLOWE

But, Your Grace, how are we to survive?

WHITGIFT

(to Maunder) Shutter the place up.

MAUNDER

Yes, Your Grace.

Whitgift and Maunder exit.

JUDITH

(despair) What're we going to do, Philip? We can't go on without our writers.

HENSLOWE

Twas inevitable - either the plague or the church would close us.

JUDITH

We're finished. It's all over. We'll be bankrupted!

HENSLOWE

(reassuring) No, my dear, we'll come up with something.

JUDITH

(dismissive) You're a dreamer, Philip.

HENSLOWE

Have faith, my dear, we'll find a way. We're actors, we always do.

SCENE TEN

A street and a doorway. Enter the Collector, wearing his grotesque beaked mask, wheeling his cart covered in a bloody sheet, and humming a tune.

COLLECTOR

*For to see mad Tom of Bedlam,
ten thousand years I'll travel
Mad Maudlin goes on dirty toes,
to save her shoes from gravel.
Now I repent that ever,
Poor Tom was so Disdain'd
My wits were lost when him I cross't,
which makes me go thus chain'd.*

KIT (HIDDEN)

Hey.

COLLECTOR

(turns around, can't see anyone) Who's there?

Marlowe steps out the shadows.

COLLECTOR

It's you again, the writer fellow.

KIT

What's the swiftest way out of London?

COLLECTOR

None, sir, they closed the gates to stop the spread of disease.

KIT

There must be some way?

COLLECTOR

Locked down tight as a keg, sir.

KIT

But you have access.

COLLECTOR

I come and go to the pits.

KIT

Will you do me a favor, sirrah?

COLLECTOR

What kind of favor?

KIT

Carry me away.

COLLECTOR

Why, who's after you?

KIT

The bishop's man.

COLLECTOR

I dunno, sir, I like to keep my nose clean.

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

Stand aside, peasant.

KIT

(to Collector) I beg you.

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

He can't have got far. He must be hereabout somewhere.

COLLECTOR

All right, get under. *(indicates the tarp)*

Marlowe lifts the tarp revealing rotting bodies.

KIT

(almost vomits) Does all beauty, honor, and achievement become this putrid rot?

COLLECTOR

Be quick, sir, lest you're discovered. Bury yourself deep.

Marlowe covers his mouth and climbs among the corpses.
The Collector pulls the bloody sheet over. Enter
Maunder.

MAUNDER

You there. Have you seen a young man pass?

COLLECTOR

I see many men pass away.

MAUNDER

I mean a living man, you cretin.

COLLECTOR

No, sir, everyone's at the theater watching that new devil play.

MAUNDER

(suspicious) What've you got here?

COLLECTOR

Nothing but what the grave will hold.

Maunder pokes the sheet then starts to lift it.

COLLECTOR

I wouldn't do that.

MAUNDER

(grimaces, holds his nose) Jesus, it stinks.

COLLECTOR

That'll be the maggots as the flesh putrefies.

MAUNDER

(puts the sheet back down) Get this rot to the pits.

COLLECTOR

Yes, sir, on my way now.

Maunder exits.

COLLECTOR

(to Marlowe) Stay under, sir, we'll be gone hence.

(wheels the cart and sings...)

I went down to Satan's kitchen,

to get me food one morning

and there I got souls piping hot,

all on the spit a-turning.

Then I took up a cauldron,

Where boil'd ten thousand 'Tornies

'Twas full of flame, yet I drank the same,

and wished them happy journeys.

He exits. A church bell TOLLS.

A FLASH of lightning and THUNDER off stage in the distance.

SCENE ELEVEN

Lights up on Marlowe and Kyd's modest room, two beds, one desk, a window.

Marlowe frantically pulls papers out of the desk draws and packs them in a travel bag.

Enter Kyd and Lill laughing.

KYD

Let's get married, I'll make an honest woman of you yet.

LILL

You've got a good heart, Tom, but *(grabs his crotch)* it's your cock talking.

They turn and notice Marlowe.

KYD

Kit! How did it go?

KIT

My words rapt them, but all turned to chaos.

KYD

Why so?

KIT

They believed the devils were real.

KYD

Oh, the dream of every writer, that his words ring true.

KIT

So Whitgift is closing the theaters.

KYD

All of them?

KIT

So he says.

LILL

Trouble follows you like flies to shit.

KIT

(sarcastic) Have you ever considered poetry instead of prostitution?

LILL

Not likely. Look at you two, you give your lives for make-believe.

KIT

Lill, did you do as I asked?

LILL

You mean your little rumor.

KYD

What rumor?

LILL

(to Marlowe) It's spreading faster than the miasma.

KIT

Thank you, darling Lill. (*KISSES her and pushes her half out of the door*) Sorry, but time's of the essence.

LILL

All right, I get the hint, (*jams her foot in the door*) but I ain't been paid yet.

KIT

Tom? (*snaps his fingers*) A shilling.

Kyd hands a coin to Marlowe who passes it to Lill.

LILL

Thank you, kindly, Tom.

KIT

Now go.

LILL

(*to Kyd*) See you later.

KYD

(*flirting*) Bye Lill.

Marlowe closes the door on her, finishes stuffing his bag.

KYD

Closed permanently?

KIT

He declared it heretical.

KYD

I (*stutters*) t... told you, you go (*stutters*) t... too far.

KIT

Not far enough. What we've begun; Spencer, Johnson, Shakespeare, you and I, will fulfill to its zenith.

KYD

I don't want to be a martyr.

Heavy feet STOMPING off stage.

KIT

Shit, they're here.

KYD

Who?

KIT

The Church Sergeant. (*looks around*) Quickly, the window.

He rushes over and opens it.

KYD

(*nervous*) I'm not going to jump. I've nothing to hide.

KIT

They will invent a crime. Come.

Marlowe climbs through the window. A hard KNOCKING at the door.

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

Open up! I know you're in there.

KIT

Come on, Tom.

Kyd looks out of the window.

KYD

I... I... I can't. It's (*stutters*) t... too high!

The door handle turns and rattles, but it's locked.

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

(*shouts*) Open the door!

KIT

(*to Kyd*) Roll as you land.

Marlowe JUMPS and is gone.

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

Open up now!

KIT (OFF STAGE)

Come on, Tom! For God's sake jump!

The door BURSTS open. Maunder STORMS in.

MAUNDER

Stop where you are.

KYD

(out the window) Go Kit, flee.

Maunder GRABS Kyd and looks out the window.

KIT (OFF STAGE)

Te futueo!

MAUNDER

(to Kyd) What did he say?

KYD

I don't speak Latin.

MAUNDER

You lie, but we'll get him yet. Right, what you got here?

Maunder TEARS through papers on the desk and reads the titles.

MAUNDER

'The Spanish Tragedy', 'King Leir', what's all this?

KYD

My plays.

Maunder tosses them aside and finds a pamphlet and reads.

MAUNDER

Religion was invented just to keep men in awe... Christ was a bastard... St John was bedfellow to Christ... (to Kyd) This yours?

KYD

N *(stutters)*... n... no.

MAUNDER

You sure?

KYD

I'm a God fearing Christian.

MAUNDER

Then it must be his. *(continues reading) 'the sacrament would have been better administered in a Tobacco pipe'. 'God is dead'. He'll burn for this. So where is he?*

KYD

I... I don't know.

MAUNDER

You would suffer for him?

KYD

(breaking down crying) I know not where he went.

MAUNDER

We'll discuss it at the Tower.

Maunder SHOVES him to the door.

KYD

(terrified) Please, I... I haven't done anything.

MAUNDER

It's not just what you do, but what you think.

He shoves Kyd off.

SCENE TWELVE

A meeting room in Durham House. On the wall a banner with a pyramid in a circle with an eye at the apex, and the words "NUVOS ORDO SECLORUM", familiar to us from the American one dollar note. Thomas at the table, writing.

Enter Poley (40s), rough hewn and scarred.

POLEY

Sorry to disturbed you, sir, your 'friend's here.

THOMAS

Kit? What the hell's he playing at? He should be in hiding.

POLEY

Yes, sir, I told him, but he's insistent on seeing you.

THOMAS

(huffs) Send him in.

Thomas puts down his quill and hides his paper. Enter Marlowe.

THOMAS

Kit, you endanger us all by coming here.

KIT

I'm sorry, Thomas, but the bishop's man is on my tail. He was at my apartment.

THOMAS

What did he find?

KIT

Nothing - plays, notes.

THOMAS

Your essays and arguments weren't discovered?

KIT

I don't think so.

THOMAS
You don't know?

KIT
I escaped, but what of Kyd?

THOMAS
If he's taken, he's beyond our help.

KIT
I cannot just leave him.

THOMAS
You must cut him loose.

KIT
He's my friend!

THOMAS
Shush, someone comes.

Enter Lady Anne.

THOMAS
Lady Anne.

ANNE
(surprised) Kit.

KIT
(bows) My lady.

ANNE
I apologize for my father's draconian closure of your play.

KIT
He's a zealot.

ANNE
It's the best you've written.

KIT

You were there?

ANNE

I was, discreetly. In my opinion English drama will never be the same.

KIT

But alas no more, Thomas Kyd has been imprisoned and I am next.

THOMAS

(to Anne) Your father's Moral Code.

KIT

Can your husband help?

ANNE

I would not dare ask him, not after...

KIT

Yes, I understand.

THOMAS

After what?

ANNE

A slight quarrel.

THOMAS

With Havenhurst?

ANNE

Twas nothing.

KIT

Thomas, I must help Kyd.

THOMAS

You're insane.

KIT

You'd do the same for me. I'll see you anon. My lady.

Marlowe bows.

ANNE

Gods speed, Kit.

Marlowe exits.

ANNE

So you'll not help him?

THOMAS

He's reckless. I cannot endanger the School.

ANNE

But if he's caught, he'll be more of a danger.

THOMAS

They have nothing on him.

ANNE

That won't stop my father. T'would be in our interest to keep Marlowe out of his hands.

THOMAS

Indeed. *(calls off)* Poley! *(to Anne)* How about lunch on the terrace? We've a few hours before the storm breaks. *(enter Poley)* Keep an eye on Marlowe. Do not let him out of your sight.

POLEY

Yes, my lord. *(exits)*

THOMAS

Your concern is surprising. I thought he was beneath your... ambitions.

ANNE

Tis the poetry I love, not the man.

THOMAS

And yet I see how you look at him.

ANNE

And I see how you gaze upon him, Thomas. It seems we're pricked by the same thorn.

She CLUTCHES her stomach in pain.

ANNE

Ahr!

THOMAS

Anne, what is it? (*holds her arm to steady her*)

ANNE

I... I'm sorry, I have these... pains.

THOMAS

You must see a physician.

ANNE

He cannot cure what ails me.

They exit.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Whitgift's office, desk, crucifix, Crusader flag. Whitgift enters with Andrew Perne.

WHITGIFT

I've dedicated my life to building the church and now they would tear my work asunder.

PERNE

I'm sure they think it's for the good of England

WHITGIFT

England's good is its moral virtue, of which I am the custodian.

PERNE

John, we have a bigger problem.

WHITGIFT

What could possibly be more pressing than the souls of our people?

PERNE

There are rumors circulating in Parliament.

WHITGIFT

What rumors?

PERNE

They say we live under the same roof.

WHITGIFT

As many colleagues do. The Earl of Salisbury and Viscount Cranborn are long time house mates.

PERNE

(deadly serious) John, the rumors go further.

WHITGIFT

(worried) Oh?

PERNE

They're saying that we live in sin.

WHITGIFT

(furious) From where do these rumors stem?

PERNE

Possibly the servants.

WHITGIFT

My own fucking staff? I'll have them flogged.

PERNE

Or maybe interlopers.

WHITGIFT

Damn them all, why can't they leave us alone. What evidence do they have?

PERNE

None, but under The Buggery Act an accusation is enough.

WHITGIFT

I shall silence these rumors.

PERNE

We must not stir further suspicion.

WHITGIFT

So do nothing?

PERNE

We both know that we have been on borrowed time for years. It must end. I've made arrangements.

WHITGIFT

You're leaving?

PERNE

Back to Cambridge.

WHITGIFT

But I need you here with me. How will I live alone?

PERNE

I dreamed we'd grow old together, but alas, the world has no place for us.

WHITGIFT

Andrew, can you not stay but one more night?

PERNE

I'm sorry, I leave in an hour. My things will be delivered.

He takes Whitgift's hand.

PERNE

I will always love you, my friend.

Whitgift KISSES Perne on the lips.

Enter Anne. She coughs to make her presence known
They break apart.

WHITGIFT

(flustered) Ah, my dear.

PERNE

I must be getting along. Goodbye, Anne, nice to see you.

ANNE

Chancellor.

Perne exits.

WHITGIFT

(mumbles) We were just discussing the articles of Supremacy.

ANNE

Father, I see you're upset.

WHITGIFT

Perne believes they can be aligned with...

ANNE

(interrupts) I care not what you do in private.

WHITGIFT

(shocked) Anne!

ANNE

If he makes you happy, then I am the more content.

WHITGIFT

Whatever filth you're thinking, get it out of your mind.

ANNE

Yet you purge the best thinkers in England for being immoral.

WHITGIFT

A few miscreants have been rounded up, that's all.

ANNE

You took Francis Bacon and Harriot for God's sake.

WHITGIFT

Do not take the Lord's name in vain.

ANNE

They are heroes, father.

WHITGIFT

They are heretics and undermine our faith with their so-called 'science'.

ANNE

Then why Marlowe in particular?

WHITGIFT

Why do you care?

ANNE

He's our greatest writer.

WHITGIFT

He's a troublemaker.

ANNE

(bitter) And you are a zealot.

WHITGIFT

Stop your tongue, you are shameful.

ANNE

No, father, you shame me with your dogma.

WHITGIFT

How dare you. *(shouts)* You... you thankless wretch.

ANNE

I am what you have made me, father.

WHITGIFT

I tried my best.

ANNE

After mother died and Perne moved in, you abandoned me to the care of the maids.

WHITGIFT

I had duties to the church.

ANNE

But none to me?

WHITGIFT

(shouts) I disown you.

ANNE

Good, be my father no more.

Anne bends over and RETCHES, almost vomiting.

WHITGIFT

What's wrong with you?

ANNE

(between retching) Nothing.

WHITGIFT

You're sick, my dear.

He puts his arm around her. She pushes it off.

ANNE

Leave me alone. I'm fine.

She storms off.

Whitgift shakes with rage, grabs a crucifix and it about to hurl it, but calms himself, puts it down, and prays.

WHITGIFT

Lord Jesus Christ, by your patience be near me in my time of weakness; sustain me by your grace, that my strength and courage may not fail.

A chilling SCREAM off stage of a tortured prisoner.

SCENE FOURTEEN

THUNDER in the distance. The jail cell indicated by a cot, a candle, and a barred window.

Thomas Kyd, bloodied and exhausted, tied to a rack, his wrists bound and stretched above his head. The ropes are on pulleys with a ratchet.

Enter Jailer and a man covered by a hooded gown, who reads a letter.

MAN

(reads a letter) I seek one Thomas Kyd.

JAILER

Who'd you say you were?

MAN

(gruff voice) I am sent by order of Lord Havenhurst.

JAILER

Show me.

The man presents a piece of paper, the jailer tries to read.

JAILER

"This order of his most just and pi.. pi..."

MAN

Pious.

JAILER

(gives the paper back) Read it out.

MAN

(reads) "This order of his most just and pious Lord Havenhurst, Chairman of the Star Chamber, alloweth the bearer visitation to all and sundry imprisoned."

JAILER

(suspicious) Where's the seal?

MAN

The order's from his lordship himself, he'll be annoyed if I'm delayed.

JAILER

Fine. That's him. (*indicates Kyd*) You got five minutes.

The Jailer exits. The man enters and removes his hood revealing - Marlowe.

KIT

Tom, what have they done to you?

KYD

(*wearily*) Kit, I didn't (*stutters*) t... tell them anything.

KIT

Be calm. (*tries to untie the ropes*)

KYD

(*weak*) They'll be back. You must go.

KIT

Not without you.

KYD

(*groans*) What use us both dying?

KIT

(*struggles with the ropes*) Stay still.

WHITGIFT (OFF STAGE)

Has he confessed?

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

Not yet, Your Grace.

KIT

(*tugs at the ropes*) It's stuck fast!

KYD

(*urgent*) Go, Kit, and live.

Marlowe heads to the door.

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

This way, Your Grace.

KIT

Shit! *(looks around, hides behind a column)* Be brave, Tom.

KYD

(lowers his head) Our Father which art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come...

Enter Ma under and Whitgift, holding a pamphlet. Behind
the column, Marlowe listens.

WHITGIFT

Mister Kyd, are you ready to talk?

KYD

I *(stutters)* t... told you everything.

WHITGIFT

I think not.

KYD

(crying) Please...

WHITGIFT

I think you've been holding back. *(waves the pamphlet)* Is this yours?

KYD

(looks up groggy, throat dry) No, sir.

WHITGIFT

(reads) "Religion was invented 'to keep men in awe', 'Christ was a bastard'. Familiar?

KYD

No... Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

(continues reading) 'St. John was bedfellow to Jesus', 'the sacrament ... would have been better administered in a Tobacco pipe'.

KYD

Tis not mine, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

Is it Marlowe's?

KYD

(petrified) I... I don't know.

Whitgift nods to Maunder who pulls the rope. The ratchet grinds. The ropes tighten, stretching Kyd.

KYD

Ahhhhhhh.

WHITGIFT

Who wrote it?

Behind the column Marlowe pulls out a knife. He is about to rush out.

WHITGIFT

Ease off, Sergeant.

Maunder releases the rack and Kyd slumps.

WHITGIFT

There, you see, the pain can stop. Is it his?

KYD

(sobs) I don't know.

Marlowe slips back behind the column.

WHITGIFT

Why protect him? He'd betray you in a heartbeat.

Whitgift nods to Maunder, who pulls the rope, the wheels turn.

KYD

(screams) In the name of God!

WHITGIFT

You can be free.

KYD

I... I...

WHITGIFT

The pain can stop.

KYD

(sobbing) It's his.

WHITGIFT

Say his name.

Marlowe comes out from the column, knife raised, and moves behind Whitgift and Maunder.

KYD

(almost unconscious) Chri...

Marlowe is about to stab Maunder in the back.

WHITGIFT

(impatient) Spit it out!

KYD

... Christ... *(stutters)* t... topher Marlowe.

Maunder releases the rope and Kyd falls limp. Marlowe steps back behind the column.

WHITGIFT

You see, that wasn't so hard. *(to Maunder)* Now we have a confession, find Marlowe and arrest him.

MAUNDER

What about Kyd?

WHITGIFT

He can hang and repent.

Whitgift and Maunder exit. Marlowe comes out from behind the column.

KIT

Tom? (*lifts Kyd's head*) Tom?

Kyd groans and collapses. Marlowe kisses him on the forehead.

KIT

God have mercy on you, my friend.

Marlowe exits.

A roll of THUNDER in the distance.

End of Act Three.

ACT FOUR

SCENE FIFTEEN

The meeting room in Durham House. The banner with the words "NUVOS ORDO SECLORUM" above.

Enter Thomas and Havenhurst.

HAVENHURST

(angry) The jailer said I gave a visitation order. I did no such thing. What the hell's going on?

THOMAS

I know not, my lord.

HAVENHURST

I'll wager it's that bloody 'friend' of yours.

THOMAS

Let's not cast doubt until proven.

HAVENHURST

You hue too closely to him and are blinded.

THOMAS

My lord, I do see the danger, but he's my friend.

HAVENHURST

Friend or not, keep him at bay.

Enter Sir Francis.

THOMAS

Uncle, did you talk to Her Majesty of our School?

SIR FRANCIS

She will not lend her name to atheists.

THOMAS

Though she be one herself.

SIR FRANCIS

Not publicly.

THOMAS

So, then will you support us?

SIR FRANCIS

It'd be a conflict of interest.

THOMAS

But the Enlightenment needs air to thrive.

SIR FRANCIS

Air, but not the fire of controversy. Under the Act of Morality all books, plays, and pamphlets are to be reviewed by the clergy.

THOMAS

The courts will stop them.

HAVENHURST

The courts are riddled with church men loyal to Whitgift, and he has the queen's favor to boot.

SIR FRANCIS

I can no longer guarantee your safety, Thomas.

HAVENHURST

Come, Sir Francis, we must review the naval budget.

SIR FRANCIS

We've secured thirty frigates, but Drake says we need forty more.

Sir Francis and Havenhurst exit.

Thomas paces, agitated. Poley enters.

POLEY

My lord.

THOMAS

What?

POLEY

I believe we should make haste to your country house, before we're trapped in the city.

THOMAS

Is it so bad?

POLEY

Worse, sir, they're falling like flies.

THOMAS

What of Marlowe?

POLEY

I followed him to the prison, but no word since.

THOMAS

Fine, summon my carriage.

POLEY

Yes, sir.

As Poley exits, Marlowe enters.

THOMAS

Thank God, I thought you were taken. Did any see you enter?

KIT

No, I came in the back door.

THOMAS

What of Tom?

KIT

I could not free him.

THOMAS

Did he... betray us?

KIT

Why speak you of betrayal?

THOMAS

A man will say anything on the rack.

KIT

He will hold his tongue.

THOMAS

It's not just our school being investigated. Harriot's in hiding. Ben Johnson's plays are banned, and Nashe's house was raided.

KIT

Was he taken?

THOMAS

Thank God, no, he escaped to France. They even say Sir Francis Drake's in disfavor.

KIT

The center of England crumbles.

THOMAS

I lament we did nothing sooner and let the bigots rise. You can't stay here. We'll hide you at my estate at Scadbury.

KIT

And what of Tom?

THOMAS

I'll do my best. Take my carriage, I'll come for you soon.

KIT

Thank you, my dear friend.

POLEY (OFF STAGE)

You cannot proceed.

MAUNDER (OFF STAGE)

Stand aside.

The door BURSTS open. Enter Maunder with a soldier, followed by Poley.

THOMAS

What's the meaning of this intrusion?

MAUNDER

I have a warrant for the arrest of Christopher Marlowe.

THOMAS

By who's authority?

MAUNDER

The Archbishop. *(to soldier)* Take him.

The soldier GRABS Marlowe.

KIT

(struggles) Unhand me villain!

THOMAS

Lord Havenhurst will not let this injustice proceed.

MAUNDER

It's not his jurisdiction. Soldier, you may fulfill your duty.

THOMAS

(to Marlowe) Say nothing.

MAUNDER

Shut up.

Maunder pushes Marlowe out.

POLEY

He has brought this on himself.

THOMAS

So must I abandon him?

POLEY

Lord Havenhurst is in agreement.

THOMAS

He talked of this?

POLEY

Marlowe endangers us all. Cut him loose lest we're snared on his rope.

THOMAS

But, perhaps he could lose himself.

POLEY

There's no where safe in England.

THOMAS

Then France or Italy, he could just disappear.

POLEY

Do you want it hanging over you like a cloud? Never knowing if he's been found. Finish it, and if you cannot help, then do not impede. *(heads for the door, turns back...)* One more thing. Get on Her Majesty's good side.

THOMAS

(worried) Has she expressed disfavor?

POLEY

Not yet, but the cards are about to fall.

Poley exits.

Thomas paces. Stops. Looks up.

THOMAS

Forgive me.

SCENE SIXTEEN

Lights up on Havenhurst House - indicated by a candelabra and chairs. Anne writes at a table. Susan cleaning and singing.

SUSAN

*On Monday night he came to my door, a-makin such a din,
"Get up, get up my darlin' girl, and let your lover come in!"
So I went down and let him in and on me he did fall,
It was five o'clock in the mornin' before we got any sleep at all.*

Anne turns and RETCHES.

SUSAN

My lady, you're not well.

ANNE

I'm fine.

SUSAN

But, ma'am?

ANNE

(wipes spit from her mouth) Can you keep a secret?

SUSAN

Yes, ma'am.

ANNE

You promise on your soul?

SUSAN

(puts her hand on her chest) Yes ma'am, I swear.

ANNE

I am with child.

SUSAN

Oh ma'am, congratulations. His lordship will be delighted.

ANNE

He must not know.

SUSAN

On, my lady, tis a ...

ANNE

Bastard. Yes. I must be rid of it, and yet I dread to do it.

SUSAN

Jesus says nothing against it, nor does any of the Bible.

ANNE

So it cannot be a sin.

SUSAN

No, ma'am, if it is necessity.

ANNE

It is, and tis my own fault.

SUSAN

Then I'll fetch you a potion from the apothecary. *(a beat)* Do you love him, ma'am?

ANNE

Kit? I'll never love another the same.

SUSAN

And Lord Havenhurst?

ANNE

I cannot deny my disgust.

SUSAN

I'm so sorry, ma'am.

ANNE

It is as it is.

HAVENHURST (OFF STAGE)

Let's put this behind us swiftly, Thomas.

Enter Havenhurst, in a dressing gown and now on crutches, followed by Thomas.

ANNE

(to Susan) Be gone and fetch me the remedy.

HAVENHURST

(to Thomas) I won't broach failure and neither will your uncle, any mistake and it's your head on the block.

THOMAS

It shall be done, and there'll be no mistakes.

They approach Anne.

ANNE

What shall be done, my lord?

HAVENHURST

None of your concern.

ANNE

(humble) Yes, my lord. Good evening, Thomas.

HAVENHURST

He's just leaving, *(to Thomas)* Send me word when it's done.

THOMAS

I will, my lord.

Thomas exits. Havenhurst has a coughing fit.

ANNE

My lord, you should be resting.

HAVENHURST

(snaps) Nonsense, there's a kingdom to run.

She goes to him.

ANNE

Let me help you.

HAVENHURST

Don't pretend 'dear'. I know your true feeling.

Havenhurst exits.

ANNE

You know little of my true feelings 'dear'.

Susan enters from the other side.

SUSAN

There's a man at the door.

ANNE

What man?

SUSAN

From the prison, he says Christopher Marlowe seeks your aid.

ANNE

I'm not a lawyer.

SUSAN

I believe he wants money. Shall I tell him to go away?

ANNE

Yes, at once.

SUSAN

Very wise, ma'am. *(starts to leave)*

ANNE

Wait.

SUSAN

(turns back) Ma'am?

Anne takes coins from the table and gives them to Susan.

ANNE

That should be enough.

SUSAN

But my lady, what if his lordship were to find out?

ANNE

We'll make sure he doesn't.

SUSAN

Yes, ma'am.

ANNE

Go, be quick, lest he leave.

Susan exits.

Anne GROANS, clutching her stomach.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

A thunder crack in the distance.

Lights up on a prison cell, a cot, a barred window, and a candle. Marlowe, beaten and dishevelled, huddled in a corner.

A distant church bell tolls.

KIT

*Ah Faustus, now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually.
Stand still, you ever moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease and midnight never come.
Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day.*

A SCREAM from the victim in a neighboring cell.
Marlowe clasps his hands over his ears.

KIT

*The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike.
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.*

The clock strikes twelve - long, heavy clangs.
Mephistophilis enters in a swirl of fog and shadows.

MEPHISTOPHILIS/WHITGIFT

Marlowe.

KIT

Are you vision?

MEPHISTOPHILIS/WHITGIFT

Will you confess?

KIT

Some trick of my mind?

MEPHISTOPHILIS/WHITGIFT

Save your damned soul.

KIT

My soul is in my plays.

MEPHISTOPHILIS/WHITGIFT

Your art is merely an appendage of your vanity.

KIT

Art is the voice of the soul. You'd do as well to kill God himself.

MEPHISTOPHILIS./WHITGIFT

You would oppose God?

KIT

And the devil too. I am not afraid to die.

Mephistophilis disappears into the fog.

Marlowe looks around. GROANING from the shadows.

KIT

Who's there?

(cracked voice) Kit? KYD
 Tom? KIT
 He takes the candle and sees Kyd laid up, bloody, bruised, flagging.
 Their savagery knows no bounds. KIT
 (voice cracked) Kit, they... they broke me. KYD
 No, no, my friend, you'll heal, in time. KIT
 (almost in tears) I couldn't help it. KYD
 Here, try to sit up? KIT
 I couldn't bear the pain. KYD
 Be calm, we'll get out yet. KIT
 I... I told them... KYD
 (afraid) Told them what? KIT
 I'm sorry... (sobbing) I couldn't help it. KYD
 What did you say? KIT

KYD

That you're a heretic and a (*stutters*) t... traitor.

KIT

(*sighs*) Tom, Tom, Tom.

KYD

I'm sorry.

KIT

Worry not, someone will come to our aid.

KYD

Who cares for us, we're just writers.

KIT

Trust me, soon we'll be free and shall escape England.

KYD

Rome, I always wanted to see the Eternal City.

KIT

We shall, my friend.

KYD

I never left these shores.

KIT

We'll walk the Appian Way and we'll drink in the Coliseum, and the women, oh, they'll love you back to health.

The lock of the cell door TURNS.

KIT

I knew my lady would come through.

The door creaks open.

KIT

Hang on, Tom, we'll be free yet.

Poley enters.

KIT

(shocked) Poley!

POLEY

(suspicious) You were expecting someone else?

KIT

No.

POLEY

Come on, you're getting out.

KIT

Where's Thomas?

POLEY

He'll meet us at the dock. A ship will take you abroad. I know not the details.

KIT

You see, Tom, we'll be in Rome soon.

KYD

(tries to stand) I... I can't.

KIT

Come on, Tom, get up.

POLEY

We're not waiting.

KIT

I'm not leaving him again.

POLEY

(looks out of the door) Quickly, while the way is clear.

KYD

Go without me.

KIT

(braces him) Come on, get up. *(to Poley)* Help me.

POLEY

I only came for you, not him.

KIT

(barks) Take his arm.

Poley reluctantly grabs Kyd's other arm.

KYD

Thank you. I think... I think I can make it.

Poley jumps back in horror.

POLEY

(snaps) Put him down and stand away.

KIT

I can't carry him alone.

POLEY

(barks) Looks at his hands. They're not blisters. They're boils and pustulations.

KIT

(looks at Kyd's hand) Oh Tom.

KYD

(bleary) What?

POLEY

For Christ sake, leave him, he's got the pestilence. Fuck, we might be infected. *(to Kyd)*
You bastard!

He moves to punch Kyd. Marlowe BLOCKS him.

KIT

Do not touch him.

POLEY

(squaring off) You would fight me?

KIT

(standing his ground) If I'm pressed to it.

POLEY

You're right. *(backs away)* He's contaminated. Let's get out.

KIT

Tom, we must leave.

POLEY

(barks) Come on, he'll be dead soon.

KYD

(to Kit) Save yourself. Go.

KIT

Goodbye, my friend. *(makes the sign of the cross)* *Sit Deus vobiscum.*

Marlowe follows Poley off. Kyd looks at his hands and moans.

SCENE EIGHTEEN

Whitgift's office. A crucifix and the Crusader's red cross flag. Whitgift at a desk writing.

Enter Maunder.

WHITGIFT

Did you find Marlowe?

MAUNDER

No, Your Grace, he, er, escaped.

WHITGIFT

Again? You idiot.

MAUNDER

Yes, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

Put men on the taverns and ports.

MAUNDER

They're on it now, Your Grace.

WHITGIFT

Then I'll have him yet. And keep an eye on Thomas Walsingham. He's the key to Marlowe.

MAUNDER

We can't find him either.

WHITGIFT

Then recruit more men.

MAUNDER

Yes, Your Grace.

As Maunder exits, enter Sir Francis and a soldier.

SIR FRANCIS

(to Maunder) Sergeant, stand aside.

WHITGIFT

(to Maunder) Do not move.

SIR FRANCIS

(to Maunder) Do not give your life for this.

Maunder steps back.

WHITGIFT

How dare you barge into my office and threaten my men. I'll have you sanctioned.

SIR FRANCIS

Archbishop, Her Majesty says you acted without her consent in the apprehending of certain individuals.

WHITGIFT

I have full authority under the law.

SIR FRANCIS

No longer. Your Code of Morality is revoked.

WHITGIFT

Impossible. Her Majesty signed it into law.

SIR FRANCIS

It was Her Majesty's command to repeal, and parliament ratified.

WHITGIFT

Then I will stir the bishops to open rebellion, and we shall correct Her Majesty.

SIR FRANCIS

You breach the boundary of treason with such words.

WHITGIFT

I'll not be intimidated by this chicanery.

SIR FRANCIS

Then you leave me no choice. *(to Maunder and soldier)* Gentlemen, give us a moment.

Maunder and the soldier exit.

WHITGIFT

Well?

SIR FRANCIS

I've information that you harbor 'unholy relations' with Chancellor Perne.

WHITGIFT

(becomes pale) That is vindictive slander.

SIR FRANCIS

I have my sources.

WHITGIFT

You mean your spies?

SIR FRANCIS

Your 'affections' are your affair, but if it were to become publicly known, your bishops will drop you like a gargoyle from a parapet.

WHITGIFT

You wouldn't dare.

SIR FRANCIS

Wouldn't I? Your office has been moved to Whitehall, where we can keep an eye on you.
(calls out) Sergeant.

WHITGIFT

You've crossed the line, Sir Francis.

SIR FRANCIS

Be quiet, bishop, and acknowledge that you are defeated.

The soldier and Maunder enter.

SIR FRANCIS

Escort the Archbishop out.

The soldier moves towards Whitgift.

WHITGIFT

Maunder, stop him.

MAUNDER

But Your Grace, the queen...

WHITGIFT

I am your patron.

MAUNDER

(backs away) And she is my liege.

SIR FRANCIS

(to Maunder) England thanks you, Sergeant. You may secure the bishop and escort him out.

Maunder approaches Whitgift.

MAUNDER

I'm sorry, Your Grace.

Whitgift spits at him.

WHITGIFT

Judas.

SIR FRANCIS

(to Maunder) Deliver this *(gives a paper)* to the Rose. It's an order to reopen the theaters.

MAUNDER

Yes, sir.

SIR FRANCIS

Archbishop, shall we?

They exit.

SCENE NINETEEN

The sound of SEAGULLS squawking nearby. A warning BELL clangs a melancholic tone.

A dock side indicated by the silhouette of a ship, ghostly in the fog filled stage. A pallid moon above. Enter Poley and Marlowe.

KIT

Tis past the midnight hour. How much longer must we wait?

POLEY

Don't worry, he'll be here.

KIT

You said that an hour ago.

POLEY

He must be detained. You stay put, I'll ensure the way is secure, and stick to the shadows, don't be seen.

Poley exits. Marlowe huddles against the cold.

KIT

*What glory is there in a common good,
That hangs for every peasant to achieve?
That like I best, that flies beyond my reach.
I'll either rend it with my nails to naught,
Or mount the top with my aspiring wings,
Although my downfall be the deepest hell.
For this I wake, when others think I sleep;
For this I wait, that scorn attendance else;
For this, my quenchless thirst, whereon I build,
For this, this head, this heart, this hand,
Contrives, imagines, and fully executes,
Matters of import aimed at by many,
Yet understood by none;*

Rolling THUNDER in the near distance. In the thick mist a figure appears.

KIT

Who's that?

MAN

You state first.

KIT

A traveler. And you?

MAN

A tradesman.

KIT

Show yourself.

Through the fog The Collector appears wearing the grotesque beaked mask and wheeling his cart, with bodies under the bloody sheet.

COLLECTOR

It's you again, the writer fellow. *(takes his mask off)*

KIT

The collector.

COLLECTOR

(relieved) I thought you might be a brigand come to rob me.

KIT

And I thought you a ghost.

COLLECTOR

What brings you to Hades?

KIT

Why call you it that? Tis not the underworld.

COLLECTOR

Look yonder.

KIT

(peering out) I don't see...

COLLECTOR

In the river.

KIT

(peering out) Those dark shapes, what are they?

COLLECTOR

Bodies.

KIT

There are dozens!

COLLECTOR

Hundreds.

KIT

Good God!

COLLECTOR

The pits are full up, so we dump 'em in the river. Too many people in the city cheek by jowel, that's the problem.

KIT

Tis a morbid job you do.

COLLECTOR

Not morbid, sirrah, for what is it but a brief dance and then - poof - we're gone.

The sickly moon comes out from behind the clouds. The fog bell clangs.

KIT

Tonight is a hunter's moon, which they say forbodes ill.

COLLECTOR

Ah, mere superstition, an old wives' tale.

KIT

And yet my stomach turns as if someone walked across my grave. *(a beat)* That knife at your hip?

COLLECTOR

What of it?

KIT

I'll trade my coat for it. *(he takes it off)* Here, it's worth ten times more.

COLLECTOR

I dunno, the knife's my trade.

KIT

(re: the coat) Try it on.

The Collector tries the coat, admiring himself.

COLLECTOR

Tis a nice fit, and as they say, clothes maketh the man.

Then it's a deal?
KIT

The Collector gives the knife. THUNDER off stage.

The storm's about to break, sir.
COLLECTOR

The Collector wheels his cart aside as Thomas, Poley, and Frizer (30s), gruff and roughly dressed, enter through the fog.

(hides the knife) Thomas, at last.
KIT

My friend, are you well?
THOMAS

Bruised, but fine.
KIT

Were you tortured?
THOMAS

I'm unharmed.
KIT

They extracted nothing from you?
THOMAS

No, nothing.
KIT

You didn't mention me or the school?
THOMAS

(adamant) No, I said nothing.
KIT

Thomas turns to Poley who frowns and shakes his head.

KIT

You don't trust me?

THOMAS

(regards him and softens) I'm sorry, I had to be sure.

POLEY

Sir?

THOMAS

(snaps) What?

POLEY

The arrangements have been made.

THOMAS

Give me a moment.

POLEY

It must be done, sir.

THOMAS

(barks) I said wait.

POLEY

Yes, sir.

KIT

(aside to Thomas re: Frizer) Who's he?

THOMAS

(aside) In case of any... surprise.

A CLAP of THUNDER and a FLASH OF LIGHTNING.

Marlowe turns away and slips the knife inside his shirt.

POLEY

My lord, it's time.

KIT

Time for what?

The reckoning.

POLEY

Poley withdraws a knife and approaches Marlowe.

Thomas?

KIT

Marlowe pulls out his blade and backs away as Poley and Frizer approach.

KIT

I said nothing of the school. I'm not what you think.

POLEY

No man is.

THOMAS

I believe you, Kit.

KIT

Then why...?

Marlowe waves his blade.

POLEY

Put the knife down.

KIT

Take it from me if you dare.

Poley indicates to Frizer, who draws his blade, boxing Marlowe in.

KIT

(to Thomas) I trusted you.

THOMAS

It's not my decision.

POLEY

(to Frizer) Let's end this quickly.

I'll not go without a fight.

KIT

Frizer MOVES IN. Marlowe SWIPES and Frizer REELS back.

KIT

Come closer and I'll dispatch thee.

Poley PLUNGES his blade and SLICES Marlowe across the cheek.

POLEY

Gotcha.

Marlowe clutches his face, pouring BLOOD.

THOMAS

Quick, while he's stunned.

They rush him, but Marlowe SWIPES almost catching Poley. Poley jumps back.

POLEY

Get him.

Frizer moves to tackle. Marlowe PUNCHES him. Frizer REELS back and Marlowe DRIVES his blade into Frizer's gut.

Frizer doubles over and falls, groaning.

Marlowe turns and puts his dagger at Thomas' throat.

KIT

(to Poley) Back away or he'll taste the point of my blade.

Poley moves forward. Kit pushes the dagger into Thomas' neck.

THOMAS

(to Poley) Step back.

POLEY

He won't do it, he ain't got the stomach.

KIT

Don't bet on it.

THOMAS

(to Poley) Step back I say.

POLEY

(to Marlowe) Yield or fight.

KIT

Do your worst.

Poley moves in.

Marlowe SHOVES Thomas into Poley.

THOMAS

(to Poley) Get him.

Poley CHARGES. Marlowe DRIVES his knife down.
Poley BLOCKS him.

They STRUGGLE.

Marlowe pivots and Poley falls.

Marlowe raises his dagger over Poley, about to strike.

In a FLASH of LIGHTNING Thomas steps forward and
STABS Marlowe in the back.

Marlowe pauses, shocked.

KIT

Thomas!

He STAGGERS and weakly swipes his knife. Thomas
easily steps aside.

THOMAS

I'm sorry, my friend.

A thunder CLAP in the distance.

Marlowe COLLAPSES and GROANS, bleeding out.

KIT

I... loved... you.

Thomas kneels down to Marlowe, a pool of blood widening around him.

POLEY

Come, sir, before you're discovered.

THOMAS

I cannot leave you in their hands.

KIT

We make our own hell, Thomas.

THOMAS

Sssh.

Thomas SLIDES THE KNIFE INTO MARLOWE'S NECK.

THOMAS

Good night, sweet poet.

Marlowe GURGLES BLOOD.

Thomas hugs him as Marlowe SHUDDERS and becomes STILL.

THOMAS

I loved you too, my friend.

POLEY

We must go, my lord.

THOMAS

(snaps) A moment.

He KISSES Marlowe.

THOMAS

(to Marlowe) Farewell.

A sound off stage.

POLEY

(looking back) A soldier's almost upon us.

THOMAS

Remember the story, killed in a tavern.

POLEY

Yes, sir.

Thomas exits.

Poley helps Frizer up and they stagger off.

Lights down to Marlowe's body.

The fog bell tolls. The sound of rain and thunder.

The Collector wheels his cart on.

COLLECTOR

(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 stops the cart and regards Marlowe's body.

COLLECTOR

A rare spark you was, but betrayed and slain on the whim of a lord. Why? Because you spoke truth to power and wouldn't be shut down. Ah, if but a few more of us had your courage, what a world we might have.

But alas, round pegs don't fit in a square world, and what have you to show for it? Nothing, just words on pages, and another body for the grave, where we all end; the virtuous and the vile; priests and soldiers, whores and children. None escape.. (*hoists Marlowe's body up*) Up you come, lad, and off to the pits with you.

He slides Marlowe onto the cart and wheels it off.

COLLECTOR

*(sings) Then weep no more, thou sorry boy, Turn thy tears to weeping joy.
Sigh no more "Ah me! I die!", But dance, and sing, and ti-hy cry.*

A CLAP of thunder. A FLASH of lightning.

End of Act Four.

ACT FIVE

SCENE TWENTY

Henslowe's office, indicated by a chair, table, and masks on the wall. Enter Henslowe, half dressed as Faustus, and Judith, half dressed as Helen.

HENSLOWE

Are we full?

JUDITH

To the rafters.

HENSLOWE

Is Her Majesty in attendance?

JUDITH

No, but everyone else; lords, ladies, gentlemen, even the mayor.

HENSLOWE

Didn't I tell you we'd be back?

JUDITH

Yes, you did, Phillip. And we'll give The Globe a run for it's money.

Thomas and Anne enter at the side of the stage. She carries a manuscript. They approach the office door.

THOMAS

My condolences on the death of your husband. I heard it was a speedy departure.

ANNE

His already diminutive heart finally gave up.

THOMAS

I'm truly sorry.

ANNE

Twas no great loss.

THOMAS

Was it that bad between you?

ANNE

Let's just say now I'm free.

THOMAS

And how are you faring alone?

ANNE

Never better, for what was his is now mine, but let's not talk of death, but life and what lies ahead.

THOMAS

Yes, my lady, that's the spirit.

She wavers, unsteady.

THOMAS

Are you all right?

ANNE

I'm fine. (*pats her stomach*)

THOMAS

By the gleam in your eye I'm guessing it's not Havenhurst's progeny?

ANNE

Now, now Thomas, you presume too much.

THOMAS

Forgive me, my lady, some things are better left unsaid.

ANNE

Indeed, but if I'm to bear a child, I'll need a husband, a partner, so to speak.

THOMAS

So not for love?

ANNE

More of a business proposition. As a woman of wealth I'll be preyed upon.

THOMAS

Yes, half of the court will be on you like sharks.

ANNE

But with the right man at my side I could accomplish much.

THOMAS

You're an intriguing woman, my lady.

ANNE

(smiles) You may call me Anne.

THOMAS

And you may call me Thomas.

He takes her arm and they enter the office. Henslowe at his desk.

HENSLOWE

Lord Walsingham, always a pleasure. *(bows to Anne)* My lady.

THOMAS

It's good to see the theater open again, Henslowe.

HENSLOWE

It was touch and go there, but with the queen's blessing, our license is restored.

THOMAS

And with the plague in recession it should be plain sailing.

HENSLOWE

We can only hope so, my lord.

THOMAS

What's your first production?

HENSLOWE

Marlowe's *Faustus*.

THOMAS

Splendid. His best.

HENSLOWE

*“Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium...”*

THOMAS

*(to Anne) “... Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helen.”*

HENSLOWE

He did write a mighty line.

THOMAS

He set the world alight.

HENSLOWE

Is it true, he died in a brawl in a tavern?

THOMAS

Do you doubt it?

HENSLOWE

Oh no, no doubt, just curious.

THOMAS

Eleanor Bull, the tavern owner, bore witness.

HENSLOWE

Right. Of course.

ANNE

He was a poet amongst jackals.

THOMAS

(laughs) He was no innocent, my lady.

HENSLOWE

Wisely said my lord, for none of us are without sin. I have a box reserved for you.

THOMAS

(gives him a coin) Thank you, Henslowe.

ANNE

Perhaps we should join forces? I could become your patron in Kit's memory.

HENSLOWE

(delighted) My lady.

ANNE

I have money to spare.

JUDITH

How much patronage are you talking?

ANNE

Enough to buy The Globe, where you can perform Kit's plays in all their splendor.

HENSLOWE

But his play are lost with him.

THOMAS

No, actually I kept copies.

HENSLOWE

All of them?

THOMAS

I'd not let them disappear.

HENSLOWE

You hear that, Judith, we could run a season.

ANNE

And we could commission new plays by Johnson, Fletcher, and Shakespeare.

HENSLOWE

Absolutely, my lady, they're more popular than ever.

ANNE

Then my servant shall bring you a down payment.

JUDITH

(overcome) Goodness, my lady, t'would be a dream fulfilled.

ANNE

I take that as a yes?

JUDITH

Yes, definitely yes. We'll present you a plan, won't we, Philip?

HENSLOWE

We'll have it all drawn out for you, my lady, costs, returns, overheads, everything.

ANNE

I believe this could be the start of a wonderful partnership, but of course, as a woman, we'll have to keep this between us.

HENSLOWE

(gleeful) Yes, my lady, yes, yes.

A bell RINGS off stage.

JUDITH

Sir Thomas, Lady Walsingham, your box is ready. *Faustus* is about to begin.

ANNE

(hands Henslowe a script) Will you take a look at this?

HENSLOWE

A play?

ANNE

My first.

HENSLOWE

I look forward to reading it, ma'a m.

THOMAS

Anne, let's take our place.

ANNE

Keep up the good work, Henslowe, for where there's art there's hope.

Thomas and Lady Anne exit arm in arm.

Henslowe takes a 'devil' mask from the wall and puts it on.

HENSLOWE

Come, my dear, let's give them a show to remember.

They exit.

On the side of the stage enter The Collector with his cart.

COLLECTOR

*(sings) 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 who'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.*

He exits.

Lights to black.

End play.