

**"EXIT MARLOWE"**

An Adapted Screenplay

By

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Based On His Novel

"The Marlowe Conspiracy"

FADE IN:

Moon over sea. Title: "MAY 1593 -- ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND."

TITLE CARD:

Plague, famine, and religious persecution blast the land...

Enemies both at home and abroad challenge the Queen...

Now is a time of poison, plots, and spies...

EXT. CALAIS, FRANCE - CITY STREET -- DUSK

Bustling. TWO CITY GUARDS scan the crowd and stroll by a murky inn with the sign: 'AUBERGE DU PASSEUR'.

INT. AUBERGE DU PASSEUR - ROOM -- DUSK

Dusty. Spare. Before a mirror, CHRISTOPHER 'KIT' MARLOWE (late 20's) carefully applies a wig and fake moustache.

Kit is a man of hidden tension: focused yet undisciplined; alert but frustrated; confident yet racked by anxiety.

He checks his disguise and stares at his reflection. Next, he takes A DOCUMENT and hides it inside a medical bag.

A PIGEON FLUTTERS at his window.

He flinches, opens the window, and unclips the message from the pigeon's foot. The note reads: "Boat to England on schedule. Good luck."

He glances out of the window: galleon masts peek over distant rooftops. Below, guards stop and search a cart.

EXT. AUBERGE DU PASSEUR -- NIGHT

Moonlit mist. Cobblestone streets. With his medical bag, Kit steps outside, his eyes searching for danger.

GUARD 1 (O.S.)

Stand fast! Halt!

He turns and faces TWO GUARDS. GUARD 1 thrusts out a hand.

GUARD 1

Papers.

Calmly, Kit opens his bag, pulls out his papers, and hands them over to Guard 1. GUARD 2 rifles through his bag.

GUARD 1

Your business in Calais, monsieur?

KIT

I'm a doctor traveling on to Rouen.

They study each other. Guard 2 finishes with his bag.

GUARD 2

Nothing.

Guard 1 nods and gives the papers back to Kit.

KIT

Forgive me, but is there some hazard  
in town tonight?

GUARD 1

There's word of English spies. We're  
searching everyone. Good morrow.

The guards leave and Kit puts his papers away.

LATER

Kit paces quicker down the road and tries to avoid A KNOT  
OF WORRIED PEOPLE by a house. A PORTLY WOMAN in the crowd  
sees his medical bag and rushes over to him.

WOMAN

Pray help me, doctor! Something  
ails my husband! Will you look?

KIT

Sorry, I have another appointment.

He strides past her but she catches up again.

WOMAN

Wait! If it's the money, we have  
enough. You must help us!

He stops reluctantly, looks back at the guards, then follows  
her over to the group. Her HUSBAND lies slumped against  
the wall, eyes shut. Kit inspects him suspiciously.

KIT

He's drunk, madam.

The woman looks around the group, embarrassed.

WOMAN

Drunk? Not my husband. It must be worse than that. It's his heart.

KIT

Afraid not.

WOMAN

Yes it is. It's his heart.

Silence. All eyes on Kit. He gives in, rummages through his bag, and finds A POT OF LEECHES. With a FAT LEECH in hand, he hesitates and places the leech on the husband's forehead. Afterwards, he steps back grandly.

KIT

He'll be fine now. There's nothing like a good leech to mend the heart.

The crowd GRUMBLES and the woman's temper rises.

WOMAN

I've never seen a doctor do that. Who are you? You're no doctor.

Kit packs his bag fast. She grabs him as he moves off.

WOMAN

Come back here! Who are you?

KIT

No one. Whoever you say I am.

He speeds off. She flings her hands in the air and SHOUTS.

WOMAN

A devil! That's who you are! A devil! A devil! A devil!

Her words ECHO and alarm the guards up the street. They stalk back towards Kit. He veers away around a corner.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET -- NIGHT

Kit sweeps along briskly. The guards dash after him. He reaches into his bag, removes the secret document, hides it up his sleeve. Seconds later, the guards reach him.

He spins. Crashes the bag into Guard 1's face, knocking him to the floor. Guard 2 lunges at Kit with a spear, forces him back towards a well.

At the well, Guard 2 stabs at Kit's head. Kit sidesteps. The guard overbalances and tumbles over into the well.

Guard 1 rushes at Kit. With the well's bucket and rope, Kit fights him, knocks him out, and takes his sword.

People SHOUT in alarm. More GUARDS appear and chase after Kit. He streaks towards a cooper's shop and breaks inside.

INT. COOPER'S SHOP -- NIGHT

Kit hides behind barrels. The guards hunt around for him.

When the guards move close enough, Kit slashes his sword into a shelf laden with huge barrels. It collapses. BARRELS THUNDER DOWN and hit the guards.

EXT. COOPER'S SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE -- MOMENTS LATER

Kit darts outside and finds a CART with a MAN unloading sacks of flour from the back. He leaps into the driver seat and whips the reins against the horse.

MAN

Hey!

Kit RUMBLES off aboard the cart.

EXT. CITY STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Kit ROARS along. Seconds later, GUARDS ON HORSEBACK, armed with crossbows, gallop after him.

KIT

God's death!

He YELLS at the horse and frowns at the sacks of flour on the cart bed.

GUARD ON HORSEBACK

Halt! In the name of the king!

Kit speeds up. Arrows slice past and spike into the cart.

With guards almost upon him, he veers toward a narrow alley. Leaps onto the horse in front. Fumbles at the pin connecting the horse to the cart. The alley gets closer... and closer... He frees the pin just in time.

THE CART DETACHES FROM THE HORSE. SWINGS RIGHT. SMASHES INTO THE ALLEY WALL, EXPLODING INTO A CLOUD OF FLOUR. The guards behind him crash into the cart's wreckage. Kit escapes and gallops his horse away.

EXT. DOCKS -- NIGHT

Fog-shrouded galleons. Kit rides to a ship just as SAILORS prepare to go. He leaps down from his horse, gives a slip of paper to a sailor, then scrambles aboard the ship.

EXT. GALLEON - TOP DECK -- NIGHT

By an oil lamp, Kit rests alone on bags of grain and hides the secret document in a pouch hanging from his belt.

From the same pouch, he pulls out a pencil, blank paper, and writes: "*DOCTOR FAUSTUS -- LAST SCENE*". Below the title, he writes:

"FAUSTUS: Ah, Faustus, Now hast thou but one bare hour to live..."

EXT. ENGLAND - CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL -- DAY

TITLE CARD: CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL -- ENGLAND

By the entrance, royal carriages wait with idle footmen.

INT. CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL - NAVE -- DAY

Sun cascades through stained glass windows. JOHN WHITGIFT, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, strolls with QUEEN ELIZABETH I towards the exit. The Queen's SERVANTS trail behind them.

Whitgift (60's) is straight, tall, and powerful, but looks as stiff as a figure in a stained glass window. Elizabeth (59) is painted in pearls, velvets, and layers of heavy makeup -- more a portrait of herself than the real thing.

WHITGIFT

Your majesty's stay was agreeable?

ELIZABETH

Indeed. You've spoiled me as a child.

WHITGIFT

Ah, that comes from having none of my own. I have the will, but my position allows no time for marriage.

ELIZABETH

Even so, without the riots in London I should've stayed longer.

Whitgift's face darkens and he bows his head solemnly.

ELIZABETH

We've had such plagues and famines...

WHITGIFT

But the people's unrest is not disease or hunger. Atheism is the blight and famine of their souls. Your grace, Catholics and Puritans have torn apart this country, but Atheists are still few enough to curtail--

ELIZABETH

If you wish to cut open my policies, Archbishop, please do so with a point.

WHITGIFT

Stop the mouths of playwrights.

ELIZABETH

Glorious! A ban on entertainment.

They pause at the entrance. Elizabeth narrows her eyes. Whitgift shifts about, nervously.

WHITGIFT

Only upon the most sinful plays. Of all poets, none is so profane or worshipped as Christopher Marlowe. Execute him for atheism and you'll silence the rest.

ELIZABETH

You obviously haven't heard -- I'm to see Marlowe's new play tomorrow.

Whitgift freezes, shocked and bitter.

ELIZABETH

Marlowe may be radical, but providing his plays remain inside the theater, and no one acts them out in the streets, I'll not quarrel with him.

She gives him her hand. He pecks it with due correctness and glowers as she departs for the carriages.

EXT. WHITEHALL PALACE - BALLROOM -- DAY

Ornate. Elizabeth and many nobles watch a play: Marlowe's "*Doctor Faustus*". NED ALLEYN, a star actor, BELLOWS out.

## ALLEYN AS FAUSTUS

"My heart's so harden'd, I cannot  
repent: scarce can I name salvation,  
faith, or heaven, but fearful echoes  
thunder in mine ears 'Faustus, thou  
art damned!'"

Kit creeps in, admires the captivated audience, and sees a couple seated nearby: THOMAS WALSHINGHAM and his wife AUDREY.

Thomas (late 20's) is well-dressed, with a sharp forelock and intelligent eyes. Audrey (20's) is composed like a beautiful statue -- alive and dead in the same moment.

Kit tiptoes over to them. He retrieves PAPERS from his pouch and delivers them to Thomas. Discreetly, Thomas slips the papers inside his doublet. He and Kit WHISPER.

Meanwhile, Audrey strains to watch the play but is unable to keep her eyes off Kit. Thomas scowls as she leans across him to speak with Kit.

AUDREY

Your play's wonderful, Christopher.  
Probably your best yet.

KIT

Thank you, my lady.

AUDREY

Will he go to Hell at the end?

KIT

Hell?

He springs to his feet, suddenly troubled.

KIT

Oh, Hell! The last scene!

He scampers off down the aisle.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- DAY

At the intermission, Kit dives into the backstage chaos of ACTORS changing costume and rehearsing. PHILIP HENSLOWE (40's), a pudgy businessman, confronts Kit immediately.

HENSLOWE

Three hours! Three!

KIT

I know...

HENSLOWE

You've never, ever, been this late!  
Where's my ending?

The actors wait anxiously for the scene. Kit draws out some PAGES from his pouch and gives them to Henslowe.

HENSLOWE

D'you realize the position you've put the Admiral's Men in? We're performing a play that's not finished. The Queen's out there! By god, she'll ask for more than her money back.

Henslowe rubs his neck anxiously and scans over the pages. He frowns and shows them to Alleyn.

HENSLOWE

That's a strange last scene.

ALLEYN

(reads)

"A catalogue of recent words between Henry IV of France and the Duke of--"

Horrified, Kit snatches back the papers. He rushes away.

HENSLOWE

My scene, Kit? I want my scene!

INT. ROOM ADJOINING BALLROOM -- DAY

Nobles sip drinks and MURMUR about the play. Quickly, Kit weaves into the room and finds Thomas and Audrey.

AUDREY

You've come to steal my husband?

KIT

No, merely to borrow him. You may have him back anon.

AUDREY

Is that a threat?

Audrey SNICKERS at her joke and Kit smiles. Thomas looks at them both and glowers jealously.

THOMAS

Really, Audrey! I think you've had enough wine this evening.

He snatches her goblet and gives it to A PASSING SERVANT.  
After, Kit takes Thomas aside and gives him the DOCUMENT.

KIT

This is the document. What I gave  
you earlier was something else.

Thomas glances over the papers before he swaps them.

THOMAS

Sloppy, Christopher. Remember, you  
work for her majesty. You're not a  
spy and a playwright in equal measure.

KIT

Thanks for telling me.

THOMAS

I'll tell you something else, too:  
mess up like this again and you'll  
be neither a spy nor a playwright.  
At least, not on my payroll.

Thomas stalks off. Kit rubs his brow, tired and annoyed.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- DAY

Kit hands a wad of paper to a glowering Henslowe.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- LATER

From behind the curtain, Kit eagerly surveys the audience.

BALLROOM - FRONT STAGE

Alleyn stands on stage before A GROUP OF DEVILS. His VOICE  
resounds throughout the room.

ALLEYN AS FAUSTUS

"My God, my God, look not so fierce  
on me! Adders and serpents, let me  
breathe a while! Ugly hell, gape  
not! Come not, Lucifer! I'll burn  
my books! - Ah, Mephistophilis!"

The devils drag Alleyn backstage.

BACKSTAGE

Everyone peers through the curtain as the CHORUS finishes.

## CHORUS

"...regard his hellish fall, whose  
fiendish fortune may exhort the wise,  
only to wonder at unlawful things,  
whose deepness doth entice such wits  
to practice more than heavenly power  
permits."

The play ends. Silence. Slowly, after Elizabeth starts  
CLAPPING, others join in and build to a frenzy of APPLAUSE.

The actors line up to file back onto stage, but Kit pushes  
out through the curtain before them.

## BALLROOM - FRONT STAGE

Kit basks in his glory. Among the audience, Whitgift grabs  
the arms of his chair, knuckles white.

Elizabeth parades up onto the stage. Kit bows before her.

## ELIZABETH

Congratulations, master Marlowe. A  
resounding success, I believe.

## KIT

My humble thanks, your majesty.

Whitgift lunges to his feet and makes a stir as he works  
his way to the stage. Kit watches with concern.

## WHITGIFT

My Queen! Surely you don't plan to  
release this play upon the people?  
The hero fakes his religion, he  
desires god-like power, and he spends  
his time conversing with a devil!

## ELIZABETH

At the end of which he is damned.

## WHITGIFT

No substitute for two hours of sin.

Elizabeth STAMPS her foot.

## ELIZABETH

Do you doubt our judgment, Archbishop?

## WHITGIFT

No, only that of the people. They  
are as children to the wisdom of  
their rulers. This play cannot but  
harm their faith and cause more riots.

Elizabeth turns to Kit.

ELIZABETH  
What say you? The Archbishop thinks  
this is a terrible play.

KIT  
I quite agree.

ELIZABETH  
You do?

KIT  
Of course. But who am I to stand  
against the opinion of my Queen and  
so many of her noblemen?

LAUGHTER trickles through the audience.

WHITGIFT  
This play will drag the people further  
from their faith. Again, I ask your  
majesty to ban this man's work.

Elizabeth refuses to answer. Whitgift turns to Kit.

WHITGIFT  
My son, will you not write more  
conservatively to save England?

KIT  
I thought this play was conservative.  
(to Elizabeth)  
I always aim to be conservative.

Elizabeth smirks. Whitgift bows sharply.

WHITGIFT  
I beg leave of your majesty.

He storms off. The doormen step across the exit and look  
to Elizabeth. She nods and the doormen let Whitgift go.

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE - BALLROOM -- NIGHT

The crowd disperses. Marlowe stands and chats with Audrey  
and Thomas. They both seem to compete for Kit's attention.

THOMAS  
You won't sleep in London, I trust?

Kit nods.

AUDREY

But the plague, Christopher! You must come home with us till it passes.

THOMAS

Yes, and besides, it looks well for a poet to live with his patron.

Kit glances at Audrey. Thomas pretends not to notice.

THOMAS

Then it's settled.

(To Audrey)

Doesn't the Queen have need of you?

AUDREY

Not yet. Oh, look, there's Burghley -- I thought you had to speak with him?

Audrey points to LORD BURGHELY a tall, white-haired man. Thomas's face tightens. He looks at Kit apologetically.

THOMAS

I'll be just a moment.

Thomas follows Burghley out of the room. An awkward silence opens between Kit and Audrey. Kit clears his throat.

KIT

How fares it as Gentlewoman to the Privy Chamber? You must know the Queen's mind more than her ministers.

AUDREY

I do, at the expense of my own.

Suddenly, A STAR-STRUCK YOUNG MAIDEN tugs on Kit's sleeve.

MAIDEN

Sorry to interrupt, but I've seen all your plays! Would you do me the honor of kissing my hand?

Politely, Kit pecks her hand, then turns back to Audrey. However, the maiden taps him on the shoulder again.

MAIDEN

I wonder... could I also have some memento to cherish our meeting?

Annoyed, he rips a button from his doublet for her.

MAIDEN

My everlasting thanks!

He turns away and back to Audrey.

AUDREY

Looks like you have quite the admirer.

KIT

Yes, and because of my admirers I have to write the same play over and over. They never want anything new.

The maiden interrupts again by pushing A BOUND COPY OF A PLAY in front of Kit's nose.

MAIDEN

Look, I have your play -- 'Tamburlaine the Great'. Could I entreat you to make your mark upon this, too?

KIT

No. I've given you enough.

Her lips tighten.

MAIDEN

My father is Lord Rochester.

KIT

Oh, he's Lord Rochester, is he? Why didn't you say so before? What was it you wanted again?

MAIDEN

Your mark on this.

KIT TAKES THE PLAY, DRAWS HIS DAGGER, AND STABS IT INTO THE BOOK. He gives it back to her, the dagger still impaled. She gapes in shock, but soon grins, impressed.

She skips off clutching the play. Kit scowls after her, but soon smiles again when he looks at Audrey.

EXT. BARGE ON CANAL -- NIGHT

Rain lashes the barge. Inside, Kit and Thomas lounge on plush cushions. Thomas can't take his eyes away from Kit.

THOMAS

Do you ever long for home when you travel abroad? I - I mean Audrey and myself - always miss your company.

Kit doesn't respond. His arms are crossed.

THOMAS

You're not stung by what I said earlier? Forgive me if--

KIT

No, I was just thinking on Whitgift.

THOMAS

For a man who hates the stage, he's certainly full of his own theatrics!

Thomas LAUGHS lightly, but Kit remains serious.

KIT

Yes, but he'll have his way sooner or later. My future as a playwright is shorter than a hangman's rope.

THOMAS

Nonsense. Whitgift's been after you before, hasn't he? He couldn't touch you then and he won't touch you now.

KIT

I don't know.

THOMAS

Look, Burghley's taken you under his wing -- the head of the intelligence service, no less! And even the Queen favors you. That's protection enough.

Kit shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

KIT

No more assignments for a while. My efforts should be focused on my plays.

Thomas frowns and looks at him askew.

THOMAS

That's a little extreme...

KIT

I'm not your only spy.

THOMAS

But you're my best. To people like Burghley, your efficiency becomes my efficiency. You just need a break.

KIT

A break from service to her majesty.

Thomas sits upright.

THOMAS

You know, I'll take you with me as my position advances.

KIT

You're also patron of my plays. Don't you care about my writing?

THOMAS

My interest is solely as your employer for Lord Burghley and the government. I support your writing on behalf of my wife, not myself.

Kit firmly shakes his head.

KIT

No more assignments.

Thomas smiles coldly.

THOMAS

You must be richer than I thought to throw away employment so easily.

KIT

I have debts everywhere.

THOMAS

Obviously you don't need my cash...

Kit grinds his teeth and looks away. Outside, the barge docks before Scadbury Manor.

EXT. SCADBURY MANOR -- NIGHT

Stocky. Brick walls. Encircled by lawns and forest.

INT. SCADBURY MANOR - GUEST BEDCHAMBER -- NIGHT

A Low-beamed ceiling. Grimly, Thomas leads Kit inside. Kit lugs a satchel of belongings onto the bed.

THOMAS

One of our finest bedchambers.

They exchange a tense look. Kit SIGHS and wanders over to the window. Thomas shuffles up to the bed, fiddles with Kit's satchel, and idly starts to unpack his clothes.

THOMAS

You know, I've taken a new passion to archery. Perhaps I'll erect some targets in the garden this week. We could shoot together?

Kit looks out at the rain. Thomas watches him, spellbound.

THOMAS

Of course, I'm not very good. No matter how I set my sights, my arrow drifts away from its target. Does that make me a bad archer, just because I miss from time to time?

Kit shrugs and approaches the bed. He notices Thomas unpacking his clothes and frowns, suddenly disturbed.

THOMAS

I can always learn accuracy... with discipline...

Thomas slowly extends an amorous hand towards Kit's cheek. Kit freezes, then jerks his head away. Thomas snatches his hand back, instantly embarrassed.

THOMAS

Anyway, it's late. You should get these clothes in drawers. Good-night.

Kit watches anxiously as Thomas paces out of the room.

INT. GUEST BEDCHAMBER -- LATER

Kit sits at a desk and writes on parchment. Stressed, he crumples the page and lobs it across the room.

A KNOCK at his door. He winces. The KNOCK sounds again.

KIT

Thomas?

AUDREY (O.S.)

No. Audrey.

He gets up, drags open the door, and finds Audrey outside.

AUDREY

I'm not disturbing your writing?

KIT

No, I fear it's disturbed already.

AUDREY

Why? Are your words blocked?

KIT

No, the words march out very easily,  
like they've been written before.  
You know... sometimes... I think I  
hate Christopher Marlowe...

AUDREY

I have a secret answer for that.

He frowns. Her eyes twinkle as she leans in and whispers.

AUDREY

Be someone else.

He smiles.

KIT

Your wisdom overwhelms me, my lady.

AUDREY

Yes, I'm truly wonderful, aren't I?

Silence descends. His eyes float away from her.

AUDREY

Would you come to town on the morrow?  
There's a royal banquet soon and I  
need to see a tailor about my gown.  
I'd value your opinion.

KIT

You flatter me, but--

AUDREY

Thomas will be with us, too.

KIT

My lady, I have other business.

AUDREY

It's just a silly dress, anyway. I  
don't know why you'd be interested.

She ambles away dejectedly. He leans out the doorway.

KIT

What time will you go?

AUDREY

Nine.

KIT  
Very well.

She gives a faint smile.

AUDREY  
Good-night.

KIT  
Good-night.

INT. CORRIDOR -- MOMENTS LATER

Audrey shuffles along. Light spills out from under a nearby door -- Thomas's bedchamber. She cracks the door open.

Thomas lies in bed, brooding. A candle flickers nearby.

AUDREY  
I've invited Christopher to town.

He stares upwards, his face blank.

AUDREY  
Did you hear me?

THOMAS  
I won't be able to go.

AUDREY  
No, you must, I won't have time to see the tailor otherwise!

He snuffs out his candle.

THOMAS  
I only said I couldn't go. You can still see the tailor with Christopher.

AUDREY  
As you wish...

She shuts the door, leaving him to brood in the dark.

EXT. SCADBURY MANOR - DRIVE -- MORNING

Kit and Audrey climb into a carriage. Unseen, Thomas watches them sternly from an upstairs window.

EXT. LONDON - STREET -- DAY

Maids and delivery boys pass in front of a small tailor's shop. The Walsingham carriage waits outside.

INT. TAILOR'S SHOP -- DAY

Audrey flaunts an elegant gown before Kit. Meanwhile, an old TAILOR measures and sticks pins about her waist.

KIT

Lovely. Quite befitting of a lady.

With a carefree air, she points to the fabric of her gown.

AUDREY

I had the gold stitch-work added specially. You don't think it's too much, do you?

He shakes his head.

TAILOR

Stand straight for me, my lady.

She corrects her posture.

KIT

I'd love to know more of what court is like. You're very fortunate to have the position you do.

Her expression saddens, but she hides it.

AUDREY

Yes, I'm certainly fortunate. You might even say I'm fortune's wife.

TAILOR

Stand straight, please.

AUDREY

Of course, I doubt if I should please such a husband. I'm sure... I'm sure I'd disappoint him.

TAILOR

My lady, I need--

She slaps his hand away and a few tears run down her cheeks.

AUDREY

I'll stand straight when I want to and not a moment before! Remember your place, good sir!

KIT

(to Tailor)

Give us a few minutes alone.

The tailor leaves and Kit strides toward her. She blushes and wipes away her tears.

KIT  
Anything wrong?

AUDREY  
No. Why would you think that?

They both smile a little.

KIT  
Thomas tells me he funds my work because of you. So, I think it only right that you decide the subject of my next play.

AUDREY  
Make it on love, though I'm not sure if it should be a comedy or tragedy.

His eyes widen.

KIT  
How about neither? Why not just a story about two people and how they overcome the obstacles between them?

AUDREY  
I like that. But what would the heroine look like? Would she have a dress like this?

KIT  
No. More colorful. Perhaps green.

AUDREY  
Or purple.

KIT  
And her kirtle could be blue.

They LAUGH at the bizarre design.

AUDREY  
I see her in a big myrtle wreath.

KIT  
Yes, and a necklace made of pebbles?

AUDREY  
Pebbles?

He nods and they continue to CHUCKLE.

AUDREY  
My thanks, Christopher. You always  
cheer me.

She wipes away the last of her tears and embraces him in  
thanks. However, her dress snags on an BROOCH he wears.

AUDREY  
Oh, careful -- I'm caught.

He works to untangle them. Meanwhile, they stand locked  
together, tantalizing close. Finally, they part.

KIT  
I don't think it harmed the fabric.

She shakes her head. He gives her the brooch -- A GOLD  
OUROBOROS (a snake eating its own tail).

KIT  
You should have it. It seems to  
like you.

Silence. She smiles gratefully, but his face darkens.

AUDREY  
Kit...

KIT  
I should go. I must see Henslowe.

AUDREY  
Then don't let me keep you.

He bows. As he leaves, their eyes meet one last time.

EXT. GOLDING & CO. TAILORS -- DAY

Thomas and FRIZER (30's), his weasel-faced secretary, rush  
from outside the tailor's window and hide in an alleyway.

Kit exits the shop and strides off. Thomas watches, his  
face tight with anger, jealousy, and frustration.

THOMAS  
I knew it.

FRIZER  
Are you sure, sir?

THOMAS  
Didn't you see their embrace with  
your own two eyes?

He turns and sneers at the tailor shop.

THOMAS  
The mountebank and the harlot...

FRIZER  
Sounds like a play.

Thomas gives him a dark look and stares after Kit again.

EXT. ROSE THEATER -- DAY

Three circular tiers of plaster and beam. A thatched roof open to the sky. Kit barges through the main door.

INT. ROSE THEATER - YARD -- DAY

Kit whisks through the sawdust of the yard near the stage.

On stage, PEELE (30's) rehearses his play with actors. One actor plays A GIRL and kneels before MONSTERS. An ARMORED MAN bravely protects her from the monsters.

ARMORED MAN  
By all the powers in heaven, you  
shalt not harm this girl.

Peele shakes his head and interrupts.

PEELE  
No. More conviction there.

Kit frowns as he passes by.

KIT  
Devils on stage! Good idea -- wish  
I'd thought of it. Oh, wait, I did.

PEELE  
Actually, they're goblins not devils.  
You didn't have that idea, did you?

Kit rolls his eyes and moves off to the backstage area.

INT. RETIRING ROOM

Kit chances upon an argument between Henslowe and WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (late 20's). Will is plain and skinny: his ordinary body almost hides his dazzling mind and spirit.

HENSLOWE

No, no, no -- the public's taste is now for tragedy. That's the only type of play I'll bankroll.

WILL

But what if my play changed the public's taste!

Henslowe tilts his head and pretends to think about it.

HENSLOWE

What if? Hmm. If you want your pig to fly it'll need stronger wings than than that.

WILL

I'll take it elsewhere, then. You're not the only playhouse in town.

HENSLOWE

No, I've heard Burbage up at The Theater is fond of bacon.

Henslowe spots Kit waiting and struts away from Will.

HENSLOWE

If you go, I'll just drag another playwright off the street. There's plenty more of your ilk around here, master Shakespeare.

(to Kit)

But there's only one Marlowe. How are you, Kit?

They shake hands. Will grumbles to himself.

INT. ROSE THEATER - STANDS -- DAY

Kit and Henslowe sit and watch the rehearsals on stage.

HENSLOWE

A what?

KIT

A story about love. It can be comic and tragic, but escape the bounds of either style -- a new type of drama.

HENSLOWE

You know I don't like the word 'new'.

Kit looks hopeful as Henslowe pauses in thought.

HENSLOWE

You see, people come to a Marlowe play expecting tragedy, a hero fighting the world. Your story isn't really a Marlowe play at all.

Kit throws his hands in the air.

KIT

Then you don't want it?

HENSLOWE

Bring me half and we'll discuss an advance then.

KIT

No, I need the money now.

Henslowe shrugs frankly. Incensed, Kit jumps up and rages for the exit. He strides near the actors on stage.

ARMORED MAN

By all the powers in heaven--

KIT

(finishes it)

How could anyone write such a god-awful scene?

The players PROTEST loudly. Peele takes particular offense.

PEELE

We're all tired of your mouth, Kit. Why don't you go to Hell along with your last hero?

KIT

Peele, I've seen gutter turds that could write a better play than you. Henslowe should get some in here. Or perhaps we have enough refuse lying about the place already!

He storms out.

EXT. LONDON - CITY STREET -- DAY

As Kit stalks up the street, cooling down, he sights Will ahead and catches up with him.

KIT

What did you try to push on Henslowe?

WILL

A comedy.

Kit raises his eyebrows.

WILL

No offense, but I don't want to write another tragedy. I like your work, but I always tend towards humor.

KIT

Isn't comedy out of place in a world like ours? What's funny about poverty, injustice, and brutality?

WILL

Nothing. But there's more to the world than that. There are forces that transcend our suffering -- that exist beyond our limitations. Life becomes a tragedy when we miss them, but a comedy if we find them.

KIT

Forces like what, exactly? God?

WILL

No. Love.

Kit pats him on the back.

KIT

Want a drink somewhere?

INT. LONDON - TAVERN -- EVENING

Gloomy. CUSTOMERS are sullen: hatred seems part of the brew they gulp down. Uneasily, Kit and Will perch on a bench and drink their ale.

KIT

This place isn't usually so dead.

Kit scans the room and shakes his head.

KIT

Anyway, about your play, will it be set in courtly circles?

WILL

No. I don't know much about that side of life. I don't have the connections you do.

KIT

Well, I don't see nearly enough of that life myself.

Kit SIGHS.

KIT

God, the day is too short to eke it out in hovels like this!

WILL

It's not so bad -- it's just today.

KIT

It's every day. But not for everyone, of course. People like Thomas Walsingham have cushions of wealth rather than hard benches to sit on.

Kit takes a big draught of ale.

WILL

Tell me something: do you think it possible for a man to write himself?

KIT

In words and plays, perhaps. But not in reality. Out here, we don't decide who we are.

WILL

It's just I never get the same strength of voice found in your work.

KIT

That's because you try to slip inside every character. I only put myself in one: the hero.

WILL

Don't you feel that confines you?

KIT

Well, yes, but...

Suddenly, Henslowe rams through the door and dashes across the room to Kit's table. He arrives panting and upset.

HENSLOWE

Outside. In the street--

KIT

Save it, Henslowe. Your tongue's wagged enough today.

HENSLOWE

No. Listen to me! There's something  
I must show you! Quickly!

Kit and Will look startled. Henslowe is deadly serious. He starts away and waves for them to follow. Kit and Will exchange mystified glances and leave their seats.

EXT. CHURCH -- NIGHT

Led by Henslowe, Kit and Will hurry to A CROWD (Puritans in black) staring at the church's front door. Nailed high above, A LARGE POSTER glares down at the anxious faces.

HENSLOWE

These appear on nearly every street.

They move closer through the crowd and Kit scans the poster.

In large black letters, the poster reads: "MARCH AGAINST THE POWERS OF HEAVEN!" He can't yet see the very bottom.

With a frown, he turns cautiously to Henslowe.

KIT

What's it to do with me?

Henslowe jostles to the front of the crowd and points to the signature at the bottom of the poster. Kit peers closer in disbelief. He gulps. It reads: "CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE."

KIT

They've taken my words... It's from one of my plays.

HENSLOWE

They'll have you on treason for this.  
You know the punishment for treason,  
don't you?

Kit freezes in terror...

FLASHCUTS:

- Gallows: A crowd JEERS as Kit hangs by the neck, barely alive. Executioners cut him down and revive him with water.
- Execution table: Kit is disemboweled and castrated.
- Chopping Block: An axe thuds down into Kit's neck.
- Execution table: Kit's dead body is severed into quarters.

BACK TO SCENE

Kit flinches and turns to Henslowe and Will desperately.

KIT  
You know I didn't write this.

WILL  
Then who?

Kit shakes his head. Scared but furious, he wheels, rips the poster from the door.

KIT  
Let's find out!

The crowd reacts. A PURITAN WOMAN points at him.

PURITAN WOMAN  
It's him! He's the one!

The crowd GRUMBLES. With Will in tow, Kit rampages off down the street, the poster clasped in his hand.

EXT. LONDON STREET -- NIGHT

Will struggles to keep up as Kit marches along, half-mad.

WILL  
Where are you going?

KIT  
To find the charlatan printer who made this venomned thing.

Kit spies ANOTHER POSTER. He grimaces and barrels onwards to a shop with a sign that reads: "Edward Blount & Sons."

EXT. EDWARD BLOUNT & SONS -- NIGHT

Kit rams the thick oak door. It shakes, but he rebounds, making no impact. Will watches and frowns.

WILL  
How d'you know it's this one?

KIT  
I don't.

Kit rams the door again. No impact. Will stands in front.

WILL  
Don't be such a fool. Anyone in  
England - anyone in all of Europe -  
could have printed it.

Kit nods calmly, but crashes into the door again. He slumps,  
grips his sore shoulder. Will kneels down beside him.

KIT  
You know what this means, don't you?

WILL  
That you need a stronger shoulder?

KIT  
It means these libels have posted a  
fence between myself and the Queen.  
She only protected me while my plays  
did no harm.

Will takes the poster from his hand and scans it over.

WILL  
These weren't cheap. It took power,  
organization to post so many. Are  
there any lords who wish you dead?

Kit shrugs and heaves himself to his feet.

KIT  
Is there a horse I can borrow?

WILL  
Henslowe has some at the Rose. Go.

Kit nods and races off. At the corner, he stops dead and  
backs up quickly. A LYNCH MOB (mainly Puritans) turn the  
corner. Torchlight flashes. They swarm towards him.

PURITAN MAN  
Heretic!

PURITAN WOMAN  
Hang the scoundrel!

He spins around. Sprints back towards Will, but the mob  
descend upon him too fast. Will darts away down a side  
street as the mob shove and jostle Kit towards a park.