

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE MUST DIE

by

Matthew Gray

"CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE MUST DIE"

FADE IN:

INT. THEATRE/STAGE - DAY

The stage is wreathed in shadow. A spotlight (anachronistic) illuminates EDWARD II. He is young, ruggedly handsome, dressed in Elizabethan costume. He reads from parchment.

EDWARD

These looks of thine can harbour  
nought but death; /  
I see my tragedy written in thy brows. /  
Know that I am a king. O, at that name /  
I feel a hell of grief.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

More! To the back seats!

Edward's delivery grows more frantic and impassioned.

EDWARD

Where is my crown? /  
Gone, gone, and do I remain alive? /  
(beat)  
I am too weak and feeble to resist. /  
Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul.

He bows his head.

Then: the red-hot tip of a poker. It plunges down, with the sound of hot metal extinguished in water.

BLACK

SUPER: "Christopher Marlowe Must Die."

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

All right everybody, take five.

INT. THEATRE/STAGE WINGS - DAY

Edward stands facing CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: an older, neat, calculating figure. They are in the middle of a difficult conversation. There is a heavy silence.

Finally:

CHRISTOPHER  
I am to be executed.

EDWARD  
What?

CHRISTOPHER  
The Queen has issued a warrant for my  
arrest. She will then have me killed.  
Discreetly.

EDWARD  
Who told you this?

CHRISTOPHER  
Sir Francis.

EDWARD  
This cannot be.

CHRISTOPHER  
She said:

CUT TO:

INT. WHITEHALL/THRONE ROOM - DAY

The middle-aged lips of ELIZABETH I.

ELIZABETH  
Christopher Marlowe must die.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE/STAGE WINGS - DAY

EDWARD  
I see.

For a moment, Edward is dumbfounded. Then: he sharply pulls  
Christopher in for a hug. He clings desperately.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)  
Positions everyone!

INT. A TAVERN - DAY

Christopher and Edward slump sullenly at the bar.

The BARMAN stares with consternation at this sorry duo.

BARMAN

Sure, they can't kill you. Why, you're the only one spins the fruit machine.

The "fruit machine": a dodgy looking cabinet with rotting apples and pears dangling inside. A single fly buzzes on fruit-flesh.

EDWARD

Don't worry. I'm sure another cynical playwright will turn up.

BARMAN

Aye, Edward. England certainly has no shortage of those.

Christopher swirls the drink in his cup.

CHRISTOPHER

Funny. I've thought of death often, but... I'd always presumed it would be at my own hand.

Edward is keen to change the conversation.

EDWARD

I know! What about Mary, Queen of Scots? Surely after all you did for her, she'd gladly repay the favour.

CHRISTOPHER

What's she going to do? Raise the Scottish Army and invade England? No. Besides, you of all people should know never to trust Catholics.

EDWARD

Amen.

Christopher is sinking further into his depression.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

You know... if I were still the King of England, I'd have all their heads on pikes.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, well... you're not.

They resume moping.

The Barman plonks the tankard he was drying on the bar.

BARMAN

It do be strange though. All this intrigue.  
Sort of like one of your plays, isn't  
it?

Christopher raises his head. His eyes alight. Eureka.

INT. TAVERN BEDROOM - DAY

Christopher tosses a sheaf of parchment down on the table  
where Edward is seated. Edward picks up the pages,  
unenlightened.

CHRISTOPHER

It's finished. My masterpiece.

EDWARD

What's this?

CHRISTOPHER

Your lines. I've rewritten the ending.

Edward inspects the title page.

EDWARD

(reading)

"The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death  
of Elizabeth I, Queen of England,  
with the Tragical Fall of Proud Christopher  
Marlowe."

(beat)

And where do I fit in?

CHRISTOPHER

Edward is still the lead player.

EDWARD

That's what you said about Virgin Number  
Three in *Tamburlaine the Great*.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, that was obviously a lie. This is  
different.

Christopher kneels beside Edward and takes the younger man's  
hands in his own.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Look, I need you to be my star. I need *you*.

He places a hand on Edward's cheek, then rises.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Besides, it was partly your idea.

EDWARD

How so?

CHRISTOPHER

Heads on pikes. I thought: I can either  
kill myself... or kill everybody else.

"At my own hand."

INT. A NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A hypnotic, pulsating rhythm.

A mass of bodies: a ragtag band of queers, rent boys, Harlem  
ballers, leather fetishists, subversives, refugees.

Music eases its way through flesh. It grows hard to tell  
where one body ends and another begins.

Through this organic machine strolls Edward II: white scoop-  
neck, leather jacket, sunglassed and slick-haired.

Christopher Marlowe is reclined on a bench. Two androgynous  
youths, crouched on the floor, paw playfully at the  
playwright.

Upon seeing his soulmate, Christopher's face grows sincere.  
He rises, walks towards Edward. Business-like, Christopher  
joins at Edward's side, and they continue on the same  
trajectory.

CHRISTOPHER

Ready?

EDWARD

All is prepared.

INT. A BLACK BOX ROOM - NIGHT

All is black.

Then: spotlight on a smoking Christopher Marlowe, exuding  
'cool' as he perches on a solitary barstool.

Then: spotlight on Edward II. He raises his eyes.

It is a showdown.

EDWARD

Are you Christopher Marlowe?

Christopher rises. A GREEN-HAIRED TWINK slinks towards the playwright and nestles at his side. Christopher exhales a cloud of smoke.

CHRISTOPHER

Those that love not tobacco and boys  
are fools.

A pistol shot.

Marlowe is splayed on the floor.

EXT. OUTSIDE A TAVERN - DAY

In the same position: Christopher Marlowe's body on a mound of hay.

The Barman approaches the body, kneels down, inspects.

He looks up.

BARMAN

Christopher Marlowe is dead.

EXT. AN ELIZABETHAN STREET - DAY

A cool, crisp morning. Marlowe's funeral procession wades down the street.

Standing inconspicuous in their cloaks: Edward and Christopher.

A BYSTANDER leans across.

BYSTANDER

Who they got this time?

CHRISTOPHER

That's Kit Marlowe, that is. Killed in  
a pub brawl.

BYSTANDER

Who's that then?

CHRISTOPHER

Christopher Marlowe. The playwright.

Christopher returns to Edward's confidence.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)  
It's not well attended, is it?

The cogs in Edward's brain whirl.

EDWARD  
Actors couldn't get the day off. Matinee.

CHRISTOPHER  
Of course. That makes me feel better.

They watch as the coffin reaches them, then moves on.

EDWARD  
Do you think you'll enjoy death?

CHRISTOPHER  
It is merely Christopher Marlowe who must  
die. Don't count on me being dead for long.

From under his cloak, Christopher produces a carnival mask,  
and hands it to Edward.

CHRISTOPHER  
Phase Two. Now the real fun begins.

EXT. WHITEHALL - DAY

A carriage careers ungracefully up the driveway, arriving at  
the grand entrance of Whitehall Palace.

INT. WHITEHALL/THRONE ROOM - DAY

A crowd of nobles in fine clothes are gathered. Among their  
ranks, leaning against a stone pillar in a cape and mask, is  
Edward.

There is a fanfare.

The unmistakable silhouette of Elizabeth I enters the room,  
followed by a stately procession. She arrives at her throne.  
She takes her seat.

Her aid, SIR FRANCIS, presents her with an ornately bound  
tome.

FRANCIS  
A gift from the Earl of Mummerset, your  
Majesty.



The Queen looks inquisitively at Francis, then accepts the book, caressing the binding.

Slowly, she opens the cover to discover inside: a note. She picks it up, keeping it closely guarded. She peeks.

Ink on parchment: "Wuu2? x"

Elizabeth pulls this scandalising note protectively towards her breast. She allows herself a private glance upwards, her face blushing.

Her eyes catch Edward in the crowd, by the pillar. She does not miss his coy nod.

INT. WHITEHALL/CORRIDOR - DAY

Elizabeth waddles down the corridor, surrounded by an entourage including Francis.

FRANCIS

Well, I think that a resounding success, don't you? We should have a feast to celebrate. Pig. Pheasant. Lots of dead things.

Suddenly: Elizabeth's eyes spy a figure, concealed behind a curtain. She gives a wry smile.

ELIZABETH

(to attendants)

Leave me.

At first her attendants are uncertain, but they soon curtsey and leave Elizabeth in private.

Elizabeth's attentions return to the mysterious figure.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You. Vagabond. Make thyself known.

Edward emerges from his hiding place. He slips off the mask to reveal his handsome face. He comes close. The erotic charge is palpable.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

A moment of privacy is rare. They shall soon grow suspicious. What do you want with me?

EDWARD

What every man wants.

Elizabeth double checks they are alone.

ELIZABETH

You know I am... a virgin.

EDWARD

My lady needn't worry about that. Virginity, they tell me, is a sort of performance these days.

ELIZABETH

Is that so?

She gives a coy smile.

INT. WHITEHALL/A BEDCHAMBER - DAY

Elizabeth I, still in her dress, on all fours atop a lavish bed. Behind her, naked, thrusts Edward II. It is a wild, unbridled shag.

ELIZABETH

Yes! Yes! YES! O Edward, you naughty prince!

Edward keeps pounding. His face reveals little.

INT. A TAVERN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marlowe is reading in bed. His appearance has changed: the top of his scalp shaved into a receding hairline.

Edward sits on the floor, back against the bed, his head by Christopher's side. Edward is naked and smokes a cigarette, staring into the distance.

Exhale.

EDWARD

I had sex with her. Good Queen Bess.

No response.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

She's not as tight as I expected. I thought all virgins were supposed to be tight. Perhaps that's just what happens with age.

Christopher's eyes look straight ahead, away from Edward.

CHRISTOPHER

Did you cum?

Edward is silent. Christopher guesses the answer is "no."

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

I think I shall write another play.

Edward frowns. It may have been Christopher's words; it may have been the cigarette.

EDWARD

You wish to write again?

CHRISTOPHER

Why not? It's what I'm good at.

Edward tosses the cigarette butt and turns to Marlowe.

EDWARD

Perhaps a sequel? With the revised, happy ending, I could return for *Edward III*?

Edward begins to kiss Christopher's feet. His kisses move up Marlowe's legs. Christopher remains unmoved.

CHRISTOPHER

With the embers of my funeral pyre still hot, I shall rise again.

Edward continues to kiss, growing hungrier. He arrives at Christopher's groin. His eyes look up into Marlowe's unwatching face.

EDWARD

And how has little Kit been today?

Christopher's eyes meet Edward's. Christopher scoffs.

CHRISTOPHER

You mean *where* has little Kit been?

Edward smiles lustfully. Then: Edward suddenly rolls off, back into his position on the floor. He crosses his arms.

EDWARD

I refuse to be made jealous.

Christopher smirks. He produces a vial filled with a seminiferous fluid and hands it to Edward.

CHRISTOPHER

For the next time. Phase Three.

EXT. WHITEHALL/GARDENS - DAY

Watching Edward and Elizabeth from a distance are Francis and an ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT

Who is that the Queen walks with?

FRANCIS

He claims to be the Earl of Mummerset.  
Mark my words, he'll bring us all ruin.

ON THE GARDEN PATH

Elizabeth and Edward take a constitutional.

ELIZABETH

Grass.

EDWARD

Constellations.

ELIZABETH

Kingcups.

EDWARD

Sacrament.

ELIZABETH

Pebble.

EDWARD

Mercy.

ELIZABETH

Love.

EDWARD

Love?

ELIZABETH

O, all these years I've had little course  
to talk. Now that I've started why, I fain  
I should never stop. Even if I have nothing  
to say.

A tear runs down her cheek. Edward wipes it away.

EDWARD II

Whoever heard of crying over such a silly  
thing as love?

INT. A TWENTIETH-CENTURY DRESSING ROOM - DAY

In a mirror surrounded by bulbs, Christopher applies powder to his face.

Edward paces the room.

EDWARD II

I can't go through with this. Phase Three.  
I can't.

Christopher turns plainly to his companion.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, this is a fine time to develop  
principles.

EDWARD II

I'm serious. I won't.

Christopher considers. He sighs.

CHRISTOPHER

Ned, Ned, Ned... Ned.

He places a patronising hand upon Edward's shoulder.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Try to remember you are but an actor.  
The scum of the Earth. To the playwright  
you are simply... meat. My little. meat.  
puppet.

Christopher punctuates these final words with three claps on Edward's cheek. Christopher's face turns immediately stony.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Never forget your place.

He returns to the mirror, adding the final touches.

EDWARD

You know, sometimes I feel demoralised  
when I'm with you. Like a prostitute.

CHRISTOPHER

At least a prostitute can expect a  
regular income.

Satisfied, Christopher turns from the mirror, holding a ruff around his neck.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

What do you think?

EDWARD

Ridiculous.

Christopher reappraises himself in the mirror. Clearly, he is more pleased than Edward.

CHRISTOPHER

Why is it youth so often fails to appreciate my charm?

INT. WHITEHALL/A BEDCHAMBER

Edward and Elizabeth are making love. She gazes up at him.

ELIZABETH

Of course, it is the *idea* of love which infatuates youth. To them it matters not the person.

EDWARD

I know love. Real love.

ELIZABETH.

O, Edward.

She pulls him close.

Unseen, Edward produces the corked vial with a free hand.  
POP.

Elizabeth bucks, her neck thrown back in ecstasy, in response to something being pushed inside her.

Moans of pleasure morph into—

INT. WHITEHALL/A CORRIDOR - DAY

— heaves of morning sickness heard through a door.

An Attendant and Francis stand at attention outside the door.

They hear the percussive SLOP of puke hurtling from mouth to bucket.

FRANCIS

I think, perhaps, another bucket.

ATTENDANT

Very good, sir.

The attendant exits.

Another SLOP. Francis cringes in disgust.

INT. WHITEHALL/THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Queen Elizabeth is stationary in an armchair, as if sitting for a portrait. She is now visibly pregnant. Her complexion is pallid, glossy with sweat.

Six heads, belonging to six attendants, peep through an archway, three on either side. They whisper.

ELIZABETH

I know you watch me.

No response. Elizabeth smirks.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You. Sirrah. Bring me the royal chronicle.

ATTENDANT

My lady.

LATER

Elizabeth flicks through richly illustrated portraits of monarchs.

Henry III, Edward I, then:

The illustration of Edward II resembles her lover.

Having arrived at what she was looking for, she trawls her palm erotically across his image. Elizabeth's eyes are closed, her mouth slackened as she quietly exhales.

INT. WHITEHALL/CHAPEL - NIGHT

A hundred candles of varying height are burning, wax pooling at their bases.

Kneeling low at the steps of a tall alter is Elizabeth, her neck craned upwards, gazing at the chronicle. It sits open at the image of Edward.

ELIZABETH

O thou, sweeter than honeyed wine, tender  
as the summer breeze, soft as a new babe's  
buttock.

She takes a deep breath, drawing her hands to her bosom.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Above all the angels and archangels is  
my love.

She casts out her hands and throws back her head, her eyes  
searching up into the heavens.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

O Zephyr, thou westron wynde, I pray thee  
deliver my beloved safe unto mine arms, that  
we may clasp and share our love once more.

Composing herself, she places a hand upon her stomach. She  
turns towards a narrow window and gazes out longingly.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Hurry, sweet Prince. Tarry not.

INT. WHITEHALL, A BEDCHAMBER - DAY

Elizabeth I is quietly embroidering in her armchair.

Suddenly: the large doors to her chamber burst open. In  
marches Christopher Marlowe, Edward II in tow behind her.

CHRISTOPHER

Hello, fatty. I believe you've got  
something that belongs to us.

Elizabeth is shocked. She peers over the intruder's  
shoulder.

ELIZABETH

Edward? Is that you, my love?

Edward lowers his head.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Guards! I say, Guards!

Her screams break into breathless pants.

Edward is ready to make a break for it, but Christopher  
holds up a hand to halt him.



Elizabeth's eyes are bugling.

EDWARD

I think she's having some sort of fit.

Christopher glances down. Around her skirts, a puddle of water slowly expands.

CHRISTOPHER

It seems we arrived just in time.

LATER - NIGHT

Elizabeth is bound to a chair, blindfolded, her neck forced back. Her skin is red and sweating profusely.

Christopher pours milk over her writhing face.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

You've been screwin' the milkman,  
haven't you?

ELIZABETH

Edward. Please. I do not understand.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't lie to me, Bertha. You've been screwin'  
the milkman!

ELIZABETH

Our child.

EDWARD

Here, bite on this.

A ball gag, hot pink with a black strap, is in Elizabeth's mouth and being fastened.

A sound emerges: a new baby's screams.

LATER - DAY

Christopher paces the room, cradling a crying new-born, shrouded from view.

Choked gargles come from Elizabeth. Edward grips a handful of red hair, keeping her head submerged in a basin of milk.

CHRISTOPHER

Ugh, I can't take this anymore.

Christopher sticks on record (anachronistic): "Baby Love" - The Supremes.

Elizabeth's feet twitch slightly.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Is she dead yet?

EDWARD

WHAT?

CHRISTOPHER

IS SHE DEAD YET?

EDWARD

HANG ON.

Edward plunges her head deep. In response, Elizabeth's lower body shoots in the air like a see-saw, before plummeting down with a final THUNK.

The record continues to play, oblivious.

INT. WHITECHAPEL/HALL - DAY

Grand double doors are thrown open. In marches a cluster of men, led by Francis.

From behind: Elizabeth I sits on a chair in full regalia. A faint whiff of smoke rises from her.

FRANCIS

By heaven.

CHRISTOPHER (O.S.)

Gentlemen, thank goodness you're here.

Christopher emerges from the shadows. He now sports a rather foxy moustache and beard, in addition to the hairline and the ruff.

FRANCIS

Master Shakespeare?

CHRISTOPHER

The Queen is dead, but in her parting she had the foresight to leave behind an heir, born this morning.

A stir from underneath Elizabeth's skirts. A creature emerges from under the hem, its wide eyes adjusting to the light. We finally see the child: half-human, half-ass.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

May I present the father, King Edward II  
a.k.a. The Earl of Mummieset.

Edward emerges and offers a bow.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

With the new king still incapable of speech,  
I'd say it is in all of our interests that  
the father by blood should govern in his  
stead - until he comes of age.

FRANCIS

I'm afraid I don't follow.

CHRISTOPHER

History now belongs to us.

(beat)

Why don't we talk business somewhere  
without the, um... smell.

The men leave the room.

Finally, we see from the front: the charred skeleton of  
Elizabeth I in full costume.

Across her bosom, in what appears to be pink spray paint:  
"S L U T".

FADE OUT.

END OF FILM