

Ralph Roister Doister

The "Short" Version (Researched and Edited by Rose de Le Mans)

© 1993, The Golden Stag Players

A Comedy
By Nicholas Udall

CHARACTERS

Ralph Roister Doister

Matthew Merrygreek

Gawyn Goodluck, affianced to Dame Custance

Tristram Trusty, his friend

Dobinet Doughty, servant to Ralph Roister Doister

Tom Truepenny, servant to Dame Custance

Sim Suresby, servant to Goodluck

Scrivener

Dame Christian Custance, a widow

Margery Mumblecrust, her nurse

Tibet Talkapace,

Annot Alyface, her maidens

ACT I

Prologue

Welcome be ye to another Golden Stag Production --
Here stand I once again to make introduction.
Ralph Roister Doister we present you this day,
Honest and truly, 'tis a period play!
We bring this to you, in original strength

(Rose comes out and whispers in ear)

Well, a few songs were cut, because of the length.

(Rose comes out again ...)

All right, all the songs we had to throw out!
But the words remain true, have ye no doubt!

(Rose comes out a final time)

Sigh Fine, fine! So the play would not slog
Near two hours were rid from this dialogue.
So the abridged Roister DOister you'll enjoy, we hope.
We did-eth our best, must you then COPE!

(Exeunt)

(Enter "the parasite" **Matthew Merrygreek**.)

Merrygreek As long liveth the merry man, they say,
As doth the sorry man, and longer by a day;
Yet the grasshopper, for all his summer piping,
Starveth in winter with hungry griping.
This lesson must I practise, or else ere long,
With me, Matthew Merrygreek, it will be wrong.
My living lieth here, and there, of God's grace
Sometime with this good man, sometime in that place,
Sometime I hang on Hankyn Hoddydody's sleeve,
But this day, on Ralph Roister Doister's, by his leave.
For truly of all men he is my chief banker
Both for meat and money, and my chief sheet-anchor.
But marvel I see him not all this same day;
I will seek him out -- But, lo! he cometh this way.
I have yond espied him sadly coming,
And in love, for twenty pound, by his glumming.

(Enter **Ralph Roister Doister**.)

Roister Doister Come, death, when thou wilt, I am weary of my life!

Merrygreek (*to the audience*) I told you, I, we should woo another wife!

Roister Doister Why did God make me such a goodly person?

Merrygreek He is in by the week. We shall have sport anon.

Roister Doister And where is my trusty friend, Matthew Merrygreek?

Merrygreek I will make as I saw him not. He doth me seek.

Roister Doister I have him espied, methinketh; yond is he.
Ho! Matthew Merrygreek, my friend, a word with thee!

Merrygreek I will not hear him, but make as I had haste.
Farewell, all my good friends! The time away doth waste,
And the tide, they say, tarrieth for no man!

Roister Doister Thou must with thy good counsel help me if thou can.

Merrygreek God keep thee, worshipful Master Roister Doister!
And farewell the lusty Master Roister Doister!

- Roister Doister** I must needs speak with thee a word or twain.
- Merrygreek** Within a month or two I will be here again.
Negligence in great affairs, ye know, may mar all.
- Roister Doister** Attend upon me now, and well reward thee I shall.
- Merrygreek** I have taken my leave, and the tide is well spent.
- Roister Doister** I die except thou help! I pray thee, be content.
- Merrygreek** Then, to serve your turn, I will some pains take,
And let all mine own affairs alone for your sake.
- Roister Doister** My whole hope and trust resteth only in thee.
- Merrygreek** Then can ye not do amiss, whatever it be.
- Roister Doister** Upon thy comfort I will all things well handle.
- Merrygreek** So, lo! that is a breast to blow out a candle!
But what is this great matter, I would fain know?
We shall find remedy therefore, I trow.
Do ye lack money? Ye know mine old offers;
Ye have always a key to my purse and coffers.
- Roister Doister** I thank thee! Had ever man such a friend?
- Merrygreek** Ye give unto me; I must needs to you lend.
- Roister Doister** Nay, I have money plenty all things to discharge.
- Merrygreek** (*aside*) That knew I right well when I made offer so large.
- Roister Doister** But it is no such matter.
- Merrygreek** What is it than?
Are ye in danger of debt to any man?
- Roister Doister** Tut! I owe nought!
- Merrygreek** What then?
Fear ye imprisonment?

- Roister Doister** No.
- Merrygreek** No, I wist, ye offend not so to be shent¹.
What is it? Hath any man threatened you to beat?
- Roister Doister** What is he that durst have put me in that heat?
He that beateth me -- by His arms! -- shall well find,
That I will not be far from him, nor run behind.
- Merrygreek** That thing know all men ever since ye overthrew
The fellow of the lion which Hercules slew.
But what is it, then?
- Roister Doister** Of love I make my moan.
- Merrygreek** Ah, this foolish love! Wilt ne'er let us alone?
I would meddle no more, since I find all so unkind.
- Roister Doister** Yea, but I cannot so put love out of my mind.
- Merrygreek** But is your love -- tell me first, in any wise --
In the way of marriage, or of merchandise?
If it may otherwise than lawful be found,
Ye get none of my help for a hundred pound.
- Roister Doister** No, by my troth; I would have her to my wife.
- Merrygreek** Then are ye a good man, and God save your life!
And what, or who is she, with whom ye are in love?
- Roister Doister** A woman, whom I know not by what means to move.
- Merrygreek** What is her name?
- Roister Doister** Mistress -- ah --
- Merrygreek** Fie, fie, for shame!
Love ye, and know not whom but "her, yond," "a woman"?
We shall then get you a wife I cannot tell when.
- Roister Doister** The fair woman that supped with us yesternight;
And I heard her name twice or thrice, and had it right.

¹ *shent*] Disgraced.

Merrygreek Yea, ye may see ye ne'er take me to good cheer with you;
If ye had, I could have told you her name now.

Roister Doister I was to blame indeed; but the next time, perchance --
And she dwelleth in this house.

Merrygreek What! Christian Custance?

Roister Doister I hear she is worth a thousand pound and more.

Merrygreek Yea, but learn this one lesson of me afore;
An hundred pound of marriage-money, doubtless,
Is ever thirty pound sterling, or somewhat less,
So that her thousand pound, if she be thrifty,
Is much near about two hundred and fifty,
Howbeit, woers and widows are never poor!

Roister Doister Is she a widow? I love her better therefore.

Merrygreek But I hear she hath made promise to another.

Roister Doister He shall go without her, an he were my brother.

Merrygreek I have heard say -- I am right well advised --
That she hath to Gawyn Goodluck promised.

Roister Doister What is that Gawyn Goodluck?

Merrygreek A merchant man.

Roister Doister Shall he speed afore me? Nay, sir, by sweet Saint Anne!
Ah, sir, "Backare²," quoth Mortimer to his sow.
I will have her mine own self, I make God a vow.
For, I tell thee, she is worth a thousand pound!

Merrygreek Yet a fitter wife for your maship might be found.
Such a goodly man as you might get one with land,
Besides pounds of gold a thousand, and a thousand,
Your most goodly personage is worthy of no less.

Roister Doister I am sorry God made me so comely, doubtless;
For that maketh me eachwhere so highly favored,
And all women on me so enamoured.

² Backare] Backup

- Merrygreek** "Enamoured," quoth you? Have ye spied out that?
As, sir, marry, now I see you know what is what.
"Enamoured," ka? Marry, sir, say that again!
But I thought not ye had marked it so plain.
- Roister Doister** Yes, eachwhere they gaze all upon me and stare.
- Merrygreek** Yea, Malkin, I warrant you as much as they dare.
But now to your widow, whom you love so hot.
- Roister Doister** By Cock, thou sayest truth! I had almost forgot.
- Merrygreek** What if Christian Custance will not have you? what?
- Roister Doister** Have me? yes, I warrant you, never doubt of that,
I know she loveth me, but she dare not speak.
- Merrygreek** Indeed, right meet it were somebody should it break.³
- Roister Doister** She looked on me twenty times yesternight,
And laughed so --
- Merrygreek** That she could not sit upright?
- Roister Doister** No, faith could she not.
- Merrygreek** No, even such a thing I cast.⁴
- Roister Doister** But, for wooing, thou knowest, women are shamefast.
But and she knew my mind, I know she would be glad,
And think it the best chance that ever she had.
- Merrygreek** To her, then, like a man, and be bold forth to start,
Wooers never speed well that have a false heart.
- Roister Doister** What may I best do?
- Merrygreek** Sir, remain ye awhile here;
Ere long one or other of her house will appear.
(*exit*)

³ *should it break*] Make known.

⁴ *cast*] Guessed.

(With **Roister Doister** in the background, enter **Margery Mumblecrust**, spinning on the distaff, and **Tibet Talkapace**, sewing.)

- Mumblecrust** If this distaff were spun, Margery Mumblecrust --
- Talkapace** Where good stale ale is, will drink no water, I trust.
- Mumblecrust** Dame Custance hath promised us good ale and white bread --
- Talkapace** If she keep not promise I will beshrew her head!
But it will be stark night before I shall have done.
- Roister Doister** I will stand here a while, and talk with them anon.
I hear them speak of Custance, which doth my heart good;
To hear her name spoken doth even comfort my blood.
- Mumblecrust** Sit down to your work, Tibet, like a good girl.
- Talkapace** Nurse, meddle you with your spindle and your whirl!
No haste but good, Madge Mumblecrust; for whip and whur⁵,
The old proverb doth say, never made good fur.
- Mumblecrust** Well, ye will sit down to your work anon, I trust.
- Talkapace** Soft fire maketh sweet malt, good Madge Mumblecrust.
- Mumblecrust** And sweet malt maketh jolly good ale for the nones.⁶
- Talkapace** Which will slide down the lane without any bones.
- Roister Doister** The jolliest wench that ere I heard! little mouse!
May I not rejoice that she shall dwell in my house?
- Talkapace** (*To Margery Mumblecrust*)
So, sirrah, now this gear⁷ beginneth for to frame.
- Mumblecrust** Thanks to God, though your work stand still, your tongue is not lame!
- Talkapace** And, though your teeth be gone, both so sharp and so fine,
Yet your tongue can run on pattens as well as mine.

⁵ *whip and whur*] Hurry.

⁶ *nones*] afternoon.

⁷ *gear*] business.

- Talkapace** So would I, if you could your clattering cease;
 But the devil cannot make old trot¹⁰ hold her tongue.
 This sleeve is not willing to be sewed, I trow.
 A small thing might make me all in the ground to throw!
 If ye do so again, well, I would advise you nay.
 In good sooth, one stop more, and I make holiday.
 Ah, each finger is a thumb today methink,
 I care not to let all alone, choose it swim or sink.
(She casts down her work.)
 There it lieth! The worst is but a curried coat.¹¹
 Tut, I am used thereto; I care not a groat!
- Alyface** Have we done sewing since? Then will I in again.
 Here I found you, and here I leave both twain.
(She goes out.)
- Mumblecrust** And I will not be long after, Tib Talkapace.
(Spying Roister Doister.)
- Talkapace** What is the matter?
- Mumblecrust** Yond stood a man all this space,
 And hath heard all that ever we spake together.
- Talkapace** Marry! the more lout he for his coming hither!
 And the less good he can, to listen maidens' talk!
 I care not an I go bid him hence for to walk.
 It were well done to know what he maketh here away.
- Roister Doister** Now might I speak to them, if I wist what to say.
- Mumblecrust** Nay, we will go both off, and see what he is.
- Roister Doister** *(Advancing.)* One that hath heard all your talking, iwis.
- Talkapace** The more to blame you! a good thrifty husband¹²
 Would elsewhere have had some better matters in hand.

¹⁰ *old trot*] old crone

¹¹ *curried coat*] beating.

¹² *good thrifty husband*] housekeeper.

- Roister Doister** I did it for no harm, but for good love I bear
To your dame mistress Custance, I did your talk hear.
And, mistress nurse, I will kiss you for acquaintance.
- Mumblecrust** (*Eagerly.*) I come anon, sir.
- Talkapace** Faith, I would our dame Custance saw this gear!
- Mumblecrust** I must first wipe all clean, yea, I must.
- Talkapace** I'll 'chieve it, doting fool, but it must be cust!¹³
- Mumblecrust** God yield you, sir! Chad¹⁴ not so much i-chotte¹⁵ not whan¹⁶,
Ne'er since chwas born, chwine, of such a gay gentleman!¹⁷
- Roister Doister** I will kiss you too, maiden, for the good will I bear you.
- Talkapace** No, forsooth, by your leave, ye shall not kiss me!
- Roister Doister** Yes, be not afeared; I do not disdain you a whit.
- Talkapace** Why should I fear you? I have not so little wit,
Ye are but a man, I know very well.
- Roister Doister** Why, then?
- Talkapace** Forsooth, for I will not, I use not to kiss men.
- Roister Doister** I would fain kiss you too, good maiden, if I might.
- Talkapace** What should that need?
- Roister Doister** But to honor you, by this light!
I use to kiss all them that I love, so God I vow.
- Talkapace** Yea, sir, I pray you, when did ye last kiss your cow?
- Roister Doister** Ye might be proud to kiss me, if ye were wise.

¹³ *cust*] kissed.

¹⁴ *Chad*] I had.

¹⁵ *i-chotte*] I know.

¹⁶ *not whan*] not when.

¹⁷ *Ne'er ... gentleman!*] Not since I was born, I believe, of such a lively gentleman.

- Talkapace** What promotion were therein?
- Roister Doister** Nurse is not so nice.
- Talkapace** Well, I have not been taught to kissing and licking.
- Roister Doister** Yet I thank you, mistress nurse, ye made no sticking.¹⁸
- Mumblecrust** I will not stick for a kiss with such a man as you!
- Talkapace** They that lust!¹⁹ I will again to my sewing now.
- (*Enter Annot Alyface.*)
- Alyface** Tidings, ho! tidings! Dame Custance greeteth you well.
- Roister Doister** Whom? me?
- Alyface** You, sir? No, sir; I do no such tale tell.
- Roister Doister** But, and she knew me here --
- Alyface** Tibet Talkapace, Your mistress, Custance, and mine, must speak with your grace.
- Talkapace** With me?
- Alyface** Ye must come in to her, out of all doubts.
- Talkapace** And my work not half done! A mischief on all louts!
 (*They go out.*)
- Roister Doister** Ah, good sweet nurse!
- Mumblecrust** A good sweet gentleman!
- Roister Doister** What?
- Mumblecrust** Nay, I cannot tell, sir; but what thing would you?
- Roister Doister** How doth sweet Custance, my heart of gold, tell me how?

¹⁸ *sticking*] objection.

¹⁹ *lust!*] like.

Mumblecrust She doth very well, sir, and commends me to you.

Roister Doister To me?

Mumblecrust Yea, to you, sir.

Roister Doister To me? Nurse, tell me plain, To me?

Mumblecrust Yea.

Roister Doister That word maketh me alive again!

Mumblecrust She commended me to one last day, whoe'er it was.

Roister Doister That was e'en to me and none other, by the Mass.

Mumblecrust I cannot tell you surely, but one it was.

Roister Doister It was I and none other. This cometh to good pass.
I promise thee, nurse, I favour her.

Mumblecrust E'en so, sir.

Roister Doister Bid her sue to me for marriage.

Mumblecrust E'en so, sir.

Roister Doister And surely for thy sake, she shall speed.

Mumblecrust E'en so, sir.

Roister Doister I shall be contented to take her.

Mumblecrust E'en so, sir.

Roister Doister But at thy request, and for thy sake.

Mumblecrust E'en so, sir.

Roister Doister And, come, hark in thine ear what to say.

Mumblecrust (*He tells her a great, long tale in her ear.*) E'en so, sir.

(*Enter Merrygreek, and Dobinet Doughty.*)

- Merrygreek** (*Pretending to believe **Roister Doister** is in love with the old woman.*)
 God be at your wedding! Be ye sped already?
 I did not suppose that your love was so greedy.
 I perceive now ye have chose of devotion;
 And joy ye, lady, of your promotion!
- Roister Doister** Tush, fool, thou are deceived; this is not she.
- Merrygreek** Well, mock much of her, and keep her well, I 'vise ye.
 I will take no charge of such a fair piece keeping.
- Mumblecrust** What aileth this fellow? He driveth me to weeping.
- Merrygreek** What! weep on the wedding day? Be merry, woman!
 Though I say it, ye have chose a good gentleman.
- Roister Doister** Kock's nowns²⁰! what meanest thou man? tut a whistle!²¹
- Merrygreek** (*Continuing to mock him.*)
 Ah, sir, be good to her; she is but gristle! Ah, sweet lamb and cony!
- Roister Doister** Tut, thou are deceived!
- Merrygreek** Weep no more, lady; ye shall be well received.
 Up with some merry noise, sirs, to bring home the bride!
- Roister Doister** Gog's arms, knave! Art thou mad? I tell thee thou art wide²².
- Merrygreek** Then ye intend by night to have her home brought.
- Roister Doister** I tell thee, no!
- Merrygreek** How then?
- Roister Doister** 'Tis neither meant nor thought.
- Merrygreek** What shall we then do with her?
- Roister Doister** Ah, foolish harebrain! This is not she!

²⁰ *Kock's nowns!*] God's wounds!

²¹ *whistle]* trifle.

²² *thou art wide]* thou art mistaken.

- Merrygreek** No is? Why then, unsaid again!
And what young girl is this with your maship so bold?
- Roister Doister** A girl?
- Merrygreek** Yea; I dare say; scarce yet threescore year old.
- Roister Doister** This same is the fair widow's nurse, of whom ye wot.²³
- Merrygreek** Is she but a nurse of a house? Hence home old trot!
Hence at once!
- Roister Doister** No! no!
- Merrygreek** What! an please your maship,
A nurse talk so homely with one of your worship?
- Roister Doister** I will have it so; it is my pleasure and will.
- Merrygreek** Then I am content. Nurse, come again; tarry still.
- Roister Doister** What! she will help forward this my suit for her part.
- Merrygreek** Then is't mine own pigsny²⁴, and blessing on my heart.
- Roister Doister** This is our best friend, man!
- Merrygreek** Then teach her what to say.
- Mumblecrust** I am taught already.
- Merrygreek** Then go, make no delay!
- Roister Doister** Yet hark, one word in thine ear.
- Merrygreek** Back, sirs, from his tail!
- Roister Doister** Back, villains! Will ye be privy of my counsail?
- Merrygreek** Back, sirs! so! I told you afore ye would be shent.²⁵

²³ *wot*] know.

²⁴ *pigsny*] darling.

²⁵ *shent*] put to shame.

- Roister Doister** She shall have the first day a whole peck of argent.
- Mumblecrust** A peck? Nomine Patris! have ye so much to spare?
- Roister Doister** Yea, and a cart-load thereto, or else were it bare,
Besides other movables, household stuff, and land.
- Mumblecrust** Have ye lands too?
- Roister Doister** An hundred marks.
- Merrygreek** Yea, a thousand!
- Mumblecrust** And have ye cattle too? and sheep too?
- Roister Doister** Yea, a few.
- Merrygreek** He is ashamed the number of them to show.
E'en round about him, as many as thousand sheep goes,
As he and thou, and I too have fingers and toes.
- Mumblecrust** And how many years old be you?
- Roister Doister** Forty at least.
- Merrygreek** Yea, and thrice forty to them!
- Roister Doister** Nay, now thou dost jest.
I am not so old; thou misreckonest my years.
- Merrygreek** I know that; but my mind was on bullocks and steers.
- Mumblecrust** And what shall I show her your mastership's name is?
- Roister Doister** Nay, she shall make suit ere she know that, iwis.
- Mumblecrust** Yet let me somewhat know.
- Merrygreek** This is he, understand,
That killed the Blue Spider in Blanchepowder land.
- Mumblecrust** Yea, Jesus! William! Zee law! Did he zo? law!

- Merrygreek** Yea, and the last elephant that ever he saw;
As the beast passed by, he start out of a busk,²⁶
And e'en with pure strength of arms plucked out his great tusk.
- Mumblecrust** O Lord! My heart quaketh for fear!
He is too sore!
- Roister Doister** Thou makest her too much afeard. Merrygreek, no more!
This tale would 'fear my sweetheart Custance right evil.
- Merrygreek** Nay, let her take him, nurse, and fear not the devil!
- Roister Doister** Now, nurse, take this same letter here to thy mistress;
And as my trust is in thee, ply my business.
- Mumblecrust** It shall be done.
- Merrygreek** Who make it?
- Roister Doister** I wrote it, each whit.
- Merrygreek** Then needs it no mending.
- Roister Doister** No, no!
- Merrygreek** No; I know your wit;
I warrant it well.
- Mumblecrust** It shall be delivered.
But, if ye speed, shall I be considered?
- Merrygreek** Whough! dost thou doubt of that?
- Mumblecrust** What shall I have?
- Merrygreek** A hundred times more than thou canst devise to crave.
- Mumblecrust** Shall I have some new gear? for my old is all spent.
- Merrygreek** The worst kitchen wench shall go in ladies' raiment.
- Mumblecrust** Yea?

²⁶ *busk*] bush.

- Merrygreek** And the worst drudge in the house shall go better
Than your mistress doth now.
- Mumblecrust** Then I trudge with your letter. (*Exit*)
- Roister Doister** Now, may I repose me, Custance is mine own.
Let us sing and play homeward, that it may be known.
- Merrygreek** But are you sure that your letter is well enough?
- Roister Doister** I wrote it myself!
- Merrygreek** Then go we to dinner!
(*They go out.*)
- (*Enter Christian Custance and Margery Mumblecrust.*)
- Dame Custance** Who took thee this letter, Margery Mumblecrust?
- Mumblecrust** A lusty gay bachelor took it me of trust,²⁷
And if ye seek to him he will 'low²⁸ your doing.
- Dame Custance** Yea, but where learned he that manner of wooing?
- Mumblecrust** If to sue to him you will any pains take,
He will have you to his wife, he saith, for my sake.
- Dame Custance** Some wise gentleman, belike! I am bespoken;
And I thought, verily, this had been some token
From my dear spouse Gawyn Goodluck; whom, when him please,
God luckily send home to both our hearts' ease.
- Mumblecrust** A jolly man it is, I wot well by report.
And would have you to him for marriage resort.
Best open the writing, and see what it doth speak.
- Dame Custance** At this time, nurse, I will neither read nor break.²⁹
- Mumblecrust** He promised to give you a whole peck of gold.
- Dame Custance** Perchance lack of a pint, when it shall be all told!

²⁷ *took ot me of trust*] gave it to me in trust.

²⁸ 'low] approve.

²⁹ *break*.] open.

Mumblecrust I would take a gay rich husband, an I were you.

Dame Custance In good sooth, Madge, e'en so would I, if I were thou.
But no more of this fond talk now, let us go in.
And see thou no more move me folly to begin.
Nor bring me no more letters for no man's pleasure,
But thou know from whom.

Mumblecrust I warrant ye shall be sure!

ACT II

(Enter *Dobinet Doughty*.)

Doughty Where is the house I go to? before or behind?
I know not where, nor when, nor how I shall it find.
And now an I sent to Dame Christian Custance;
But I fear it will end with a mock for pastance.³⁰
I bring her a ring, with a token in a clout,³¹
And, by all guess, this same is her house out of doubt.
I know it now perfect, I am in my right way.
And lo yond the old nurse that was with us last day!

(Enter *Margery Mumblecrust*.)

Mumblecrust I was ne'er so shook up afore since I was born.
That our mistress could not have chid, I would have sworn;
And I pray to God I die, if I meant any harm,
But for my life-time, this shall be to me a charm!

Doughty God you save and see, nurse! And how is it with you?

Mumblecrust Marry, a great deal the worse it is, for such as thou!

Doughty For me? Why so?

Mumblecrust Why, were not thou one of them, say,
That sang and played here with the gentleman last day?

Doughty Yes; and he would know if you have for him spoken,
And prays you to deliver this ring and token.

Mumblecrust Now, by the token³² that God tokened, brother,
I will deliver no token, one nor other!
I have once been so shent for your master's pleasure,
As I will not be again for all his treasure.

Doughty He will thank you, woman.

Mumblecrust I will none of his thank.
(*Exit.*)

³⁰ *pastance*] pastime.

³¹ *clout*] piece of cloth.

³² *pastance*] pastime.

Doughty I ween³³ I am a prophet! this gear³⁴ will prove blank!
 But what! should I home again without answer go?
 It were better go to Rome on my head than so.
 I will tarry here this month, but some of the house
 Shall take it of me; and then I care not a louse.
 But yonder cometh forth a wench -- or a lad;
 If he have not one Lombard's³⁵ touch, my luck is bad.
 (*Enter Tom Truepenny.*)

Truepenny I am clean lost for lack of merry company!
 We 'gree not half well within, our wenches and I.
 They will command like mistresses; they will forbid,
 If they be not served, Truepenny must be chid.

Doughty Whether is it better that I speak to him first,
 Or he first to me? it is good to cast the worst.
 If I begin first, he will smell all my purpose;
 Otherwise, I shall not need anything to discorse.

Truepenny What boy have we yonder? I will see what he is.

Doughty He cometh to me. It is hereabout, iwis.

Truepenny Wouldest thou aught, friend, that thou lookest so about?

Doughty Yea; but whether ye can help me or no, I doubt,
 I seek to one mistress Custance house, here dwelling.

Truepenny It is my mistress ye seek to, by your telling.

Doughty Is there any of that name here but she?

Truepenny Not one in all the whole town that I know, perdie.

Doughty A widow she is, I trow?

Truepenny And what an she be?

Doughty But ensured³⁶ to an husband?

³³ *ween*] believe.

³⁴ *gear*] business.

³⁵ *Lombard*] The Lombards were bankers in the Middle Ages.

³⁶ *ensured*] engaged.

- Truepenny** Yea, so think we.
- Doughty** And I dwell with her husband that trusteth to be.
- Truepenny** In faith, then must thou needs be welcome to me.
Let us for acquaintance shake hands together;
And whate'er thou be, heartily welcome hither.
- (Enter Tibet Talkapace and Annot Alyface.)*
- Talkapace** Well, Truepenny, never but flinging!³⁷
- Alyface** And frisking!
- Truepenny** Well, Tibet and Annot, still swinging and whisking!³⁸
- Talkapace** But ye roil abroad.³⁹
- Alyface** In the street, everywhere!
- Truepenny** Where are ye twain, in chambers, when ye meet me there?
But come hither, fools; I have one now by the hand,
Servant to him that must be our mistress' husband,
Bid him welcome.
- Alyface** To me truly is he welcome!
- Talkapace** Forsooth, and as I may say, heartily welcome!
- Doughty** I thank you, mistress maids.
- Alyface** I hope we shall better know.
- Talkapace** And when will our new master come.
- Doughty** Shortly, I trow.

³⁷ *flinging*] rushing around.

³⁸ *swinging and whisting*] dashing about.

³⁹ *roil abroad*] gad about.

Talkapace I would it were to-morrow; for till he resort,
 Our mistress, being a widow, hath small comfort,
 And I heard our nurse speak of an husband to-day
 Ready for our mistress, a rich man and a gay;
 And we shall go in our French hoods every day,
 In our silk cassocks, I warrant you, fresh and gay,
 In our trick ferdegews and biliments⁴⁰ of gold;
 Brave in our suits of change, seven double fold.
 Then shall ye see Tibet, sirs, tread the moss so trim.
 Nay, why said I "tread"? ye shall see her glide and swim,
 Not lumperdeed clumperdee like our spaniel Rig.

Truepenny Marry, then, prick-me-dainty⁴¹, come toast me a fig!
 Who shall then know our Tib Talkapace, trow ye?

Alyface And why not Annot Alyface as fine as she?

Truepenny And what? had Tom Truepenny a father, or none?

Alyface Then our pretty newcome man will look to be one.

Talkapace Will you now in with us unto our mistress go?

Doughty I have first for my master an errand or two.
 But I have here from him a token and ring,
 They shall have most thank of her that first doth it bring.

Talkapace Marry, that will I!

Truepenny See, an Tibet snatch not now!

Talkapace And why may not I, sir, get thanks as well as you?
 (*Exit.*)

Alyface Yet get ye not all; we will go with you both,
 And have part of your thanks, be ye never so loth!

(*Exuent Annot and Truepenny.*)

⁴⁰ *ferdegews and biliments*] farthingales and headdresses.

⁴¹ *prick-me-dainty*] my fair lady.

Doughty So my hands are rid of it; I care for no more.
I may now return home; so durst I not afore.
(*Exit.*)

(*Enter Dame Custance, Tibet Talkapace, Annot Alyface, and Truepenny.*)

Dame Custance Nay, come forth all three! and come hither, pretty maid!
Will not so many forewarnings make you afraid?

Talkapace Yes, forsooth.

Dame Custance But still be a runner up and down?
Still be a bringer of tidings and tokens to town?

Talkapace No, forsooth, mistress.

Dame Custance Is all your delight and joy
In whisking and ramping abroad like a tomboy?

Talkapace Forsooth, these were there too, Annot and Truepenny.

Truepenny Yea, but ye alone took it, ye cannot deny.

Alyface Yea, that ye did.

Talkapace But if I had not, ye twain would.

Dame Custance You great calf! ye should have more wit, so ye should!
But why should any of you take such things in hand?

Talkapace Because it came from him that must be your husband.

Dame Custance How do ye know that?

Talkapace Forsooth, the boy did say so.

Dame Custance What was his name?

Alyface We asked not.

Dame Custance Did ye? no?

Alyface He is not far gone, of liklihood.

Truepenny I will see.

Dame Custance If thou canst find him in the street, bring him to me.

Truepenny Yes.

(He goes out.)

Dame Custance Well, ye naughty girls, if ever I perceive
That henceforth you do letters or tokens receive
That to bring unto me from any person or place,
Except ye first show me the party face to face,
Either thou, or thou, full truly aby⁴² thou shalt.

Talkapace Pardon this, and the next time powder⁴³ me in salt!

Dame Custance I shall make all girls by you twain to beware.

Talkapace If ever I offend again, do not me spare.
But if ever I see that false boy any more
By your mistress-ship's licence, I tell you afore,
I will rather have my coat twenty times swung⁴⁴,
Than on the naughty wag not to be avenged.

Dame Custance Good wenches would not so ramp abroad idly.
But keep within doors, and ply their work earnestly.
If one would speak with me that is a man likely,
Ye shall have right good thank to bring me work quickly;
But otherwise with messages to come in post
From henceforth, I promise you, shall be to your cost.
Get you in to your work!

Talkapace Yes, forsooth.

Dame Custance Hence, both twain;
And let me see you play me such a part again!
(Re-enter Truepenny.)

Truepenny Mistress, I have run past the far end of the street,
Yet can I not yonder crafty boy see nor meet.

⁴² *aby*] pay.

⁴³ *powder*] preserve.

⁴⁴ *swinged*] whipped.

Dame Custance No?

Truepenny Yet I looked as far beyond the people
As one may see out of the top of Paul's steeple.

Dame Custance Hence in at doors, and let me no more be vexed!

Truepenny Forgive me this one fault, and lay on for the next.
(*Exit.*)

Dame Custance Now will I in too; for I think, so God me mend,
This will prove some foolish matter in the end! (*Exit.*)

ACT III

(*Merrygreek. Enter Tibet Talkapace.*)

- Talkapace** Ah, that I might but once in my life have a sight
Of him that made us all so ill shent; by this light,
He should never escape if I had him by the ear,
But even from his head I would it bite or tear;
Yea, and if one of them were not enow,
I would bite them both off, I make God avow!
- Merrygreek** What is he, whom this little mouse doth so threaten?
- Talkapace** I would teach him, I trow, to make girls shent or beaten.
- Merrygreek** I will call her. Maid, with whom are ye so hasty?
- Talkapace** Not with you, sir, but with a little wagpasty,⁴⁵
A deceiver of folks by subtle craft and guile.
- Merrygreek** I know what she means: Dobinet hath wrought some wile.
- Talkapace** He brought a ring and token which he said was sent
From our dame's husband; but I wot⁴⁶ well I was shent!⁴⁷
For it liked her as well⁴⁸, to tell you no lies,
As water in her ship, or salt cast in her eyes.
And yet whence it came neither we nor she can tell.
- Merrygreek** We shall have sport anon; I like this very well!--
And dwell ye here with Mistress Custance, fair maid?
- Talkapace** Yea, marry do I sir. What would ye have said?
- Merrygreek** A little message unto her by word of mouth.
- Talkapace** No messages, by your leave, nor tokens, forsooth!
- Merrygreek** Then help me to speak with her.

⁴⁵ *wagpasty*] mischievous rascal.

⁴⁶ *wot*] know.

⁴⁷ *shent*] embarrassed.

⁴⁸ *For it ... well*] It displeased her as much.

- Talkapace** With a good will that.
- (*Enter Dame Custance.*)
- Here she cometh forth. Now speak -- ye know best what.
- Dame Custance** None other life with you, maid, but abroad to skip?
- Talkapace** Forsooth, here is one would speak with your mistress-ship.
- Dame Custance** Ah, have ye been learning of more messages now?
- Talkapace** I would not hear his mind, but bade him show it to you.
- Dame Custance** In at doors!
- Talkapace** I am gone.
- (*She goes indoors.*)
- Merrygreek** Dame Custance, God ye save!
- Dame Custance** Welcome, friend Merrygreek; and what thing would ye have?
- Merrygreek** I am come to you a little matter to break.
- Dame Custance** But see it be honest, else better not to speak.
- Merrygreek** How feel ye yourself affected here of late?
- Dame Custance** I feel no manner change but after the old rate.
 But whereby do ye mean?
- Merrygreek** Concerning marriage.
 Doth not love lade you?⁴⁹
- Dame Custance** I feel no such carriage.⁵⁰
- Merrygreek** Do ye feel no pangs of dotage? answer me right.

⁴⁹ *love lade you*] love wear you down.

⁵⁰ *carriage*] weight.

- Dame Custance** I dote so that I make but one sleep all the night.
But what need all these words?
- Merrygreek** Oh Jesus! will ye see
What dissembling creatures these same women be?
The gentleman ye wot of, whom ye do so love
That ye would fain marry him, if ye durst it move,
Among other right widows, which are of him glad,
Lest ye for losing of him perchance might run mad,
Is now contented that upon your suit making,
Ye be as one in election of taking.
- Dame Custance** What a tale is this! that I wot of? Whom I love?
- Merrygreek** Yea, and he is as loving as a worm, again, as a dove.
E'en of very pity he is willing you to take,
Because ye shall not destroy yourself for his sake.
- Dame Custance** Marry, God yield his maship! Whatever he be,
It is gentmanly spoken.
- Merrygreek** Is it not, trow ye?
If ye have the grace now to offer yourself, ye speed.
- Dame Custance** As much as though I did, this time it shall not need.
But what gentman is it, I pray you tell me plain,
That wooeth so finely?
- Merrygreek** Lo where ye be again,
As though ye knew him not!
- Dame Custance** Tush, ye speak in jest!
- Merrygreek** Nay, sure, the party is in good knocking⁵¹ earnest;
And have you he will, he saith, and have you he must.
- Dame Custance** I am promised during my life; that is just.
- Merrygreek** Marry, so thinketh he, unto him alone.

⁵¹ *in good knocking*] absolutely.

Dame Custance No creature hath my faith and troth but one--
That is Gawyn Goodluck; and if it be not he,
He hath no tittle this way, whatever he be,
Nor I know none to whom I have such word spoken.

Merrygreek Ye know him not, you, by his letter and token?

Dame Custance Indeed, true it is that a letter I have;
But I never read it yet, as God me save!

Merrygreek Ye a woman, and your letter so long unread?

Dame Custance Ye may thereby know what haste I have to wed.
But now who it is for my hand, I know by guess.

Merrygreek Ah, well I say.

Dame Custance It is Roister Doister, doubtless.

Merrygreek Will ye never leave this dissimulation?
Ye know him not?

Dame Custance But by imagination;
For no man there is but a very dolt and lout
That to woo a widow would so go about.
He shall never have me his wife while he do live.

Merrygreek Then will he have you if he may, so mote⁵² I thrive!
And he biddeth you send him word by me,
That ye humbly beseech him ye may his wife be,
And that there shall be no let⁵³ in you, nor mistrust,
But to be wedded on Sunday next, if he lute;⁵⁴
And biddeth you to look for him.

Dame Custance Doth he bid so?

Merrygreek When he cometh, ask him whether he did or no.

⁵² *mote*] might.

⁵³ *no let*] obstacle.

⁵⁴ *lute*] lust.

- Dame Custance** Go, say that I bid him keep him warm at home!
 For, if he come abroad, he shall cough me a mome.⁵⁵
 My mind was vexed, I shrew⁵⁶ his head! Sottish dolt!
- Merrygreek** He hath in his head --
- Dame Custance** As much brain as a bird-bolt!⁵⁷
- Merrygreek** Well, Dame Custance, if he hear you thus play choploge⁵⁸ --
- Dame Custance** What will he?
- Merrygreek** Play the devil in the horologe.⁵⁹
- Dame Custance** I defy him, lout!
- Merrygreek** Shall I tell him what ye say?
- Dame Custance** Yea; and add whatsoever thou canst, I thee pray,
 And I will avouch it, whatsoever it be.
- Merrygreek** Then let me alone! we will laugh well, ye shall see.
 It will not be long ere he will hither resort.
- Dame Custance** Let him come when him lust, I wish no better sport.
 Fare ye well. I will in and read my great letter;
 I shall to my wooer make answer the better.
- (*Exit*)
- Merrygreek** Now that the whole answer in my devise doth rest,
 I shall paint out our wooer in colours of the best;
 And all that I say shall be on Custance's mouth;
 She is author of all that I shall speak, forsooth.
 But yond cometh Roister Doister now, in a trance.
- (*Enter Ralph Roister Doister.*)

⁵⁵ *cough me a mome.*] prove a fool to me.

⁵⁶ *shrew*] curse.

⁵⁷ *bird bolt*] blunt arrow.

⁵⁸ *coploge*] chop logic.

⁵⁹ *horologe*] clock.

- Roister Doister** Juno send me this day good luck and good chance!
I cannot but come see how Merrygreek doth speed.
- Merrygreek** I will not see him, but give him a jut⁶⁰, indeed.
I cry your mastership mercy!
- Roister Doister** And whither now?
- Merrygreek** As fast as I could run, sir, in post against you.
But why speak ye so faintly? or why are ye so sad?
- Roister Doister** Thou knowest the proverb -- because I cannot be had.
Has thou spoken with this woman?
- Merrygreek** Yea, that I have!
- Roister Doister** And what, will this gear be?
- Merrygreek** No, so God me save!
- Roister Doister** Hast thou a flat answer?
- Merrygreek** Nay, a sharp answer!
- Roister Doister** What?
- Merrygreek** Ye shall not, she saith, by her will marry her cat!
And because ye should come to her at no season,
She despised your maship out of all reason.
"Ye are happy," ko I, "that ye are a woman!
This would cost you your life in case ye were a man."
- Roister Doister** Yea, an hundred thousand pound should not save her life!
- Merrygreek** No, but that ye woo her to have her to your wife.
But I could not stop her mouth.
- Roister Doister** Heigh-ho, alas!
- Merrygreek** Be of good cheer, man, and let the world pass!

⁶⁰ *jut*] push.

- Roister Doister** What shall I do, or say now that it will not be?
- Merrygreek** Ye shall have choice of a thousand as good as she.
And ye must pardon her; it is for lack of wit.
- Roister Doister** Yea, for were not I an husband for her fit?
Well, what should I now do?
- Merrygreek** In faith I cannot tell.
- Roister Doister** I will go home and die!
- Merrygreek** Then shall I bid toll the bell?
- Roister Doister** Heigh-ho, alas, the pangs of death my heart do break!
- Merrygreek** Hold your peace! For shame, sir! A dead man may not speak!
Ne quando. What mourners and what torches shall we have?
Come forth, sirs, hear the doleful news I shall you tell!
Our good master here will no longer with us dwell,
And will ye needs go from us thus, in very deed?
- Roister Doister** Yea, in good sadness.
- Merrygreek** Now Jesus Christ be your speed!
Soft, hear what I have cast!
- Roister Doister** I will hear nothing, I am passed.
- Merrygreek** Wough, wellaway!
Ye may tarry one hour, and hear what I shall say.
Ye were best, sir, for a while to revive again
And quiet them ere ye go.
- Roister Doister** Trowest thou so?
- Merrygreek** Yea, plain.
- Roister Doister** How may I revive, being now so far passed?
- Merrygreek** I will rub your temples, and fetch you again at last.
- Roister Doister** It will not be possible.

- Merrygreek** Yes, for twenty pound.
- Roister Doister** Arms!⁶¹ what dost thou?
- Merrygreek** Fetch you again out of your sound.⁶²
By this cross, ye were nigh gone indeed! I might feel
Your soul departing within an inch of your heel.
Now follow my counsel.
- Roister Doister** What is it?
- Merrygreek** If I were you,
Custance should eft seek to me ere I would bow.⁶³
- Roister Doister** Well, as thou wilt have one, even so will I do.
- Merrygreek** Then shall ye revive again for an hour or two?
- Roister Doister** As thou wilt; I am content, for a little space.
- Merrygreek** Good hap⁶⁴ is not hasty; yet in space⁶⁵ cometh grace.
To speak with Custance yourself should be very well;
What good thereof may come, nor I nor you can tell.
But now the matter standeth upon your marriage,
Ye must now take unto you a lusty courage,
Ye may not speak with a faint heart to Custance,
But with a lusty breast and countenance,
That she may know she hath to answer to a man.
- Roister Doister** Yes, I can do that as well as any can.
- Merrygreek** Then, because ye must Custance face to face woo,
Let us see how to behave yourself ye can do.
Ye must have a portly brag⁶⁶, after your estate.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *Arms!*] God's Arms!

⁶² *sound*] swoon.

⁶³ *Custance ... bow.*] Custance should after plead with me.

⁶⁴ *hap*] luck

⁶⁵ *space*] time.

⁶⁶ *portly brag*] dignified bearing.

⁶⁷ *after your estate*] as becomes your station in life.

- Roister Doister** Tush, I can handle that after the best rate.
- Merrygreek** Well done! So lo! Up, man, with your head and chin!
Up with that snout, man! So lo! now ye begin!
So! that is somewhat like! But, pranky-coat⁶⁸, nay, whan?
That is a lusty⁶⁹ brute! Hands under your side, man!
There, lo! such a lusty brag it is ye must make!
- Roister Doister** To come behind and make curtsy, thou must some pains take.
- Merrygreek** Lo, where she cometh! Some countenance to her make,
And ye shall hear me be plain with her for your sake.
- (*Enter Dame Custance.*)
- Dame Custance** What gauding⁷⁰ and fooling is this afore my door?
- Merrygreek** May not folks be honest, pray you, though they be poor?
- Dame Custance** As that thing may be true, so rich folks may be fools.
- Roister Doister** Her talk is as fine as she had learned in schools.
- Merrygreek** Look partly toward her, and draw a little near.
- Dame Custance** Get ye home, idle folks!
- Merrygreek** Why, may not we be here?
Nay, and he will haze⁷¹, haze; otherwise, I tell you plain,
And if ye will not haze, then give us our gear⁷² again.
- Dame Custance** Indeed I have of yours much gay things, God save all.
- Roister Doister** Speak gently to her, and let her take all.
- Merrygreek** Ye are too tender-hearted; shall she make us daws⁷³?
Nay, dame, I will be plain with you in my friends' cause.

⁶⁸ *pranky-coat*] dandy.

⁶⁹ *lusty*] gallant.

⁷⁰ *gauding*] sporting.

⁷¹ *haze*] have as.

⁷² *gear*] things.

⁷³ *daws*] fools.

- Roister Doister** Let all this pass, sweetheart, and accept my service!
- Dame Custance** I will not be served with a fool, in no wise;
When I choose an husband, I hope to take a man.
- Merrygreek** And where will ye find one which can do that he can?
Now this man toward you being so kind,
You not to make him an answer somewhat to his mind!
- Dame Custance** I sent him a full answer by you, did I not?
- Merrygreek** And I reported it.
- Dame Custance** Nay, I must speak it again.
- Roister Doister** Was I not meetly plain?
- Roister Doister** Yes.
- Merrygreek** But I would not tell all; for faith, if I had,
With you, Dame Custance, ere this hour it had been bad,
And not without cause, for this goodly personage
Meant no less than to join with you in marriage.
- Dame Custance** Let him waste no more labour nor suit about me.
- Merrygreek** Ye know not where your preferment⁷⁴ lieth, I see,
He sending you such a token, ring and letter.
- Dame Custance** Marry, here it is; ye never saw a better!
(She holds out a letter.)
- Merrygreek** Let us see your letter.
- Dame Custance** Hold, read it, if ye can.
And see what letter it is to win a woman!
- Merrygreek** *(Reading)* "To mine own dear coney, bird, sweetheart, and pigsny⁷⁵,
Good Mistress Custance, present these by and by⁷⁶."
Of this superscription do ye blame the style?

⁷⁴ *preferment*] advantage.

⁷⁵ *pigsny*] darling.

⁷⁶ *by and by*] at once.

Dame Custance With the rest as good stuff as ye read a great while!

Merrygreek *(Reading)* "Sweet mistress, whereas I love you nothing at all,
Regarding your substance and riches chief of all,
For your personage, beauty, demeanour and wit
I commend me unto you never a whit.
Sorry to hear report of your good welfare.
For (as I hear say) such your conditions are
That ye be worth favour of no living man;
To be abhorred of every honest man;
To be taken for a woman inclined to vice;
Nothing at all to virtue giving her due price.
Wherefore concerning marriage, ye are thought
Such a fine paragon, as ne'er honest man bought.
And now by these presents I do you advertise
That I am minded to marry you in no wise.
For your goods and substance, I could be content
To take you as ye are. If ye mind to be my wife,
Ye shall be assured for the time of my life
I will keep you right well from good raiment and fare;
Ye shall not be kept but in sorrow and care.
Ye shall in no wise live at your own liberty;
Do and say what ye lust, ye shall never please me;
But when ye are merry, I will be all sad,
When ye are sorry, I will be very glad;
When ye seek your heart's ease, I will be unkind;
At no time, in me shall ye much gentleness find,
But all things contrary to your will and mind
Shall be done; otherwise I will not be behind
To speak. And as for all them that would do you wrong
I will so help and maintain, ye shall not live long.
Nor any foolish dolt shall cumber you but I.
I, whoe'er say nay, will stick by you till I die.
Thus good mistress Custance, the Lord you save and keep
From me Roister Doister, whether I wake or sleep.
Who favoureth you no less (ye may be bold)
Than this letter purporteth, which ye have unfold."

Dame Custance How by this letter of love? is it not fine?

Roister Doister By the arms of Calais, it is none of mine!

Merrygreek Fie, you are foul to blame! this is your own hand!

- Dame Custance** *(Sarcastically.)* Might not a woman be proud of such an husband?
- Merrygreek** Ah, that ye would in a letter show such despite!
- Roister Doister** Oh, I would I had him here the which⁷⁷ did it endite⁷⁸.
- Merrygreek** Why, ye made it yourself, ye told me by this light.
- Roister Doister** Yea, I meant I wrote it mine own self, yesternight.
- Dame Custance** Iwis⁷⁹, sir, I would not have sent you such a mock.
- Roister Doister** Ye may so take it, but I meant it not so, by Cock.
- Merrygreek** Who can blame this woman to fume, and fret, and rage?
Tut, tut! yourself now have marred your own marriage.
Well, yet, mistress Custance, if ye can this remit,
This gentleman otherwise may your love requit⁸⁰.
- Dame Custance** No! God be with you both, and seek no more to me.
(She leaves them in a huff.)
- Roister Doister** Wough! she is gone for ever! I shall her no more see!
- Merrygreek** What, weep? fie, for shame! and blubber? For manhood's sake.
Never let your foe so much pleasure of you take!
Rather play the man's part, and do love refrain.
If she despise you, e'en despise ye her again.
- Roister Doister** By Goss, and for thy sake I defy her indeed!

⁷⁷ *which*] who.

⁷⁸ *endite*] write.

⁷⁹ *Iwis*] assuredly.

⁸⁰ *requite*] requite.

Merrygreek Yea, and perchance that way ye shall much sooner speed;
 For one mad property these women have, in fey⁸¹;
 When ye will, they will not; will not ye, then will they.
 Ah, foolish woman! Ah, most unlucky Custance!
 Ah, unfortunate woman! Ah, peevish Custance!
 Art thou to thine harms so obstinately bent
 That thou canst not see where lieth thine high preferment?
 Canst thou not lub dis⁸² man, which could lub dee⁸³ so well?
 Art thou so much thine own foe?

Roister Doister Thou dost the truth tell.

Merrygreek Well, I lament.

Roister Doister So do I.

Merrygreek Wherefore?

Roister Doister For this thing because she is gone.

Merrygreek Refrain from Custance awhile now,
 And I warrant her soon right glad to seek to you.
 Ye shall see her anon come on her knees creeping,
 And pray you to be good to her, salt tears weeping.

Roister Doister But what an she come not?

Merrygreek In faith, then, farewell she!
 Or else if ye be wroth, ye may avenged be.

Roister Doister By Cock's precious potstick, and e'en so I shall!
 I will utterly destroy her, and house and all!
 But I would be avenged in the mean space,
 On that vile scribbler, that did my wooing disgrace.

Merrygreek "Scribbler," ko you? indeed, he is worthy no less.
 I will call him to you, and ye bid me, doubtless.

⁸¹ *fey*] faith.

⁸² *lub dis*] love this.

⁸³ *lub dee*] love thee.

- Roister Doister** Yes, for although he had as many lives,
As a thousand widows, and a thousand wives,
He shall never 'scape death on my sword's point--
Though I should be torn therefore joint by joint!
- Merrygreek** Nay, if ye will kill him, I will not fetch him;
I will not in so much extremity set him.
He may yet amend, sir, and he an honest man.
Therefore pardon him, good soul, as much as ye can.
- Roister Doister** Well, for thy sake, this once with his life he shall pass.
But I will hew him all to pieces, by the Mass!
- Merrygreek** Nay, faith, ye shall promise that he shall no harm have,
Else I will not fetch him.
- Roister Doister** I shall, so God me save!
But I may chide him a good⁸⁴?
- Merrygreek** Yea, that do hardily.
- Roister Doister** Go, then.
- Merrygreek** I return, and bring him to you by-and-by.
(*Exit, leaving **Roister Doister** alone on the stage.*)
- Roister Doister** What is a gentleman but his word and his promise?
I must now save this villain's life in any wise;
And yet at him already my hands do tickle,
I shall uneth hold them, they will be so fickle.⁸⁵
- (*Enter **Merrygreek** and **Scrivener**.*)
- But lo an Merrygreek have not brought him sens.⁸⁶
- Merrygreek** Nay, I would I had of my purse paid forty pens!
- Scrivener** So would I, too; but it needed not that stound⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ *a good*] in earnest.

⁸⁵ *I ... fickle*] I shall find it difficult to keep my hands off him.

⁸⁶ *sens*] already.

⁸⁷ *stound*] at that time.

- Merrygreek** But the gentman had rather spent five thousand pound;
For it disgraced him at least five times so much.
- Scrivener** He disgraced himself, his loutishness is such.
- Roister Doister** How long they stand prating!
Why comest thou not away?
- Merrygreek** Come now to himself, and hark what he will say.
- Scrivener** I am not afraid in his presence to appear.
- Roister Doister** Art thou come, fellow?
- Scrivener** How think you? am I not here?
- Roister Doister** What hindrance hast thou done me, and what villainy?
- Scrivener** It hath come of thyself, if thou hast had any.
- Roister Doister** All the stock thou comest of, later or rather⁸⁸,
From thy first father's grandfather's father's father,
Nor all that shall come of thee, to the world's end,
Though to threescore generations they descend,
Can be able to make me a just recompense
For this trespass of thine and this one offence!
- Scrivener** Wherein?
- Roister Doister** Did not you make me a letter, brother?
- Scrivener** Pay the like hire, I will make you such another.
- Roister Doister** Nay, see and these whoreson Pharisees and Scribes
Do not get their living by polling⁸⁹ and bribes!
If it were not for shame--
- Scrivener** Nay, hold thy hands still!
- Merrygreek** Why, did ye not promise that ye would not him spill⁹⁰?

⁸⁸ *rather*] earlier.

⁸⁹ *polling*] extortion.

⁹⁰ *spoil*] destroy.

- Scrivener** Let him not spare me.
- Roister Doister** Why, wilt thou strike me again?
- Scrivener** Ye shall have as good as ye bring, of me; that is plain.
- Merrygreek** I cannot blame him, sir, though your blows would him grieve,
For he knoweth present death to ensue of all ye give.
- Roister Doister** Well, this man for once hath purchased thy pardon.
- Scrivener** And what say ye to me? or else I will be gone.
- Roister Doister** I say the letter thou madest me was not good.
- Scrivener** Then did ye wrong copy it, of likelihood.
- Roister Doister** Yes, out of thy copy word for word I wrote.
- Scrivener** Then was it as ye prayed to have it, I wrote.
But in reading and pointing there was made some fault.
- Roister Doister** I wot not; but it made all my matter to halt.
- Scrivener** How say you, is this mine original or no?
- Roister Doister** The self same that I wrote out of, so mote I go.
- Scrivener** Look you on your own fist, and I will look on this,
And let this man be judge whether I read amiss.
"To mine own dear cony, bird, sweetheart, and pigsny,
Good Mistress Custance, present these by-and-by."
How now? doth not this superscription agree?
- Roister Doister** Read that is within, and there ye shall the fault see.

Scrivener "Sweet mistress, whereas I love you--nothing at all
Regarding your riches and substance, chief of all
For your personage, beauty, demeanour and wit--
I commend me unto you. Never a whit
Sorry to hear report of your good welfare;
For (as I hear say) such your conditions are
That ye be worthy favour; of no living man
To be abhorred; of every honest man
To be taken for a woman inclined to vice
Nothing at all; to virtue giving her due price.
Wherefore, concerning marriage, ye are thought
Such a fine paragon, as ne'er honest man bought.
And now by these presents I do you advertise
That I am minded to marry you--in no wise
For your goods and substance; I can be content
To take you as you are. If ye will be my wife,
Ye shall be assured for the time of my life
I will keep you right well. From good raiment and fare,
Ye shall not be kept; but in sorrow and care
Ye shall in no wise live; at your own liberty,
Do and say what ye lust: ye shall never please me
But when ye are merry; I will be all sad
When ye are sorry; I will be very glad
When ye seek your heart's ease; I will be unkind
At no time; in me shall ye much gentleness find.
But all things contrary to your will and mind
shall be done otherwise; I will not be behind
To speak. And as for all they that would do you wrong
(I will so help and maintain ye), shall not live long.
Nor any foolish dolt shall cumber you; but I--
I, whoe'er say nay--will stick by you till I die.
Thus, good mistress Custance, the Lord you save and keep.
From me, Roister Doister, whether I wake or sleep,
Who favoureth you no less (ye may be bold)
Than this letter purporteth, which ye have unfold."
Now, sir, what default can ye find in this letter?

Roister Doister Of truth, in my mind, there cannot be a better.

Scrivener Then was the fault in reading, and not in writing--
No, nor I dare say, in the form of enditing.
But who read this letter, that it sounded so naught?

Merrygreek I read it, indeed.

- Scrivener** Ye read it not as ye ought.
- Roister Doister** Why, thou wretched villain! was all this same fault in thee?
- Merrygreek** I knock your costard⁹¹ if ye offer to strike me!
- Roister Doister** Strikest thou, indeed? and I offer but in jest?
- Merrygreek** Yea, and rap you again except ye can sit in rest.
And I will no longer tarry here, me believe.
- Roister Doister** What! wilt thou be angry, and I do thee forgive?
Fare thou well, scribbler, I cry thee mercy indeed!
- Scrivener** Fare ye well, bibbler, and worthily may ye speed!
- Roister Doister** If it were another but thou, it were a knave.
- Merrygreek** Ye are another yourself, sir, the Lord us both save!
Albeit, in this matter I must your pardon crave.
Alas! would ye wish in me the wit that ye have?
But, as for my fault, I can quickly amend;
I will show Custance it was I that did offend.
- Roister Doister** By so doing, her anger may be reformed⁹².
- Merrygreek** But, if by no entreaty she will be turned,
Then set light by her, and be as testy as she,
And do your force upon her with extremity.
- Roister Doister** Come on, therefore, let us go home, in sadness.
- Merrygreek** That, if force shall need, all may be in a readiness,
And as for this letter, hardily let all go;
We will know where⁹³ she refuse you for that or no.
(*They leave the stage.*)

⁹¹ *costard*] head.

⁹² *reformed*] appeased.

⁹³ *where*] whether.

ACT IV

(Enter *Sim Suresby*.)

Suresby My master, Gawyn Goodluck, after me a day,
Because of the weather, thought best his ship to stay,
And now that I have the rough surges so well past,
God grant I may find all things safe here at last!
Then will I think all my travail well spent.
Now the first point wherefore my master hath me sent
Is to salute Dame Christian Custance, his wife
Espoused, whom he tendereth no less than his life.
I must see how it is with her, well or wrong,
And whether for him she doth not now think long,

(Enter *Dame Custance*.)

Dame Custance I come to see if any more stirring be here.
But what stranger is this which doth to me appear?

Suresby I will speak to her. Dame, the Lord you save and see!

Dame Custance What! friend Sim Suresby? Forsooth, right welcome ye be!
How doth mine own Gawyn Goodluck? I pray thee tell?

Suresby When he knoweth of your health, he will be perfect well.

Dame Custance If he have perfect health, I am as I would be.

Suresby Such news will please him well; this is as it should be.

Dame Custance I think now long for him.

Suresby And he as long for you.

Dame Custance When will he be at home?

Suresby His heart is here e'en now;
His body cometh after.

Dame Custance I would see that fain⁹⁴.

⁹⁴ *fain*] gladly.

- Suresby** As fast as wind and sail can carry it amain --
But what two men are yond coming hitherward?
- Dame Custance** Now, I shrew⁹⁵ their best Christmas cheeks, both togetherward!
- (Enter **Roister Doister** and **Merrygreek**.)*
- Dame Custance** What mean these lewd fellows thus to trouble me still?
Sim Suresby here, perchance, shall thereof deem some ill,
And shall suspect in me some point of naughtiness,
An they come hitherward.
- Suresby** What is their business?
- Dame Custance** I have nought to them, nor they to me in sadness⁹⁶.
- Suresby** Let us hearken them. Somewhat⁹⁷ there is, I fear it.
- Roister Doister** I will speak out aloud; best that she may hear it.
- Merrygreek** Nay, alas, ye may so fear her out of her wit!
- Roister Doister** By the cross of my sword, I will hurt her no whit!
- Merrygreek** Will ye do no harm indeed? Shall I trust your word?
- Roister Doister** By Roister Doister's faith, I will speak but in bord⁹⁸!
- Suresby** Let us hearken them. Somewhat there is, I fear it.
- Roister Doister** I will speak out aloud, I care not who hear it!
For such chance may chance in an hour, do ye hear?
- Merrygreek** As perchance shall not chance again in seven year.
- Roister Doister** Now draw we near to her, and hear what shall be said.
- Merrygreek** But I would not have you make her too much afraid.

⁹⁵ *shrew*] curse.

⁹⁶ *sadness*] earnestness.

⁹⁷ *Somewhat*] Something is up.

⁹⁸ *bord*] jest.

- Roister Doister** Well found, sweet wife, I trust, for all this your sour look!
- Dame Custance** Wife! why call ye me wife?
- Suresby** Wife! this gear goeth acrook!⁹⁹
- Merrygreek** Nay, Mistress Custance, I warrant you, our letter
Is not as we read e'en now, but much better;
And where ye half stomached¹⁰⁰ this gentleman afore
For this same letter, ye will love him now therefore,
Nor it is not this letter, though ye were a queen,
That should break marriage between you twain, I ween¹⁰¹.
- Dame Custance** I did not refuse him for the letter's sake.
- Roister Doister** Then ye are content me for your husband to take?
- Dame Custance** You for my husband to take? nothing less, truly!
- Roister Doister** Yea, say so, sweet spouse, afore strangers hardily!
- Merrygreek** And, though I have here his letter of love with me,
Yet his ring and tokens he sent keep safe with ye.
- Dame Custance** A mischief take his tokens! and him, and thee too.
But what prate I with fools? have I nought else to do?
Come in with me, Sim Suresby, to take some repast.
- Suresby** (*Eager to get away.*) I must, ere I drink, by your leave, go in all haste
To a place or two, with earnest letters of his.
- Dame Custance** Then come drink here with me.
- Suresby** I thank you.
- Dame Custance** Do not hiss;
You shall have a token to your master with you.

⁹⁹ *This ... acrook!*] "This business goes crooked." (This doesn't look right to me)

¹⁰⁰ *stomached*] resented.

¹⁰¹ *ween*] believe, think.

- Suresby** No tokens this time, gramercies¹⁰²! God be with you.
(*He goes away hastily.*)
- Dame Custance** Surely this fellow misdeemeth some ill in me;
Which thing, but God help, will go near to spill¹⁰³ me.
- Roister Doister** Yea, farewell, fellow! And tell thy master, Goodluck,
That he cometh too late of this blossom to pluck!
Let him keep him there still, or at leastwise, make no haste;
As for his labour hither, he shall spend in waste;
His betters be in place now!
- Merrygreek** (*Aside.*) As long as it will hold.
- Dame Custance** I will be even with thee, thou beast, thou mayst be bold¹⁰⁴!
- Roister Doister** Will ye have us then?
- Dame Custance** I will never have thee!
- Roister Doister** Then will I have you.
- Dame Custance** No, the devil shall have thee!
I have gotten this hour more shame and harm by thee!
Than all thy life days thou canst do me honesty.
- Merrygreek** Why now may ye see what it cometh to, in the end,
To make a deadly foe of your most loving friend!
And iwis, this letter, if ye would hear it now--
- Dame Custance** I will hear none of it!
- Merrygreek** In faith, would ravish you.
- Dame Custance** He hath stained my name for ever, this is clear.
- Roister Doister** I can make all as well in an hour--
- Merrygreek** As ten year.
How say ye? will ye have him?

¹⁰² *gramercies*] thank you.

¹⁰³ *spill*] destroy.

¹⁰⁴ *bold*] sure.

- Dame Custance** No.
- Merrygreek** Will ye take him?
- Dame Custance** I defy him.
- Merrygreek** At my word?
- Dame Custance** A shame take him!
Waste no more wind, for it will never be.
- Merrygreek** This one fault with twain shall be mended, ye shall see.
- Dame Custance** Faith, rather than to marry with such a doltish lout,
I would match myself with a beggar, out of doubt!
- Merrygreek** Then I can say no more. To speed we are not like,
Except ye rap out a rag of your rhetoric.
- Dame Custance** Speak not of winning me; for it shall never be so.
- Roister Doister** Yes, dame! I will have you, whether ye will or no.
I command you to love me! Wherefore should ye not?
Is not my love to you chafing and burning hot?
- Merrygreek** To her! that is well said!
- Roister Doister** Shall I so break my brain
To dote upon you, and ye not love us again?
- Merrygreek** Well said yet!
- Dame Custance** Go, to, you goose!
- Roister Doister** I say, Kit Custance,
In case ye will not haze¹⁰⁵, well, better yes, perchance!
- Dame Custance** Avaunt, lozel¹⁰⁶! Pick thee hence!
- Merrygreek** Well, sir, ye perceive,
For all your kind offer, she will not you receive.

¹⁰⁵ haze] have us.

¹⁰⁶ lozel] lout.

Roister Doister Then a straw for her! And a straw for her again!
 She shall not be my wife, would she never so fain¹⁰⁷!
 No, and though she would be at ten thousand pound cost¹⁰⁸!

Merrygreek Lo, dame, ye may see whan an husband ye have lost!

Dame Custance Yea, no force¹⁰⁹; a jewel much better lost than found!

Merrygreek Ah, ye will not believe how this doth my heart wound!
 How should a marriage between you be toward,
 If both parties draw back and become so froward¹¹⁰?

Roister Doister Nay, dame, I will fire thee out of thy house,
 And destroy thee and all thine, and that by and by¹¹¹.

Merrygreek Nay, for the passion of God, sir, do not so!

Roister Doister Yes, except she will say yea to that she said no.

Dame Custance And what! be there no officers, trow we, in town
 To check idle loiterers bragging up and down?
 Where be they by whom vagabonds should be repress,
 That poor silly¹¹² widows might live in peace and rest.
 Shall I never rid thee out of my company?
 I will call for help. What ho! come forth, Truepenny!

(Enter Truepenny.)

Truepenny Anon. What is your will, mistress? did ye call me?

Dame Custance Yea; go run apace, and as fast as may be,
 Pray Tristram Trusty, my most assured friend,
 To be here by and by, that he may me defend.

Truepenny That message so quickly shall be done, by God's grace,
 That at my return, ye shall say, I went apace.

(He runs off.)

¹⁰⁷ *fain*] eager.

¹⁰⁸ *cost*] worth.

¹⁰⁹ *force*] matter.

¹¹⁰ *froward*] cantankerous.

¹¹¹ *by and by*] soon.

¹¹² *silly*] defenseless.

Dame Custance Then shall we see, I trow, whether ye shall do me harm!

Roister Doister Yes, in faith, Kit, I shall thee and thine so charm¹¹³,
That all women incarnate by thee may beware.

Dame Custance Nay, as for charming me, come hither if thou dare!
I shall clout thee till thou stink, both thee and thy train,
And coil¹¹⁴ thee mine own hands, and send thee home again.

Roister Doister Yea, sayest thou me that, dame? Dost thou me threaten?
Go we, I will see whether I shall be beaten.

Merrygreek Nay, for the pash¹¹⁵ of God, let me now treat peace,
For bloodshed will there be, in case this strife increase.
Ah, good Dame Custance, take better way with you!

Dame Custance Let him do his worst!

Merrygreek Yield in time.

Roister Doister Come hence, thou!

(Roister Doister and Merrygreek go off.)

Dame Custance So, sirrah! If I should not with him take this way,
I should not be rid of him, I think, till doom's day.
I will call forth my folks, that, without any mocks,
If he comes again, we may give him raps and knocks.
Madge Mumblecrust, come forth! and Tibet Talkapace!
Yea, and come forth, too, Mistress Annot Alyface!

(Enter Tibet Talkapace, Annot Alyface, and Margery Mumblecrust.)

Alyface I come.

Talkapace And I am here.

Mumblecrust And I am here too at length.

¹¹³ *charm*] overwhelm.

¹¹⁴ *coil*] best.

¹¹⁵ *pash*] passion.

Dame Custance Like warriors, if need be, ye must show your strength.
The man that this day hath thus beguiled you
Is Ralph Roister Doister, whom ye know well enow,
The most lout and dastard that ever on ground trod.

Talkapace I see folk mock him when he goeth abroad.

Dame Custance What, pretty maid! will ye talk when I speak?

Talkapace No, forsooth, good mistress.

Dame Custance Will ye my tale break?
He threateneth to come hither with all his force to fight;
I charge you, if he come, on him with all your might!

Mumblecrust I with my distaff will reach him one rap!

Talkapace And I with my new broom will sweep him one swap,
And then with our great club I will reach him one rap!

Alyface And I with our skimmer will fling him one flap!

Talkapace Then Truepenny's firework will him shrewdly fray,
And you with the spit may drive him quite away.

Dame Custance Go, make all ready, that it may be e'en so.

Talkapace For my part, I shrew¹¹⁶ them that last about it go!

(Tibet, Mumblecrust and Annot Alyface go to arm themselves.)

Dame Custance Truepenny did promise me to run a great pace,
My friend Tristram Trusty to fetch into this place.
Indeed he dwelleth hence a good start¹¹⁷, I confess;
But yet a quick messenger might twice since, as I guess,
Have gone and come again. Ah, yond I spy him now!

(Enter Truepenny and Tristram Trusty.)

¹¹⁶ shrew] scorn.

¹¹⁷ start] distance.

- Truepenny** Ye are a slow goer, sir, I make God avow;
My mistress Custance will in me put all the blame.
Your legs be longer than mine; come apace, for shame!
- Dame Custance** I can thee thank, Truepenny; thou hast done right well.
- Truepenny** Mistress, since I went, no grass hath grown on my heel;
But Master Tristram Trusty here maketh no speed.
- Dame Custance** That he came at all, I thank him in very deed,
For now have I need of the help of some wise man.
- Trusty** Then may I be gone again, for none such I am.
- Truepenny** Ye may be by your going; for no alderman
Can go, I dare say, a sadder¹¹⁸ pace than ye can.
- Dame Custance** Truepenny, get thee in. Thou shalt among them know
How to use thyself, like a proper man, I trow.
- Truepenny** I go. (*Exit.*)
- Dame Custance** Now, Tristram Trusty, I thank you right much;
For, at my first sending, to come ye never grutch¹¹⁹.
- Trusty** Dame Custance, God ye save! and, while my life shall last,
For my friend Goodluck's sake ye shall not send in wast¹²⁰.
- Dame Custance** He shall give you thanks.
- Trusty** I will do much for his sake.
- Dame Custance** But, alack, I fear, great displeasure shall he take!
- Trusty** Wherefore?
- Dame Custance** For a foolish matter.
- Trusty** What is your cause?

¹¹⁸ *sadder*] more solemn.

¹¹⁹ *grutch*] grudge.

¹²⁰ *in wast*] in vain.

- Dame Custance** I am ill accombred¹²¹ with a couple of daws¹²².
- Trusty** Nay, weep not, woman, but tell me what your cause is.
As concerning my friend is anything amiss?
- Dame Custance** No, not on my part; but here was Sim Suresby--
- Trusty** He was with me and told me so.
- Dame Custance** And he stood by
While Ralph Roister Doister, with help of Merrygreek,
For promise of marriage did unto me seek.
- Trusty** And had ye made any promise before them twain?
- Dame Custance** No; I had rather be torn in pieces and slain!
No man hath my faith and troth but Gawyn Goodluck,
And that before Suresby did I say, and there stuck,
But of certain letters there were such words spoken--
- Trusty** He told me that too.
- Dame Custance** And of a ring, and token,
That Suresby, I spied, did more than half suspect
That I my faith to Gawyn Goodluck did reject.
- Trusty** But there was no such matter, Dame Custance, indeed?
- Dame Custance** If ever my head thought it, God send me ill speed!
Wherefore I beseech you, with me to be a witness
That in all my life I never intended things less,
And what a brainsick fool Ralph Roister Doister is
Yourself know well enough.
- Trusty** Ye say full true, iwis¹²³!

¹²¹ *accombred*] encumbered.

¹²² *daws*] fools.

¹²³ *iwis*] assuredly.

Dame Custance Because to be his wife I not grant nor apply¹²⁴,
Hither will he come, he sweareth, by and by¹²⁵,
To kill both me and mine, and beat down my house flat.
Therefore I pray your aid.

Trusty I warrant you that.

Dame Custance Have I so many years lived a sober life,
And showed myself honest, maid, widow, and wife,
And now to be abused in such a vile sort?
Ye see how poor widows live, all void of comfort!

Trusty I warrant him do you no harm nor wrong at all.

Dame Custance No; but Mathew Merrygreek doth me most appal,
That he would join himself with such a wretched lout.

Trusty He doth it for a jest; I know him out of doubt,
And here cometh Merrygreek.

Dame Custance Then shall we hear his mind.

(Enter Merrygreek.)

Merrygreek Custance and Trusty both, I do you here well find.

Dame Custance Ah, Matthew Merrygreek, ye have used me well!

Merrygreek Now for altogether ye must your answer tell:
Will ye have this man, woman? or else, will ye not?
Else will he come--never boar so brim¹²⁶ nor toast so hot.

Trusty and Dame Custance But why join ye with him?

Trusty For mirth?

Dame Custance Or else in sadness¹²⁷?

¹²⁴ *apply.*] consider.

¹²⁵ *by and by*] immediately.

¹²⁶ *brim*] furious.

¹²⁷ *in sadness*] seriously.

Merrygreek The more fond¹²⁸ of you both! hardily¹²⁹ the matter guess.

Trusty Lo, how say ye, dame?

Merrygreek Why do ye think, Dame Custance,
That in this wooing I have meant aught but pastance¹³⁰?

Dame Custance Much things ye spake, I wot¹³¹, to maintain his dotage.

Merrygreek But well might ye judge I spake it all in mockage.
For why, is Roister Doister a fit husband for you?

Trusty I daresay ye never thought it.

Merrygreek No; to God I vow!
And did not I know afore of the insurance¹³²
Between Gawyn Goodluck and Christian Custance?
And did not I for the nonce, by my conveyance¹³³,
Read his letter in a wrong sense for dalliance?
That, if you could have take it up at the first bound,
We should thereat such a sport and pastime have found,
That all the whole town should have been the merrier?

Dame Custance Ill ache your heads both I was never wearier,
nor never more vexed, since the first day I was born!

Trusty But very well I wish¹³⁴ he here did all in scorn¹³⁵.

Dame Custance But I feared thereof to take dishonesty¹³⁶.

Merrygreek This should both have made sport and showed your honesty;
And Goodluck, I dare swear, your wit therein would 'low¹³⁷.

¹²⁸ *fond*] foolish.

¹²⁹ *hardily*] surely.

¹³⁰ *pastance*] pastime.

¹³¹ *wot*] know.

¹³² *insurance*] engagement.

¹³³ *conveyance*] cunning.

¹³⁴ *wish*] know.

¹³⁵ *scorn*] fun.

¹³⁶ *dishonesty*] dishonor.

¹³⁷ *'low*] approve.

- Trusty** Yea, being no worse than we know it to be now.
- Merrygreek** And nothing yet too late; for, when I come to him,
Hither will he repair with a sheep's look full grim,
By plain force and violence to drive you to yield.
- Dame Custance** If ye two bid me, we will with him pitch a field,
I and my maids together.
- Merrygreek** Let us see! be bold!
- Dame Custance** Ye shall see women's war!
- Trusty** That fight will I behold.
- Merrygreek** If occasion serve, taking his part full brim,
I will strike at you, but the rap shall light on him,
When we first appear.
- Dame Custance** Then will I run away
As though I were afeared.
- Trusty** Do you that part well play;
And I will sue for peace.
- Merrygreek** And I will set him on.
Then will he look as fierce as a Cotswold lion¹³⁸.
- Trusty** But when goest thou for him?
- Merrygreek** That do I very now.
- Dame Custance** Ye shall find us here.
- Merrygreek** Well, God have mercy on you! (*He goes off.*)
- Trusty** There is no cause of fear. The least boy in the street--
- Dame Custance** Nay, the least girl I have will make him take his feet.
But hark! methink they make preparation.
- Trusty** No force, it will be a good recreation.

¹³⁸ Cotswold lion] sheep.

Dame Custance I will stand within, and step forth speedily,
And so make as though I ran away dreadfully.

(They go off.)

*(Enter **Roister Doister**, **Doughty**, **Merrygreek**, and two drums with their ensigns.)*

Roister Doister Now, sirs, keep your 'ray¹³⁹; and see your hearts be stout!
But where be these caitiffs? me think they dare not rout¹⁴⁰!
How sayest thou, Merrygreek? What doth Kit Custance say?

Merrygreek I am loth to tell you.

Roister Doister Tush, speak, man! yea or nay?

Merrygreek Forsooth, sir, I have spoken for you all that I can.
But, if ye win her, ye must e'en play the man;
E'en to fight it out ye must a man's heart take.

Roister Doister Yes, they shall know, and thou knowest, I have a stomacke.

Merrygreek "A stomach," quod¹⁴¹ you, yea, as good as e'er a man had.

Roister Doister I trow they shall find and feel that I am a lad.

Merrygreek We shall see how ye will strike now, being angry.

Roister Doister Have at thy pate¹⁴², then! and save thy head if thou may!

Merrygreek Be not at one with her upon any amends.

Roister Doister No, though she make to me never so many friends,
Nor if all the world for her would undertake;
No, not God himself, neither, shall not her peace make!
On, therefore! March forward! Soft; stay awhile yet!

Merrygreek On!

¹³⁹ 'ray; ranks.

¹⁴⁰ rout] stir.

¹⁴¹ quod] quoth.

¹⁴² pate] head.

Roister Doister Tarry!

Merrygreek Forth!

Roister Doister Back!

Merrygreek On!

Roister Doister Soft! Now forward set!

(Enter Dame Custance.)

Dame Custance What business have we here? Out! alas, alas!
(She pretends fear and runs away.)

Roister Doister Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!
Didst thou see that, Merrygreek? how afraid she was?
Didst thou see how she fled apace¹⁴³ out of my sight?
Ah, good sweet Custance! I pity her, by this light!

Merrygreek That tender heart of yours will mar altogether.
Thus will ye be turned with wagging of a feather?

Roister Doister Now forth in 'ray¹⁴⁴, sirs! and stop no more!

Merrygreek Now Saint George to borrow!¹⁴⁵ Drum, dub-a-dub afore!

(Enter Trusty.)

Trusty What mean you to do, sir? commit manslaughter?

Roister Doister To kill forty such is a matter of laughter.

Trusty And who is it, sir, whom ye intend thus to spill¹⁴⁶?

Roister Doister Foolish Custance, here, forceth me against my will.

¹⁴³ *apace*] quickly.

¹⁴⁴ 'ray] array.

¹⁴⁵ *Now Saint George to borrow!*] Now let St. George protect us!

¹⁴⁶ *spill*] destroy.

Trusty And is there no mean¹⁴⁷ your extreme wrath to slake?
She shall some amends unto your good maship make.

Roister Doister I will none amends.

Trusty Is her offence so sore?

Merrygreek An he were a lout, she could have done no more.
She called him fool, and dressed¹⁴⁸ him like a fool,
Mocked him like a fool, used him like a fool.

Trusty Well, yet the sheriff, the justice, or constable,
Her misdemeanour to punish might be able.

Roister Doister No, sir! I mine own self will in this present cause
Be sheriff, and justice, and whole judge of the laws,
This matter to amend, all officers be I shall--
Constable, bailiff, sergeant--

Merrygreek And hangman and all.

Trusty Yet a noble courage, and the heart of a man,
Should more honour win by bearing with a woman.
Therefore take the law, and let her answer thereto.

Roister Doister Merrygreek, the best way were even so to do.
What honour should it be with a woman to fight?

Merrygreek And what then! will ye thus forgo and lose your right?

Roister Doister Nay, I will take the law on her withouten grace.

Trusty Or, if your maship could pardon this one trespass,
I pray you forgive her.

Roister Doister Hoh! (*Giving the sign to halt the fight.*)

Merrygreek Tush! tush, sir, do not!
Be good, master, to her.

Roister Doister Hoh!

¹⁴⁷ *mean*] means.

¹⁴⁸ *dressed*] treated.

- Merrygreek** (*Pretending combativeness.*) Tush, I say, do not!
And what! shall your people here return straight home?
- Trusty** Yea; levy the camp, sirs, and hence again, each one!
- Roister Doister** But be still in readiness if I hap to call;
I cannot tell what sudden chance may befall.
- Merrygreek** Do not off your harness¹⁴⁹, sirs, I you advise,
At the least for this fortnight, in no manner wise;
Perchance in an hour when all ye think least,
Our master's appetite to fight will be best.
But soft; Ere ye go, have one at Custance house!
- Roister Doister** Soft, what wilt thou do?
- Merrygreek** Once discharge my harquebouse¹⁵⁰;
And, for my heart's ease, have once more with my potgun.
- Roister Doister** Hold thy hands! else is all our purpose fordone.
- Merrygreek** An¹⁵¹ it cost me my life!
- Roister Doister** I say thou shalt not!
- Merrygreek** By the matte¹⁵², but I will! Have once more with hail shot!
I will have some pennyworth. I will not lose all.
- (*Enter Dame Custance.*)
- Dame Custance** What caitiffs are those that so shake my house wall?
- Merrygreek** (*Pretending anger.*) Ah, sirrah! now, Custance, if ye had so much wit,
I would see you ask pardon, and yourselves submit.
- Dame Custance** Have I still this ado with a couple of fools?
- Merrygreek** Hear ye what she saith?

¹⁴⁹ *harness*] armor.

¹⁵⁰ *harquebouse*] arquebous.

¹⁵¹ *An*] If.

¹⁵² *matte*] mass.

- Dame Custance** Maidens come forth with your tools!
- (Enter Annot Alyface, Tibet Talkapace, Marge Mumblecrust, and Truepenny.)*
- Roister Doister** *(Calling out warily.)* In a ray¹⁵³!
- Merrygreek** Dubbadub, sirrah!
- Roister Doister** In a ray!
They come suddenly on us.
- Merrygreek** Dubbadub!
- Roister Doister** In a ray!
That ever I was born, we are taken tardy!
- Merrygreek** Now, sirs, quit ourselves like tall men and hardy.
- Dame Custance** On afore, Truepenny! Hold thine own, Annot!
On toward them, Tibet! for 'scape us they cannot.
Come forth, Madge Mumblecrust! to stand fast together.
- Merrygreek** God send us a fair day!
- Roister Doister** See, they march on hither.
- Talkapace** But, mistress!
- Dame Custance** What sayest thou?
- Talkapace** Shall I go fetch our goose?
- Dame Custance** What to do?
- Talkapace** To yonder captain I will turn her loose;
An she gape and hiss at him, as she doth at me,
I durst jeopard my hand she will make him flee.
- Dame Custance** On forward!
- Roister Doister** They come!
- Merrygreek** Stand!

¹⁵³ *In a ray*] Take your ranks.

- Roister Doister** Hold!
- Merrygreek** Keep!
- Roister Doister** There!
- Merrygreek** Strike!
- Roister Doister** Take heed.
- Dame Custance** Well said, Truepenny!
- Truepenny** Ah, whoresons!
- Dame Custance** Well done, indeed.
- Merrygreek** Down with them, Dobinet!
- Dame Custance** Now, Madge! Here, Annot! Now, stick them, Tibet!
- Talkapace** All my chief quarrel is to this same little knave
That beguiled me last day. Nothing shall him save.
- Doughty** Down with this little quean that hath at me such spite!
Save you from her, master; it is a very sprite!
- Dame Custance** I myself will Mounsire Grand Captain undertake!
- Roister Doister** They win ground.
- Merrygreek** Save yourself, sir, for God's sake!
- Roister Doister** Out alas! I am slain! help!
- Merrygreek** Save yourself!
- Roister Doister** Alas!
- (He pretends to strike at **Custance** but hits **Roister Doister** instead.)*
- Merrygreek** Nay, then, have at you, mistress!
- Roister Doister** Thous hittest me, alas!
- Merrygreek** I will strike at Custance here.

- Roister Doister** Thou hittest me!
- Merrygreek** So I will!
Nay, mistress Custance.
- (*Hits **Roister Doister** again.*)
- Roister Doister** Alas, thou hittest me still!
- Merrygreek** Save yourself, sir.
- Roister Doister** Help! out! alas, I am slain!
- Merrygreek** Truce! hold your hands! truce for a pissing-while or twain!
Nay, how say you, Custance. For saving of your life,
Will ye yield, and grant to be this gentman's wife?
- Dame Custance** Ye told me he loved me. Call ye this love?
- Merrygreek** He loved awhile, even like a turtledove.
- Dame Custance** Gay love, God save it, so soon hot, so soon cold!
- Merrygreek** I am sorry for you. He could love you yet, so he could.
- Roister Doister** Nay, by Cock's precious, she shall be none of mine.
- Merrygreek** Why so?
- Roister Doister** Come away. By the matte, she is mankine¹⁵⁴!
I durst adventure¹⁵⁵ the loss of my right hand
If she did not slay her other husband;
And see, if she prepare not again to fight!
- Merrygreek** What then? Saint George to borrow¹⁵⁶, our ladies' knight!
- Roister Doister** Slay else whom she will, by Gog, she shall not slay me!
- Merrygreek** How then?
- Roister Doister** Rather than to be slain, I will flee.

¹⁵⁴ *mankine*] like a man.

¹⁵⁵ *adventure*] wager.

¹⁵⁶ *borrow*] defend.

- Dame Custance** To it again, my knightesses! down with them all!
- Merrygreek** Nay, stick to it, like an hardy man and a tall.
- Roister Doister** Oh, bones! thou hittest me! Away, or else die we shall!
- Merrygreek** Away, for the pash of our sweet Lord Jesus Christ.
- Dame Custance** Away, lout and lubber! or I shall be thy priest.
- (Merrygreek, Roister Doister, and his men run away.)*
- So this field¹⁵⁷ is ours, we have driven them all away.
- Talkapace** Thanks to God, mistress, ye have had a fair day.
- Dame Custance** Well, now go ye in, and make yourself some good cheer.
- All** We go.
- Trusty** Ah, sir, what a field we have had here!
- Dame Custance** Friend Tristram, I pray you, be a witness with me.
- Trusty** Dame Custance, I shall depose¹⁵⁸ for your honesty,
And now fare ye well, except something else ye wold¹⁵⁹.
- Dame Custance** Not now; but when I need to send, I will be bold.
I thank you for these pains.
- (Trusty leaves.)*
- And now I will get me in.
Now Roister Doister will no more wooing begin!
- (She goes off.)*

¹⁵⁷ *field*] fight.

¹⁵⁸ *depos*] vouch.

¹⁵⁹ *excelpt something else ye wold*] unless you want something else.

ACT V

(Enter *Gawyn Goodluck* and *Sim Suresby*.)

- Goodluck** Sim Suresby, my trusty man, now advise thee well,
And see that no false surmises thou me tell;
Was there such ado about Custance, of a truth?
- Suresby** To report that¹⁶⁰ I heard and saw, to me is ruth¹⁶¹,
But both my duty and name and property¹⁶²
Warneth me to you to show fidelity.
It may be well enough, and I wish it so to be;
She may herself discharge¹⁶³, and try her honesty¹⁶⁴,
Yet their claim to her, methought, was very large.
For with letters, rings and tokens they did her charge;
Which when I heard and saw, I would none to you bring.
- Goodluck** No, by Saint Marie! I allow¹⁶⁵ thee in that thing!
Ah, sirrah, now I see truth in the proverb old;
All things that shineth is not by and by¹⁶⁶ pure gold.
If any do live a woman of honesty,
I would have sworn Christian Custance had been she.
- Suresby** Sir, though I to you be a servant true and just,
Yet do not ye therefore your faithful spouse mistrust;
But examine the matter, and if ye shall it find
To be all well, be not ye for my words unkind.
- Goodluck** I shall do that is right, and as I see cause why.
But here cometh Custance forth; we shall know by and by.

(Enter *Dame Custance*.)

¹⁶⁰ *that*] what.

¹⁶¹ *ruth*] painful.

¹⁶² *property*] character.

¹⁶³ *discharge*] vindicate.

¹⁶⁴ *try*] prove.

¹⁶⁵ *allow*] approve.

¹⁶⁶ *by and by*] immediately.

- Dame Custance** I come forth to see and hearken for news good,
For about this hour is the time, of likelihood,
That Gawyn Goodluck, by the sayings of Suresby,
Would be at home. And lo, yond I see him, I!
What! Gawyn Goodluck, the only hope of my life!
Welcome home! and kiss me, your true espoused wife!
- Goodluck** Nay, soft, Dame Custance! I must first, by your licence¹⁶⁷,
See whether all things be clear in your conscience.
I hear of your doings to me very strange.
- Dame Custance** What, fear ye that my faith towards you should change?
- Goodluck** I must needs mistrust ye be elsewhere entangled,
For I hear that certain men with you have wrangled
About the promise of marriage by you to them made.
- Dame Custance** Could any man's report your mind therein persuade?
- Goodluck** Well, ye must therein declare yourself to stand clear,
Else I and you, Dame Custance, may not join this year.
- Dame Custance** Then would I were dead, and fair laid in my grave!
Ah, Suresby! is this the honesty that ye have
To hurt me with your report, not knowing the thing?
- Suresby** If ye be honest, my words can hurt you nothing;
But what I heard and saw, I might not but report.
- Dame Custance** Ah, Lord, help poor widows, destitute of comfort!
Truly, most dear spouse, nought was done but for pastance.
- Goodluck** But such kind of sporting is homely dalliance¹⁶⁸.
- Dame Custance** If ye knew the truth, ye would take all in good part.
- Goodluck** By your leave, I am not half well skilled in that art.
- Dame Custance** It was none but Roister Doister, that foolish mome¹⁶⁹.
- Goodluck** Yea, Custance, "Better," they say, "a bad 'scuse than none."

¹⁶⁷ *licence*] permission.

¹⁶⁸ *homely dalliance*] unbecoming sport.

¹⁶⁹ *mome*] dolt.

Dame Custance Why, Tristram Trusty, sir, your true and faithful friend,
 Was privy both to the beginning and the end.
 Let him be the judge, and for me testify.

Goodluck I will the more credit that he shall verify.
 And because I will the truth know e'en as it is,
 I will to him myself, and know all without miss.
 Come on, Sim Suresby, that before my friend thou may
 Avouch the same words which thou didst to me say.

(Goodluck and Suresby go off.)

Dame Custance O lord! how necessary it is now of days,
 That each body live uprightly all manner ways;
 For let never so little a gap be open,
 And be sure of this--the worst shall be spoken!
 How innocent stand I in this for deed or thought!
 And yet see what mistrust towards me it hath wrought!
 But thou, Lord, knowest all folks' thoughts and eke¹⁷⁰ intents,
 And thou art the deliverer of all innocents.
 Thou didst help the advourtes¹⁷¹ that she might be amended;
 Much more, then, help, Lord, that¹⁷² never ill intended!
 Thou didst help Susanna¹⁷³, wrongfully accused,
 And no less dost thou see, Lord, how I am abused.
 Thou didst help Hester¹⁷⁴, when she should have died,
 Help also, good Lord, that my truth may be tried!
 Yet if Gawyn Goodluck with Tristram Trusty speak,
 I trust of ill report the force shall be but weak.
 And lo! yond they come, sadly talking together.
 I will abide, and not shrink for their coming hither.

(Enter Goodluck, Trusty, and Suresby.)

Goodluck And was it none other than ye to me report?

Trusty No; and here were ye wished to have seen the sport.

¹⁷⁰ *eke*] also.

¹⁷¹ *advourtes*] adultress.

¹⁷² *that*] one who.

¹⁷³ *Susanna*] The heroine of the apocryphal book Susanne and the Elders.

¹⁷⁴ *Hester*] Esther.

- Goodluck** Would I had, rather than half of that in my purse!
- Suresby** And I do much rejoice the matter was no worse.
And, like as to open it I was to you faithful,
So of Dame Custance' honest truth I am joyful;
For God forfend that I should hurt her by false report.
- Goodluck** Well, I will no longer hold her in discomfort.
- Dame Custance** Now come they hitherward. I trust all shall be well.
- Goodluck** Sweet Custance, neither heart can think nor tongue tell
How much I joy in your constant fidelity.
Come now, kiss me, the pearl of perfect honesty!
- Dame Custance** God let me no longer to continue in life
Than I shall towards you continue a true wife!
- Goodluck** Well, now to make you for this some part of amends,
I shall desire first you, and then such of our friends
As shall to you seem best, to sup at home with me,
Where at your fought field we shall laugh and merry be.
- Suresby** And mistress, I beseech you, take with me no grief¹⁷⁵;
I did a true man's part, not wishing you reproof¹⁷⁶.
- Dame Custance** Though hasty reports through surmises growing
May of poor innocents be utter overthrowing,
Yet, because to thy master thou hast a true heart,
And I know mine won truth, I forgive thee for my part.
- Goodluck** Go we all to my house, and of this gear no more!
Go prepare all things, Sim Suresby; hence, run afore!
- Suresby** I go. (*He leaves.*)
- Goodluck** But who cometh yond? Matthew Merrygreek.
- Dame Custance** Roister Doister's champion; I shrew his best cheek!¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ *grief*] grudge.

¹⁷⁶ *not wishing you reproof*] to spare you.

¹⁷⁷ *I shrew his best cheek!*] Beshrew his impudence!

- Trusty** Roister Doister self, your wooer, is with him, too.
Surely some thing there is with us they have to do.
- (Enter Merrygreek and Roister Doister.)*
- Merrygreek** Yond I see Gawyn Goodluck, to whom lieth my message.
I will first salute him after his long voyage.
And then make all thing well concerning your behalf.
- Roister Doister** Yea, for the pash of God!
- Merrygreek** Hence out of sight, ye calf¹⁷⁸,
Till I have spoke with them, and then I will you fet.
- Roister Doister** In God's name. *(Exit Roister Doister.)*
- Merrygreek** What, Master Gawyn Goodluck, well met!
And from your long voyage I bid you right welcome home.
- Goodluck** I thank you.
- Merrygreek** I come to you from an honest mome.
- Goodluck** Who is that?
- Merrygreek** Roister Doister, that doughty kite.
- Dame Custance** Fie! I can scarcely abide ye should his name recite.
- Merrygreek** Ye must take him to favour, and pardon all past,
He heareth of your return, and is full ill aghast.
- Goodluck** I am right well content he have with us some cheer.
- Dame Custance** Fie upon him, beast! Then will not I be there.
- Goodluck** Why, Custance! do ye hate him more than ye love me?
- Dame Custance** But for your mind, sir, where he were would I not be!
- Trusty** He would make us all laugh.
- Merrygreek** Ye ne'er had better sport.

¹⁷⁸ calf] fool.

- Goodluck** I pray you, sweet Custance, let him to us resort.
- Dame Custance** To your will I assent.
- Merrygreek** Why, such a fool it is
As no man for good pastime would forgo or miss.
- Goodluck** Fetch him to go with us.
- Merrygreek** He will be a glad man. (*Goes for **Ralph Roister**.*)
- Trusty** We must, to make us mirth, maintain him all we can.
And lo, yond he cometh, and Merrygreek with him!
- Dame Custance** At his first entrance ye shall see I will him trim!
Bur first let us hearken the gentleman's wise talk.
- Trusty** I pray you, mark, if ever ye saw crane so stalk.

(*Enter **Roister Doister** and **Merrygreek**.*)
- Roister Doister** May I then be bold?
- Merrygreek** I warrant you, on my word.
They say they shall be sick but ye be at their board.
- Roister Doister** They were not angry, then?
- Merrygreek** Yes, at first, and made strange;
But when I said your anger to favour should change,
And therewith had commended you accordingly,
They were all in love with your maship by and by,
And cried you mercy that they had done you wrong.
- Roister Doister** For why no man, woman, nor child can hate me long?
- Merrygreek** "We fear," quod they, "he will be avenged one day;
Then for a penny give all our lives we may!"
- Roister Doister** Said they so indeed?
- Merrygreek** Did they? Yea, even with one voice.
"He will forgive all," quod I. Oh, how they did rejoice!

- Roister Doister** Ha, ha, ha!
- Merrygreek** "Go fetch him," say they, "while he is in good mood.
For, have his anger who lust¹⁷⁹, we will not, by the rood!"
- Roister Doister** I pray God that it be all true that thou hast me told
And that she fight no more.
- Merrygreek** I warrant you, be bold.
To them, and salute them!
- Roister Doister** Sirs, I greet you all well.
- All** Your mastership is welcome!
- Dame Custance** Saving my quarrel!
For, sure, I will put you up into the Exchequer--
- Merrygreek** Why so? better nay. Wherefore?
- Dame Custance** For an usurer.
- Roister Doister** I am no usurer, good mistress, by His arms!
- Merrygreek** When took he gain of money to any man's harms?
- Dame Custance** Yes, a foul usurer he is, ye shall see else--
- Roister Doister** Didst not thou promise she would pick no more quarrels?
- Dame Custance** He will lend¹⁸⁰ no blows but he have in recompense
Fifteen for one; which is too much, of conscience!
- Roister Doister** Ah, dame, by the ancient law of arms, a man
Hath no honour to foil¹⁸¹ his hands on a woman.
- Dame Custance** And, where other usurers take their gains yearly,
This man is angry but he have his by and by.
- Goodluck** Sir, do not for her sake bear me your displeasure.

¹⁷⁹ *who lust*] whoever desires

¹⁸⁰ *lend*] give.

¹⁸¹ *foil*] soil.

- Merrygreek** Well, he shall with you talk thereof more at leisure.
Upon your good usage, he will now shake your hand.
- Roister Doister** And much heartily welcome from a strange land.
- Merrygreek** Be not afeard, Gawyn, to let him shake your fist!
- Goodluck** Oh, the most honest gentleman that e'er I wist¹⁸²!
I beseech your maship to take pain to sup with us!
- Merrygreek** He shall not say you nay; and I too, by Jesus!
Because ye shall be friends, and let all quarrels pass.
- Roister Doister** I will be as good friends with them as ere I was.

finis

¹⁸² *wist*] knew.