CHARACTERS
Ralph Roister Doister
Matthew Merrygreek
Gawyn Goodluck, affianced to Dame Custance
Tristam 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)*
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.

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, tarrith 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, wooers 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
"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.

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⁵ whip and whur] Hurry.
⁶ nones] afternoon.
⁷ gear] business.
Mumblecrust: Ye were not nought named Tib Talkapace.

Talkapace: Doth my talk grieve you? Alack, God save your grace!

Mumblecrust: I hold a groat\(^8\) ye will drink anon for this gear.

Talkapace: And I will pray you the stripes for me to bear.

Mumblecrust: I hold a penny, ye will drink without a cup.

Talkapace: Wherein so e'er ye drink, I wot ye drink all up.

(Enter Annot Alyface, knitting.)

Alyface: By Cock! and well sewed, my good Tibet Talkapace!

Talkapace: And e'en as well knit, my nown Annot Alyface!

Roister Doister: See what a sort she keepeth that must be my wife. Shall not I, when I have her, lead a merry life?

Talkapace: Welcome, my good wench, and sit here by me just.

Alyface: And how doth our old beldame here, Madge Mumblecrust?

Talkapace: Chide, and find faults, and threaten to complain.

Alyface: To make us poor girls shent\(^9\), to her is small gain.

Mumblecrust: I did neither chide, nor complain, nor threaten.

Roister Doister: It would grieve my heart to see one of them beaten.

Mumblecrust: I did nothing but bid her work and hold her peace.

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\(^8\) *hold a groat* wager.

\(^9\) *shent* Ashamed.
Talkapace  So would I, if you could your clattering cease;
But the devil cannot make old trot\textsuperscript{10} 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.
\textit{(She casts down her work.)}
There it lieth! The worst is but a curried coat.\textsuperscript{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.
\textit{(She goes out.)}

Mumblecrust  And I will not be long after, Tib Talkapace.
\textit{(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  \textit{(Advancing.)} One that hath heard all your talking, iwis.

Talkapace  The more to blame you! a good thrifty husband\textsuperscript{12}
Would elsewhere have had some better matters in hand.

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{old trot} = old crone
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{curried coat} = beating.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{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! Chad\(^{14}\) not so much i-chotte\(^{15}\) not whan\(^{16}\),
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 nowns! what meanest thou man? tut a whistle!

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 wide.

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!

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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 bush,\textsuperscript{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?

\textsuperscript{26} busk\textsuperscript{]} 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.  
I bring her a ring, with a token in a clout,
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 token 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.)

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30 pastance] pastime.
31 clout] piece of cloth.
32 pastance] pastime.
Doughty  I ween I am a prophet! this gear 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's 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 disclose.

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 ensured 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.

(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!  

Alyface  And frisking!

Truepenny  Well, Tibet and Annot, still swinging and whisking!

Talkapace  But ye roil abroad.

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 biliments\(^{40}\) 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 lumperdee clumperdee like our spaniel Rig.

Truepenny  Marry, then, prick-me-dainty\(^{41}\), 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 aby\(^{42}\) thou shalt.

Talkapace  Pardon this, and the next time powder\(^{43}\) 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 swunged,\(^{44}\) 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.
\(^{44}\) swunged] 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, 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 wot well I was shent!
            For it liked her as well, 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 knacking\textsuperscript{51} 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.

\textsuperscript{51} in good knacking] 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 title 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 mote\(^52\) 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 let\(^53\) 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* last.
Dame Custance  Go, say that I bid him keep him warm at home!
For, if he come abroad, he shall cough me a mome.\textsuperscript{55}
My mind was vexed, I shrew\textsuperscript{56} his head! Sottish dolt!

Merrygreek  He hath in his head --

Dame Custance  As much brain as a bird-bolt\textsuperscript{57}

Merrygreek  Well, Dame Custance, if he hear you thus play choploge\textsuperscript{58} --

Dame Custance  What will he?

Merrygreek  Play the devil in the horologe.\textsuperscript{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.

\textit{(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.

\textit{(Enter Ralph Roister Doister.)}

\textsuperscript{55} cough me a mome.| prove a fool to me.
\textsuperscript{56} shrew| curse.
\textsuperscript{57} bird bolt| blunt arrow.
\textsuperscript{58} coploge| chop logic.
\textsuperscript{59} horologe| clock.
Juno send me this day good luck and good chance!
I cannot but come see how Merrygreek doth speed.

I will not see him, but give him a jut\(^{60}\), indeed.
I cry your mastership mercy!

And whither now?

As fast as I could run, sir, in post against you.
But why speak ye so faintly? or why are ye so sad?

Thou knowest the proverb -- because I cannot be had.
Has thou spoken with this woman?

Yea, that I have!

And what, will this gear be?

No, so God me save!

Hast thou a flat answer?

Nay, a sharp answer!

What?

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."

Yea, an hundred thousand pound should not save her life!

No, but that ye woo her to have her to your wife.
But I could not stop her mouth.

Heigh-ho, alas!

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 after plead with me.\(^{63}\)
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 hap\(^{64}\) is not hasty; yet in space\(^{65}\) 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 brag\(^{66}\), 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-coat, nay, whan? That is a lusty 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 gauding 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 haze, haze; otherwise, I tell you plain, And if ye will not haze, then give us our gear 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 daws? 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 preferment\(^{74}\) 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 pigsny\(^{75}\),  
                 Good Mistress Custance, present these by and by\(^{76}\)."
                 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 which\textsuperscript{77} did it endite\textsuperscript{78}.

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  Iwis\textsuperscript{79}, 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 requit\textsuperscript{80}.

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!

\textsuperscript{77} which\rightarrow\text{who.}
\textsuperscript{78} endite\rightarrow\text{write.}
\textsuperscript{79} Iwis\rightarrow\text{assuredly.}
\textsuperscript{80} requisite\rightarrow\text{requisite.
Merrygreek  
Yea, and perchance that way ye shall much sooner speed;  
For one mad property these women have, in fey\(^{81}\);  
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 dis\(^{82}\) man, which could lub dee\(^{83}\) 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 good

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.

(Enter Merrygreek and Scrivener.)

But lo an Merrygreek have not brought him sens.

Merrygreek  Nay, I would I had of my purse paid forty pens!

Scrivener  So would I, too; but it needed not that stound.

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 rather,  
                 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 polling 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 spill?

---

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.
"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?

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

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?

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 costard\(^{91}\) 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 reformed\(^{92}\).

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, hardly let all go; We will know where\(^{93}\) 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 fain.\(^{94}\)

---

\(^{94}\) *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 shrew\textsuperscript{95} their best Christmas cheeks, both togetherward!

(\textit{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 sadness\textsuperscript{96}.

Suresby

Let us hearken them. Somewhat\textsuperscript{97} 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 bord\textsuperscript{98}!

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.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{shrew} curse.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{sadness} earnestness.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Somewhat} Something is up.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{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 stomached\(^{100}\) 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 ween\(^{101}\).

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, gramercies\textsuperscript{102}! 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 spill\textsuperscript{103} 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 bold\textsuperscript{104}!

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 stains 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?

\textsuperscript{102} gramercies| thank you.

\textsuperscript{103} spill| destroy.

\textsuperscript{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 ye again?

Merrygreek  Well said yet!

Dame Custance  Go, to, you goose!

Roister Doister  I say, Kit Custance,
In case ye will not haze\(^{105}\), well, better yes, perchance!

Dame Custance  Avaunt, lozel\(^{106}\)! 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 fain 107!
No, and though she would be at ten thousand pound cost 108!

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

Dame Custance  Yea, no force 109; 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 froward 110?

Roister Doister  Nay, dame, I will fire thee out of thy house,
And destroy thee and all thine, and that by and by 111.

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 represt,
That poor silly 112 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 Tristam 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.
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 charm\textsuperscript{113},
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 coil\textsuperscript{114} 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 pash\textsuperscript{115} 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!

\textit{(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!

\textit{(Enter Tibet Talkapace, Annot Alyface, and Margery Mumblecrust.)}

Alyface  I come.

Talkapace  And I am here.

Mumblecrust  And I am here too at length.

\textsuperscript{113} charm\textsuperscript{} overwhelm.
\textsuperscript{114} coil\textsuperscript{} best.
\textsuperscript{115} pash\textsuperscript{} 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 shrew\textsuperscript{116} them that last about it go!

\((Tibet, \text{ Mumblecrust } and \text{ Annot Alyface} \ go \ to \ arm \ themselves.\)\)

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 start\textsuperscript{117}, I confess;
But yet a quick messenger might twice since, as I guess,
Have gone and come again. Ah, yond I spy him now!

\((Enter \ Truepenny \ and \ Tristram \ Trusty.)\)
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 sadder\textsuperscript{118} 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. \textit{(Exit.)}

Dame Custance
Now, Tristram Trusty, I thank you right much;
For, at my first sending, to come ye never grutch\textsuperscript{119}.

Trusty
Dame Custance, God ye save! and, while my life shall last,
For my friend Goodluck's sake ye shall not send in wast\textsuperscript{120}.

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?

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{sadder} \text{[more solemn.}

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{grutch} \text{[grudge.}

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{in wast} \text{[in vain.}
Dame Custance    I am ill accombred\textsuperscript{121} with a couple of daws\textsuperscript{122}.

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, iwis\textsuperscript{123}!

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{121} accombred\textsuperscript{121} encumbered.
\textsuperscript{122} daws\textsuperscript{122} fools.
\textsuperscript{123} iwis\textsuperscript{123} assuredly.
Dame Custance  Because to be his wife I not grant nor apply, Hither will he come, he sweareth, by and by, 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 brim, nor toast so hot.

Trusty and Dame Custance  But why join ye with him?

Trusty    For mirth?

Dame Custance  Or else in sadness?

---

124 apply. consider.
125 by and by] immediately.
126 brim] furious.
127 in sadness] seriously.
Merrygreek  The more fond\textsuperscript{128} of you both! hardily\textsuperscript{129} 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 pastance\textsuperscript{130}?

Dame Custance  Much things ye spake, I wot\textsuperscript{131}, 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 insurance\textsuperscript{132} Between Gawyn Goodluck and Christian Custance?  And did not I for the nonce, by my conveyance\textsuperscript{133},  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 wish\textsuperscript{134} he here did all in scorn\textsuperscript{135}.

Dame Custance  But I feared thereof to take dishonesty\textsuperscript{136}.

Merrygreek  This should both have made sport and showed your honesty;  And Goodluck, I dare swear, your wit therein would 'low\textsuperscript{137}.

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{128} fond\{foolish.
\item\textsuperscript{129} hardily\{surely.
\item\textsuperscript{130} pastance\{pastime.
\item\textsuperscript{131} wot\{know.
\item\textsuperscript{132} insurance\{engagement.
\item\textsuperscript{133} conveyance\{cunning.
\item\textsuperscript{134} wish\{know.
\item\textsuperscript{135} scorn\{fun.
\item\textsuperscript{136} dishonesty\{dishonor.
\item\textsuperscript{137} 'low\{approve.
\end{footnotes}
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 lion\(^\text{138}\).

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 'ray; and see your hearts be stout!  
But where be these caitiffs? me think they dare not rout!  
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," quod 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 pate, 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 apace\(^{143}\) 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 'ray\(^{144}\), 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 spill\(^{146}\)?

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 mean\textsuperscript{147} 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 dressed\textsuperscript{148} 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! \textit{(Giving the sign to halt the fight.)}

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

Roister Doister
Hoh!

\textsuperscript{147} mean] means.
\textsuperscript{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 harness\(^{149}\), 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 harquebouse\(^{150}\);
And, for my heart's ease, have once more with my potgun.

Roister Doister  
Hold thy hands! else is all our purpose fordone.

Merrygreek  
An\(^{151}\) it cost me my life!

Roister Doister  
I say thou shalt not!

Merrygreek  
By the matte\(^{152}\), 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 ray\textsuperscript{153}!

Merrygreek Dubbadub, sirrah!

Merrygreek Dubbadub!

Roister Doister In a ray!
They come suddenly on us.

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 togethier.

Merrygreek God send us a fair day!

Dame Custance On forward!

Roister Doister See, they march on hither.

Talkapace But, mistress!

Talkapace 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!

\textsuperscript{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  Thou hittest me, alas!

Merrygreek  I will strike at Custance here.
Roister Doister  Thouittest me!

Merrygreek  So I will!
Nay, mistress Custance.

(Hits Roister Doister again.)

Roister Doister  Alas, thouittest 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 mankine!^154
I durst adventure^155 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 borrow,^156 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 field\textsuperscript{157} 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 depose\textsuperscript{158} for your honesty,
And now fare ye well, except something else ye wold\textsuperscript{159}.

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.)

\textsuperscript{157} field\textsuperscript{[fight.}

\textsuperscript{158} depos\textsuperscript{[vouch.}

\textsuperscript{159} except something else ye wold\textsuperscript{[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 that I heard and saw, to me is ruth,
But both my duty and name and property Warneth me to you to show fidelity.
It may be well enough, and I wish it so to be;
She may herself discharge, and try her honesty,
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 allow thee in that thing!
Ah, sirrah, now I see truth in the proverb old;
All things that shineth is not by and by 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 licence\textsuperscript{167},
    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 dalliance\textsuperscript{168}.

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 mome\textsuperscript{169}.

Goodluck  Yea, Custance, "Better," they say, "a bad 'scuse than none."

\textsuperscript{167} licence\textsuperscript{167} permission.

\textsuperscript{168} homely dalliance\textsuperscript{168} unbecoming sport.

\textsuperscript{169} mome\textsuperscript{169} 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 eke\textsuperscript{170} intents,
And thou art the deliverer of all innoents.
Thou didst help the advourtess\textsuperscript{171} that she might be amended;
Much more, then, help, Lord, that\textsuperscript{172} never ill intended!
Thou didst help Susanna\textsuperscript{173}, wrongfully accused,
And no less dost thou see, Lord, how I am abused.
Thou didst help Hester\textsuperscript{174}, 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.

\textsuperscript{170} eke] also.
\textsuperscript{171} advourtess] adultress.
\textsuperscript{172} that] one who.
\textsuperscript{173} Susanna] The heroine of the apocryphal book Susanne and the Elders.
\textsuperscript{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 grief;  
I did a true man's part, not wishing you reprieve. 

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! 

---

175 grief] grudge.  
176 not wishing you reprieve] 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 calf,178
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!
But 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 lust\textsuperscript{179}, 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 lend\textsuperscript{180} 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 foil\textsuperscript{181} 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.

\textsuperscript{179} who lust\textsuperscript{179} whoever desires

\textsuperscript{180} lend\textsuperscript{180} give.

\textsuperscript{181} foil\textsuperscript{181} 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 wist!  
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.

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