

A DISPUTATION BETWEEN A HE CONY-CATCHER AND A SHE CONY-  
CATCHER WHETHER A THIEF OR A WHORE IS MOST HURTFUL IN  
COZENAGE TO THE COMMONWEALTH

Discovering the secret villainies of alluring strumpets,

With the conversion of an English courtesan, reformed this present year, 1592.

Read, laugh and learn.

*Nascimur pro patria.*

R.G.

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To all gentlemen, merchants, apprentices and country farmers, health.

Gentlemen, countrymen, and kind friends, for so I value all that are honest and enemies of bad actions, although in my books of cony-catching I have discovered divers forms of cozenings, and painted out both the sacking and crossbiting laws which strumpets use to the destruction of the simple, yet willing to search all the substance as I have glanced at the shadow, & to enter into the nature of villainy as I have broached up the secrets of vice, I have thought good to publish this dialogue or disputation between a he cony-catcher and a she cony-catcher, whether of them are most prejudicial to the commonwealth, discoursing the base qualities of them both, and discovering the inconvenience that grows to men through the lightness of inconstant wantons, who being wholly given to the spoil, seek the ruin of such as light into their company. In this dialogue, loving countrymen, shall you find what prejudice ensues by haunting of whore-houses, what dangers grows by dallying with common harlots, what inconvenience follows the inordinate pleasures of unchaste libertines (not only by their consuming of their wealth and impoverishment of their goods and lands, but to the great endangering of their health), for in conversing with them they aim not simply at the loss of goods and blemish of their good names, but they fish for diseases, sickness, sores incurable, ulcers bursting [=bursting] out of the joints and salt rheums, which by the humour of that villainy leapt from Naples into France, and from France into the bowels of England, which makes many cry out in their bones whilst goodman surgeon laughs in his purse, a thing to be feared as deadly while men live as hell is to be dreaded after death, for it not only infecteth the body, consumeth the soul, and waste[th] wealth and worship, but engraves a perpetual shame in the forehead of the party so abused, whereof Master Huggins hath well written in his *Mirror of Magistrates* in the person of Mempryciaus exclaiming against harlots. The verses be these:

*Eschew vile Venus' toys, she cuts off age;  
And learn this lesson oft, and tell thy friend:  
By pox, death sudden, begging, harlots end.*

Besides, I have laid open the wily wisdom of over-wise courtesans, that with their cunning can draw on not only poor novices, but such as hold themselves masters of their occupation. What flatteries they use to bewitch, what sweet words to inveigle, what simple holiness to entrap, what amorous glances, what smirking oeillades, what cringing courtesies, what stretching *A dios*, following a man like a bloodhound with their eyes, white [sic for 'what'?] laying out of hair, what frowning of tresses, what paintings, what ruffs, cuffs and braveries, and all to betray the eyes of the innocent novice, whom, when they have drawn on to the bent of their bow, they strip like the prodigal child and turn out of doors like an outcast of the world. The crocodile hath not more tears, Proteus more shape[s], Janus more faces, the Hieria [sic for 'sirens'?] more sundry tunes to entrap the passengers than our English courtesans, to be plain, our English whores, to set on fire the hearts of lascivious and gazing strangers, these common or rather consuming strumpets whose throats are softer than oil and yet whose steps lead unto death. They have their ruffians to rifle when they cannot fetch over with other cunning, their crossbiters attending upon them, their foists, theirs busts(?), their nips and suchlike, being waited on

by these villains as by ordinary servants, so that who thinks himself wise enough to escape their flatteries, him they crossbite; who holds himself to rule to be bitten with a counterfeit apparitor, him they rifle; if he be not so to be versed upon, they have a foist or a nip upon him, and so sting him to the quick. Thus he that meddles with pitch cannot but be defiled, and he that acquainteth himself or converseth with any of these cony-catching strumpets cannot but by some way or other be brought to confusion, for either he must hazard his soul, blemish his good name, lose his goods, light upon diseases, or at the least have been tied to the humour of an harlot whose quiver is open to every arrow, who likes all that have fat purses and loves not any that are destitute of pence. I remember a monk in *diebus illis* [=those days] writ his opinion of the end of an adulterer thus:

*Quatuor his casibus, sine dubio cadet adulter,  
Aut hic pauper e[r]it, aut hic subito morietur,  
Aut cadet in causum qua debet iudice vinci,  
Aut aliquod membrum casu vell crimine perdet.*

Which I Englished thus:

*He that to harlots' lures do yield him thrall,  
Through sour misfortune to bad end shall fall;  
Or sudden death or beggary shall him chance,  
Or guilt before a judge his shame enhance,  
Or else by fault or fortune he shall leese  
Some member, sure, escape[d] from one of these.*

Seeing then such inconvenience grows from the [sic for 'these'?] caterpillars of the commonwealth, and that [+there are] a multitude of the monsters here about London particularly and generally abroad in England to the great overthrow of many simple men that are inveigled by their flatteries, I thought good not only to discover their villainies in a dialogue, but also to manifest by an example how prejudicial their life is to the state of the land, that such as are warned by an instance may learn, and look before they leap. To that end, kind countrymen, I have set down at the end of the disputation the wonderful life of a courtesan, not a fiction but a truth of one that yet lives, not [sic for 'but'?] now in another form repentant, in the discourse of whose life you shall see how dangerous such trulls be to all estates that be so simple as to trust their feigned subtilties. Here shall parents learn how hurtful it is to cocker up their youth in their follies, and have a deep insight how to bridle their daughters if they see them any ways grow wantons. Wishing therefore my labours may be a caveat to my countrymen to avoid the company of such cozening courtesans, farewell.

R.G.

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A disputation between Laurence, a foist, and Fair Nan, a traffic, whether a whore or a thief is most prejudicial

*Laurence.* Fair Nan, well met. What news about your vine court that you look so blithe? Your cherry cheeks discovers your good fare, and your brave apparel bewrays a fat purse. Is fortune now alate grown so favourable to foists that your husband hath lighted on some large purchase, or hath your smooth looks linked in some young novice to sweat for a favour all the bite in his bung, and to leave himself as many crowns as thou hast got good conditions, and then he shall be one of Pierce Penillesse' fraternity? How is it, sweet wench? Goes the world on wheels that you tread so daintily on your tiptoes?

*Nan.* Why, Laurence, are you pleasant or peevish, that you quip with such brief girds? Think you a quartern-wind cannot make a quick sail, that easy lifts cannot make heavy burdens, that women have not wiles to compass crowns as well as men? Yes, & more, for though they be not so strong in the fists, they be more ripe in their wits, and 'tis by wit that I live and will live, in despite of that peevish scholar that thought with his cony-catching books to have crossbit our trade. Dost thou marvel to see me thus brisked? Fair wenches cannot want favours while the world is so full of amorous fools. Where can such girls as myself be blemished with a threadbare coat as long as country farmers have full purses, and wanton citizens pockets full of pence?

*Laurence.* Truth, if fortune so favour thy husband that he be neither smoked nor cloyed, for I am sure all thy bravery comes by his nipping, foisting and lifting.

*Nan.* In faith, sir, no. Did I get no more by mine own wit than I reap by his purchase, I might both go bare & penniless the whole year, but mine eyes are stales, & my hands lime-twigs, else were I not worthy the name of a she cony-catcher. Circes [=Circe] had never more charms, Calypso more enchantments, the sirens more subtile tunes than I have crafty sleights to inveigle a cony and fetch in a country farmer. Laurence, believe me, you men are but fools; your gettings is uncertain, and yet you still fish for the gallows. Though by some great chance you light upon a good bung, yet you fast a great while after, whereas [-as] we mad wenches have our tenants (for so I call every simple lecher and amorous fox [sic for 'fop'?]) as well out of term as in term to bring us our rents. Alas, were not my wits and my wanton pranks more profitable than my husband's foisting, we might often go to bed supperless for want of surfeiting, and yet I dare swear my husband gets a hundred pounds a year by bungs.

*Laurence.* Why, Nan, are you grown so stiff to think your fair looks can get as much as our nimble fingers, or that your sacking can gain as much as our foisting? No, no, Nan, you are two bows down the wind; our [sic for 'one'?] foist will get more than twenty the proudest wenches in all London.

*Nan.* Lie a little further & give me some room. What, Laurence, your tongue is too lavish. All stands upon proof, and sith I have leisure and you no great business, as being now when Paul's is shut up and all purchasies [sic for 'purchases'?] and conies in their burrows, let us to the tavern and take a room to ourselves, and there for the price of our

suppers I will prove that women, I mean of our faculty, a traffic, or as base knaves term us, strumpets, are more subtle, more dangerous in the commonwealth, and more full of wiles to get crowns than the cunningest foist, nip, lift, pragges [sic for 'prigs'], or whatsoever that lives at this day.

*Laurence.* Content, but who shall be moderator in our controversies, sith in disputing *pro & contra* betwixt ourselves, it is but your yea and my nay, and so neither of us will yield to other's victories.

*Nan.* Trust me, Laurence, I am so assured of the conquest, offeing [sic for 'affying'?] so in the strength of mine own arguments, that when I have reasoned, I will refer it to your judgment and censure.

*Laurence.* And trust me, as I am an honest man, I will be indifferent.

*Nan.* Oh, swear not so deeply, but let me first hear what you can say for yourself.

*Laurence.* What? Why more, Nan, than can be painted out in a great volume, but briefly this. I need not describe the laws of villainy because R.G. hath so amply penned them down in *The First Part of Cony-catching*, that though I be one of the faculty, yet I cannot discover more than he hath laid open. Therefore, first to the gentleman foist. I pray you, what finer quality, what art is more excellent, either to try the ripeness of the wit or the agility of the hand than that, for him that will be master of his trade must pass the proudest juggler alive [+in?] the points of legerdemain. He must have an eye to spy the bung or purse, and then a heart to dare to attempt it, for this by the way, he that fears the gallows shall never be good thief while he lives. He must, as the cat, watch for a mouse, and walk Paul's, Westminster, the Exchange, and such common-haunted places, and there have a curious eye to the person, whether he be a gentleman, citizen or farmer, and note either where his bung lies, whether in his hose or pockets, and then dog the party into a press where his stale, with heaving and shoving, shall so molest him that he shall not feel when we strip him of his bung although it be never so fast or cunningly couched about him. What poor farmer almost can come to plead his case at the bar, to attend upon his lawyers at the bench, but look he never so narrowly to it, we have his purse, wherein sometime there is fat purchase, twenty or thirty pounds, and I pray you, how long would one of your traffics be, earning so much with your chamber-work?

Besides, in fairs and markets, and in the circuits after judges, what infinite money is gotten from honest-meaning men, that either busy about their necessary affairs or carelessly looking to their crowns, light amongst us that be foists? Tush, we dissemble in show, we go so neat in apparel, so orderly in outward appearance, some like lawyers' clerks, others like serving-men that attended there about their masters' business, that we are hardly smoked, versing upon all men with kind courtesies and fair words, and yet being so warily watchful that a good purse cannot be put up in a fair but we sigh if we share it not amongst us. And though the books of cony-catching hath somewhat hindered us, and brought many brave foists to the halter, yet some of our country farmers, nay, of our gentleman and citizens, are so careless in a throng of people that they show us the

prey, and so draw on a thief, and bequeath us their purses whether we will or no. For who loves wine so ill that he will not eat grapes if they fall into his mouth, and who is so base that if he see a pocket fair before him will not foist in if he may, or if foisting will not serve, use his knife and nip, for although there be some foists that will not use their knives, yet I hold him not a perfect workman or master of his mystery that will not cut a purse as well as foist a pocket, and hazard any limb for so sweet a gain as gold. How answer you me this brief objection, Nan? Can you compare with either our cunning to get our gains in [sic for 'or?'] purchase?

*Nan.* And have you no stronger arguments, Goodman Laurence, to argue your excellency in villainy but this? Then in faith, put up your pipes, and give me leave to speak. Your chop-logic hath no great subtilty, for simple [sic for 'simply'] you reason of foisting, & appropriate that to yourselves, to you men, I mean, as though there were not women foists and nips as neat in that trade as you, of as good an eye, as fine and nimble a hand, and of as resolute a heart. Yes, Laurence, and your good mistresses in that mystery, for we without like suspicion can pass in your walks under the colour of simplicity to Westminster with a paper in our hand as if we were distressed women that had some supplication to put up to the judges or some bill of information to deliver to our lawyers when, God wot, we shuffle in for a bung as well as the best of you all, yea, as yourself, Laurence, though you be called king of cutpurses, for though they smoke you, they will hardly mistrust us. And suppose our stomach stand against it to foist, yet who can better play the stale or the shadow than we, for in a thrust or throng if we shove hard, who is he that will not favour a woman, and in giving place to us, give you free passage for his purse? Again, in the market, when every wife hath almost her hand on her bung, and that they cry: *Beware the cutpurse and cony-catchers*, then I as fast as the best, with my handbasket as mannerly as if I were to buy great store of butter and eggs for provision of my house, do exclaim against them with my hand on my purse, and say the world is bad when a woman cannot walk safely to market for fear of these villainous cutpurses, whenas the first bung I come to, I either nip or foist, or else stale another while he hath stroken, dispatched, and gone. Now, I pray you, gentle sir, wherein are we inferior to you in foisting?

And yet this is nothing to the purpose, for it is one of our most simplest shifts. But yet I pray you, what think you when a farmer, gentleman or citizen come to the term, perhaps he is wary of his purse, and watch him never so warily, yet he will never be brought to the blow, is it not possible for us to pinch him ere he pass? He that is most chary of his crowns abroad, and will cry: *Ware the cony-catchers*, will not be afraid to drink a pint of wine with a pretty wench, and perhaps go to a trugging-house to ferry [sic for 'ferret?'] out one for his purpose. Then with what cunning we can feed the simple fop, with what fair words, sweet kisses, feigned sighs, as if at that instant we fell in love with him that we never saw before. If we meet him in an evening in the street, if the farmer or other whatsoever be not so forward as to motion some courtesy to us, we straight insinuate into his company, and claim acquaintance of him by some means or other, and if his mind be set for lust, and the devil drive him on to match himself with some dishonest wanton, then let him look to his purse, for if he do but kiss me in the street I'll have his purse for a farewell, although he never commit any other act at all. I speak not this only by myself,

Laurence, for there be a hundred in London more cunning than myself in this kind of cony-catching.

But if he come into a house, then let our trade alone to verse upon him, for first we feign ourselves hungry for the benefit of the house, although our bellies were never so full, and no doubt the good pander or bawd, she comes forth like a sober matron and sets store of cates on the table, and then I fall aboard on them, and though I can eat little, yet I make havoc of all, and let him be sure every dish is well sauced, for he shall pay for a pippin pie that cost in the market four pence, at one of the trugging-houses 18 pence. Thus, what is dainty if it be not dear bought? And yet he must come off for crowns besides, and when I see him draw to his purse, I note the putting up of it well, and ere we part, that [sic for 'the'?] world goes hard if I foist him not of all that he hath. And then suppose the worst, that he miss it, am I so simply acquainted or badly provided that I have not a friend which with a few terrible oaths, and countenance set as if he were the proudest soldado that ever bare arms against Don John of Austria, will face him quite out of his money and make him walk like a woodcock homeward by Weeping Cross, and so buy repentance with all the crowns in his purse? How say you to this, Laurence, whether are women foists inferior to you in ordinary cozenage or no?

*Laurence.* Excellently well reasoned, Nan. Thou hast told me wonders. But wench, though you be wily and strike often, your blows are not so big as ours.

*Nan.* Oh, but note the subject of our disputation, and that is this, which are more subtle and dangerous to the commonwealth, and to that I argue.

*Laurence.* Aye, and beshrew me but you reason quaintly, yet will I prove your wits are not so ripe as ours, nor so ready to reach into the subtilties of kind cozenage, and though you appropriate to yourself the excellency of cony-catching, and that you do it with more art than we men do because of your painted flatteries and sugared words that you flourish rhetorically like nets to catch fools, yet will I manifest with a merry instance a feat done by a foist that exceeded any that ever was done by any mad wench in England.

A pleasant tale of a country farmer that took it in scorn to have his purse cut or drawn from him, and how a foist served him

It was told me for a truth that not long since here in London there lay a country farmer with divers of his neighbours about law matters, amongst whom, one of them going to Westminster Hall, was by a foist stripped of all the pence in his purse, and coming home made great complaint of his misfortune. Some lamented his loss and others exclaimed against the cutpurses, but this farmer, he laughed loudly at the matter, and said such fools as could not keep their purses no surer were well served. *And for my part, quoth he, I so much scorn the cutpurses that I would thank him heartily that would take pains to foist mine. Well, says his neighbour, then you may thank me, sith my harms learns you to beware, but if it be true that many things fall out between the cup and the lip, you know*

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*not what hands fortune may light in your own lap. Tush, quoth the farmer, here's forty pounds in this purse in gold; the proudest cutpurse in England win and wear it.*

As thus he boasted, there stood a subtile foist by and heard all, smiling to himself at the folly of the proud farmer, and vowed to have his purse or venture his neck for it, and so went home and bewrayed it to a crew of his companions, who taking it in dudgeon that they should be put down by a peasant, met either at Laurence Pickering's or at Lambeth (let the Blackamoor take heed I name him not, lest an honourable neighbour of his frown at it), but wheresoever they met, they held a convocation, and both consulted and concluded all by a general consent to bend all their wits to be possessors of this farmer's bung, and for the execution of this their vow they haunted about the inn where he lay, and dogged him into divers places, both to Westminster Hall and other places, and yet could never light upon it, he was so watchful, and smoked them so narrowly that all their travail was in vain.

At last one of them fled to a more cunning policy, and went and learned the man's name and where he dwelt, and then hied him to the Counter and entered an action against him of trespass, damages two hundred pounds. When he had thus done, he feed the sergeants, and carried them down with him to the man's lodging, wishing them not to arrest him till he commanded them. Well, agreed they were, and down to the farmer's lodging they came, where were a crew of foists whom he had made privy to the end of his practice stood waiting, but he took no knowledge at all of them, but walked up and down. The farmer came out, and went to Paul's. The cutpurse bade stay, and would not yet suffer the officers to meddle with him till he came into the west end of Paul's Churchyard, and there he willed them to do their office, and they stepping to the farmer, arrested him. The farmer, amazed, being amongst his neighbours, asked the sergeant at whose suit he was troubled. *At whose suit soever it be*, said one of the cutpurses that stood by, *you are wronged, honest man, for he hath arrested you here in a place of privilege, where the sheriffs nor the officers have nothing to do with you, and therefore you are unwise if you obey him.* *Tush*, says another cutpurse, *though the man were so simple of himself, yet shall he not offer the church so much wrong as by yielding to the mace to imbolish Paul's liberty, and therefore I will take his part*, and with that he drew his sword. Another took the man and haled him away. The officer, he stook [=stuck] hard to him, and said he was his true prisoner, and cried: *Clubs!* The prentices arose, and there was a great hurly-burly, for they took the officer's part, so that the poor farmer was mightily turmoiled amongst them, and almost haled in pieces. Whilst thus the strife was, one of the foists had taken his purse away and was gone, and the officer carried the man away to a tavern, for he swore he knew no such man, nor any man that he was indebted to.

As then they sat drinking of a quart of wine, the foist that had caused him to be arrested sent a note by a porter to the officer that he should release the farmer, for he had mistaken the man, which note the officer showed him and bade him pay his fees and go his ways. The poor countryman was content with that, and put his hand in his pocket to feel for his purse and, God wot, there was none, which made his heart far more cold than the arrest did, and with that, fetching a great sigh, he said: *Alas, masters, I am undone; my purse in this fray is taken out of my pocket, and ten pounds in gold in it besides white money.*



*Indeed*, said the sergeant, *commonly in such brawls the cutpurses be busy, and I pray God the quarrel was not made upon purpose by the pickpockets.* Well, says his neighbour, *who shall smile at you now? The other day when I lost my purse you laughed at me.* The farmer brook[ed] all, and sat malcontent, and borrowed money of his neighbours to pay the sergeant, and had a learning, I believe, ever [sic for 'never'] after to brave the cutpurse.

How say you to this, Mistress Nan? Was it not well done? What choice-witted wench of your faculty or she-foist hath ever done the like? Tush, Nan, if we begin once to apply our wits, all your inventions are follies towards ours.

*Nan.* You say [-good], Goodman Lawrence, as though your subtilties were sudden as women's are. Come but to the old proverb, and I put you down: *'Tis as hard to find a hare without a meuse as a woman without scuse*, and that wit that can devise a cunning lie can plot the intent of deep villainies. I grant this fetch of the foist was petty, but nothing in respect of that we wantons can compass, and therefore to quit your tale with another, hear what a mad wench of my profession did alate to one of your faculty.

#### A passing pleasant tale how a whore cony-catched a foist

There came out of the country a foist to try his experience here in Westminster Hall, and strook a hand or two, but the devil a snap he would give to our citizen foists, but wrought warily, and could not be fetched off by no means, and yet it was known he had some twenty pounds about him, but he had planted it so cunningly in his doublet that it was sure enough for finding. Although the city foists laid all the plots they could, as well by discovering him to the jailers as other ways, yet he was so politic that they could not verse upon him by any means, which grieved them so that one day at a dinner they held a council amongst themselves how to cozen him, but in vain, till at last a good wench that sat by undertook it, so they would swear to let her have all that he had. They confirmed it solemnly, and she put it in practice thus. She subtilly insinuated herself into this foist's company, who seeing her a pretty wench, began after twice meeting to wax familiar with her and to question about a night's lodging. After a little nice loving & bidding, she was content for her supper and what else he would of courtesy bestow upon her, for she held it scorn, she said, to set a salary price on her body. The foist was glad of this, and yet he would not trust her, so that he put no more but ten shillings in his pocket, but he had above twenty pounds twilted in his doublet.

Well, to be short, suppertime came, and thither comes my gentle foist, who making good cheer, was so eager of his game that he would straight to bed by the leave of dame bawd, who had her fee too, and there he lay till about midnight, when three or four old hacksters whom she had provided upon purpose came to the door and rapped lustily. *Who is there?* says the bawd, looking out of the window. *Marry*, say they, *such a justice*, and named one about the city that is a mortal enemy to cutpurses, *who is come to search your house for a Jesuit and other suspected persons.* *Alas, sir*, says she, *I have none here.* Well, quoth they, *ope the door.* *I will*, says she, and with that she came into the foist's

chamber, who heard all this, and was afraid it was some search for him, so that he desired the bawd to help him that he might not be seen. *Why, then, quoth she, step into this closet.* He whipped in hastily, and never remembered his clothes. She locked him in safe, and then let in the crew of rake-hells, who making as though they searched every chamber, came at last into that where his leman lay, and asked her what she was. She, as if she had been afraid, desired their Worships to be good to her, she was a poor country maid come up to the term. *And who is that, quoth they, that was in bed with you? None, forsooth, says she. No, says one, that is a lie; here is the print of two, and besides, wheresoever the fox is, here is his skin, for this is his doublet and hose.* Then down she falls upon her knees and says indeed it was her husband. *Your husband? quoth they. Nay, that cannot be so, minion, for why then would you have denied him at the first?*

With that, one of them turned to the bawd and did question with her what he was, and where he was. *Truly, sir, says she, they came to my house and said they were man and wife, and for my part I know them for no other. And he, being afraid, is indeed, to confess the troth, shut up in the closet. No doubt, if it please your Worships, says one rake-hell, I warrant you he is some notable cutpurse or pickpocket that is afraid to show his face. Come and open the closet, and let us look on him. Nay, sir, says she, not for tonight; I beseech your Worship, carry no man out of my house. I will give my word he shall be forthcoming tomorrow morning. Your word, dame bawd? says one. 'Tis not worth a straw. You, housewife, that says ye are his wife, ye shall go with us, and for him, that we may be sure he may not start, I'll take his doublet, hose and cloak, and tomorrow I'll send them to him by one of my men. Were there a thousand pounds in them, there shall not be a penny diminished.* The whore kneeled down on her knees and feigned to cry pitifully, and desired the justice, which was one of her companions, not to carry her to prison. *Yes, housewife, quoth he, your mate and you shall not tarry together in one house that you may make your tales all one, and therefore bring her away, and after [sic for 'as for?'] ye, dame bawd, see you lend him no other clothes, for I will send his in the morning betimes, and come you with him to answer for lodging him. I will, sir, says she. And so away goes the wench & her companions laughing, and left the bawd and the foist. As soon as the bawd thought good, she unlocked the closet, and cursed the time that ever they came in her house. Now, quoth she, here will be a fair ado. How will you answer for yourself? I fear me I shall be in danger of the cart. Well, quoth he, to be short, I would not for forty pounds come afore the justice. Marry, no more would I, quoth she. Let me shift if you were conveyed hence, but I have not a rag of man's apparel in the house. Why, quoth he, seeing it is early morning, lend me a blanket to put about me, and I will scape to a friend's house of mine. Then leave me a pawn, quoth the bawd. Alas, I have none, says he, but this ring on my finger. Why, that, quoth she, or tarry while the justice comes. So he gave it her, took the blanket, and went his ways, whither I know not, but to some friend's house of his. Thus was this wily foist by the wit of a subtle wench cunningly stripped of all that he had, and turned to grass to get more fat.*

*Nan.* How say you to this device, Laurence? Was it not excellent? What think you of a woman's wit if it can work such wonders?

*Laurence.* Marry, I think my mother was wiser than all the honest women of the parish besides.

*Nan.* Why then belike she was of our faculty, and a matron of my profession, nimble of her hands, quick of tongue, and light of her tail. I should have put in sir reverence, but a foul word is good enough for a filthy knave.

*Laurence.* I am glad you are so pleasant, Nan; you were not so merry when you went to Dunstable. But indeed I must needs confess that women foists, if they be careful in their trades, are, though not so common, yet more dangerous than men foists. Women have quick wits, as they have short heels, and they can get with pleasure what we fish for with danger. But now giving you the bucklers at this weapon, let me have a blow with you at another.

*Nan.* But before you induce any more arguments, by your leave in a little by-talk, you know, Laurence, that though you can foist, nip, prig, lift, curb and use the black art, yet you cannot crossbite without the help of a woman, which crossbiting now-a-days is grown to a marvellous profitable exercise, for some cowardly knaves, that for fear of the gallows leave nipping and foisting, become crossbites, knowing there is no danger therein but a little punishment, at the most the pillory, and that is saved with a little *unguatum* [*sic for 'unguentum'*] *aureum*. As for example, Jack Rhoades is now a reformed man; whatsoever he hath been in his youth, now in his latter days he is grown a corrector of vice, for whomsoever he takes suspicious with his wife, I warrant you he sets a sure fine on head, though he hath nothing for his money but a bare kiss, and in this art we poor wenches are your surest props and stay. If you will not believe me, ask poor A.B. in Turnmill Street what a saucy signor there is, whose purblind eyes can scarcely discern a louse from a flea and yet he hath such insight into the mystical trade of crossbiting that he can furnish his board with a hundred pounds worth of plate. I doubt the sand-eyed ass will kick like a Western pug if I rub him on the gall, but 'tis no matter if he find himself touched and stir; although he boasts of the chief of the clergy's favour, yet I'll so set his name out that the boys at Smithfield bars shall chalk him on the back for a crossbite. Tush, you men are fops in fetching novices over the coals.

Hearken to me, Laurence; I'll tell thee a wonder. Not far from Hogsdon [=Hoxton], perhaps it was there, and if you think I lie, ask Master Richard Chot, and Master Richard Strong, two honest gentlemen that can witness as well as I this proof of a woman's wit. There dwelt here sometimes a good ancient matron that had a fair wench to her daughter, as young and tender as a morrow-mass priest's leman. Her she set out to sale in her youth, and drew on sundry to be suitors to her daughter, some woers and some speeders, yet none married her, but of her beauty they made a profit, and inveigled all till they had spent upon her what they had, and then, forsooth, she and her young pigeon turn them out of doors like prodigal children. She was acquainted with Dutch & French, Italian and Spaniard, as well as English, & at last, as so often the pitcher goes to the brook that it comes broken home, my fair daughter was hit on the master-vein, and gotten with child.

Now the mother, to colour this matter to save her daughter's marriage, begins to wear a cushion under her own kirtle, and to feign herself with child, but let her daughter pass as though she ailed nothing. When the forty weeks were come, & that my young mistress must needs cry out, forsooth, this old B. had gotten housewives answerable to herself, and so brought her daughter to bed, and let her go up and down the house, and the old crone lay in childbed as though she had been delivered, and said the child was hers, and so saved her daughter's scape. Was not this a witty wonder, Master Laurence, wrought by an old witch, to have a child in her age, and make a young whore seem an honest virgin? Tush, this is little to the purpose if I should recite all, how many she had cozened under the pretence of marriage. Well, poor plain Signor See [=C.?], you were not stiff enough for her, although it cost you many crowns and the loss of your service. I'll say no more; perhaps she will amend her manners. Ah, Laurence, how like you of this gear? In crossbiting we put you down. God wot, it is little looked to in and about London, and yet I may say to thee many a good citizen is crossbit in the year by odd walkers abroad. I heard some named the other day as I was drinking at the Swan in Lambeth Marsh. But let them alone; 'tis a foul bird that defiles the own nest, and it were a shame for me to speak against any good wenches or boon companions that by their wits can wrest money from a churl. I fear me R.G. will name them too soon in his black book, a pestilence on him. They say he hath there set down my husband's pedigree, and yours too, Laurence. If he do it, I fear me your brother-in-law Bull is like to be troubled with you both.

*Laurence.* I know not what to say to him, Nan; hath plagued me already. I hope he hath done with me, and yet I heard say he would have about [sic for 'a bout'] at my nine boales [sic?]. But leaving him as an enemy of our trade, again to our disputation. I cannot deny, Nan, but you have set down strange precedents of women's prejudicial wits, but yet though you be crossbites, foist and nips, yet you are not good lifts, which is a great help to our faculty, to filch a bolt of satin or velvet.

*Nan.* Stay thee [sic for 'there'?] a word; I thought thou hadst spoken of R.B. of Long Lane and his wife. Take heed; they be parlous folks, and greatly acquainted with keepers and jailers; therefore meddle not you with them, for I hear say R.G. hath sworn, in despite of the brasill [=Brazil?] staff, to tell such a foul tale of him in his black book that it will cost him a dangerous joint.

*Laurence.* Nan, Nan, let R.G. beware, for had not an ill fortune fallen to one of R.B. his friends, he could take little harm.

*Nan.* Who is that, Laurence?

*Laurence.* I will not name him.

*Nan.* Why then, I prithee, what misfortune befell him?

*Laurence.* Marry, Nan, he was strangely washed alate by a French barber, and had all the hair of his face miraculously shaved off by the scythe of God's vengeance, insomuch that some said he had that he had not, but as hap was, howsoever his hair fell off it stood him

in some stead when the brawl was alate, for if he had not cast off his beard, and so being unknown, it had cost him some knocks, but it fell out to the best.

*Nan.* The more hard fortune that he had such ill hap, but hasty journeys breed dangerous sweats, and the physicians call it the ale Peria [sic for 'alopecia'?). Yet omitting all this, again to where you left.

*Laurence.* You have almost brought me out of my matter, but I was talking about the lift, commending what a good quality it was, and how hurtful it was, seeing we practise it in mercers' shops, with haberdashers of small wares, haberdashers of hats and caps, amongst merchant-tailors for hose and doublets, and in such places getting much gains by lifting when there is no good purchase abroad for foisting.

*Nan.* Suppose you are good at the lift, who be more cunning that we women in that we are more trusted, for they little suspect us, and we have as close conveyance as you men. Though you have cloaks, we have skirts of gowns, handbaskets, and the crowns of our hats, our placards, and for a need, false bags under our smocks wherein we can convey more closely than you.

*Laurence.* I know not where to touch you, you are so witty in your answers and have so many starting-holes, but let me be pleasant with you a little. What say you to prigging or horse-stealing? I hope you never had experience in that faculty.

*Nan.* Alas, simple sot, yes, and more shift to shun the gallows than you.

*Laurence.* Why, 'tis impossible.

*Nan.* In faith, sir, no, and for proof, I will put you down with a story of a mad merry little dapper fine wench who at Spilsby fair had three horses of her own or another's [sic for 'another'] man's to sell. As she, her husband and another good-fellow walked them up and down the fair, the owner came and apprehended them all, and clapped them in prison. The jailer not keeping them close prisoners, but letting them lie all in a chamber, by her wit she so instructed them in a formal tale that she saved all their lives thus. Being brought the next morrow after their apprehension before the justices, they examined the men how they came by those horses, and they confessed they met her with them, but where she had them they knew not. Then was my pretty peat brought in, who being a handsome trull, blushed as if she had been full of grace, and being demanded where she had the horses, made this answer: *May it please your Worships, this man, being my husband, playing the unthrift as many more have done was absent from me for a quarter of a year, which grieved me not a little, insomuch that desirous to see him, and having intelligence he would be at Spilsby fair, I went thither even for pure love of him on foot, and being within some ten miles of the town, I waxed passing weary, and rested me often, and grew very faint. At last there came riding by me a serving-man in a blue coat with three horses tied one at another's tail, which he led, as I guessed, to sell at the fair. The serving-man, seeing me so tired, took pity on me, and asked me if I would ride on one of his empty horses, for his own would not bear double. I thanked him heartily, and at the*

*next hill got up, and rode till we came to a town within three miles of Spilsby, where the serving-man alighted at a house, and bade me ride on afore, and he would presently overtake me. Well, forward I rode half a mile, and looking behind me could see nobody, so being alone, my heart began to rise, and I to think on my husband. As I had rid a little farther, looking down a lane I saw two men coming lustily up as if they were weary, & marking them earnestly, I saw one of them was my husband, which made my heart as light as before it was sad, so staying for them, after a little unkind greeting betwixt us, for I chid him for his unthriftiness, he asked me where I had the horse[s], and I told him how courteously the serving-man had used me. Why then, says he, stay for him. Nay, quoth I, let's ride on, and get you two up on the empty horses, for he will overtake us ere we come at the town; he rides on a stout lusty young gelding. So forward we went, and looked often behind us, but our serving-man came not. At last we coming to Spilsby alighted & broke our fast and tied our horses at the door that if he passed by, seeing them, he might call in. After we had broke our fast, thinking he had gone some other way, we went into the horse-fair and there walked our horses up and down to meet with the serving-man, not for the intent to sell them. Now, may it please your Worship, whether he had stolen the horses from this honest man or no, I know not, but alas, simply I brought them to the horse-fair to let him that delivered me them have them again, for I hope your Worships doth imagine, if I had stolen them as it is suspected, I would never have brought them into so public a place to sell. Yet if the law be any way dangerous for the foolish deed, because I know not the serving-man it is, I must bide the punishment, and as guiltless as any here. And so, making a low curtsy, she ended, the justice holding up his hand and wondering at the woman's wit that had cleared her husband and his friend, and saved herself without compass of law. How like you of this, Laurence? Cannot we wenches prig well?*

*Laurence.* By God, Nan, I think I shall be fain to give you the bucklers.

*Nan.* Alas, good Laurence, thou art no logician. Thou canst not reason for thyself, nor hast no witty arguments to draw me to an exigent, and therefore give me leave at large to reason for this supper. Remember the subject of our disputation is this positive question, whether whores or thieves are most prejudicial to the commonwealth. Alas, you poor thieves do only steal and purloin from men, and the harm you do is to imbolish men's goods and bring them to poverty. This is the only end of men's thievery, and the greatest prejudice that grows from robbing or filching. So much do we by our theft, and more by our lechery, for what is the end of whoredom but consuming of goods and beggary? And besides perpetual infamy, we bring young youths to ruin and utter destruction. I pray you, Laurence, whether had a merchant's son having wealthy parents better light upon a whore than a cutpurse, the one only taking his money, the other bringing him to utter confusion, for if the foist light upon him, or the cony-catcher, he loseth at the most some hundred pounds, but if he fall into the company of a whore, she flatters him, she inveigles him, she bewitcheth him, that he spareth neither goods nor lands to content her, that is only in love with his coin. If he be married, he forsakes his wife, leaves his children, despiseth his friends, only to satisfy his lust with the love of a base whore, who, when he hath spent all upon her, and he brought to beggary, beateth him out like the prodigal child, and for a small reward brings him, if to the fairest end, to beg; if to the second, to

the gallows; or at the last and worst, to the pox or as prejudicial diseases. I pray you, Laurence, when any of you come to your confession at Tyburn, what is your last sermon that you make: that you were brought to that wicked and shameful end by following of harlots, for to that end do you steal to maintain whores, and to content their bad humours. Oh, Laurence, enter into your own thoughts, and think what the fair words of a wanton will do, what the smiles of a strumpet will drive a man to act, into what jeopardy a man will thrust himself for her that he loves, although for his sweet villainy he be brought to loathsome leprosy. Tush, Laurence, they say the pox came from Naples, some from Spain, some from France, but wheresoever it first grew, it is so surely now rooted in England that, by St. Sithe, it may better be called a *morbus Anglicus* than *Gallicus*, and I hope you will grant all these French favours grew from whores. Besides, in my high loving or rather creeping, I mean where men and women do rob together, there always the woman is most bloody, for she always urgeth unto death, and though the men would only satisfy themselves with the party's coin, yet she endeth her theft in blood, murdering parties so deeply as she is malicious. I hope, gentle Laurence, you cannot contradict these reasons, they be so openly manifestly probable.

For mine own part, I hope you do not imagine but I have had some friends besides poor George, my husband. Alas, he knows it, and is content like an honest simple suffragan to be corral with a number of other good companions, and I have made many a goodman, I mean a man that hath a household, for the love of me to go home and beat his poor wife, when, God wot, I mock him for the money he spent, and he had nothing for his pence but the waste beleavings of others' beastly labours. Laurence, Laurence, if concubines could inveigle Solomon, if Delilah could betray Sampson, then wonder not if we, more nice in our wickedness than a thousand such Delilahs, can seduce poor young novices to their utter destructions. Search the jails; there you shall hear complaints of whores. Look into the spittles and hospitals; there you shall see men diseased of the French marbles giving instruction to others that are said to beware of whores. Be an auditor or ear-witness at the death of any thief, and his last testament is: *Take heed of a whore*. I dare scarce speak of Bridewell because my shoulders tremble at the name of it, I have so often deserved it, yet look but in there and you shall hear poor men with their hands in their pigeon-holes cry: *Oh, fie upon whores*, when Fowler gives them the terrible lash. Examine beggars that lie lame by the highway, and they say they came to that misery by whores. Some threadbare citizens that from merchants and other good trades grow to be base informers and knights of the post cry out when they dine with Duke Humphrey: *O, what wickedness comes from whores*. Prentices that runs from their masters cries out upon whores. Tush, Laurence, what enormities proceeds more in the commonwealth than from whoredom?

But sith 'tis almost supper-time, and mirth is the friend to digestion, I mean a little to be pleasant. I pray you, how many bad profits again grows from whores? Bridewell would have very few tenants, the hospital would want patients and the surgeons much work, the apothecaries would have surfling water and potato-roots lie dead on their hands, the painters could not dispatch and make away their vermilion if tallow-faced whores used it not for their cheeks. How should Sir John's Broad's men do if we were not? Why Laurence, the Galley would be moored and the Blue Boar so lean that he would not be man's meat if we of the trade were not to supply his wants. Do you think in conscience

the Peacock could burnish his fair tail were it not the whore of Babylon and suchlike makes him lusty with crowns? No, no, though the Talbot hath bitten some at the game, yet new fresh huntsmen shake the she-crew out of the couples. What should I say more, Laurence? The suburbs should have a great miss of us, and Shordish [=Shoreditch] would complain to Dame Anne a' Clare if we of the sisterhood should not uphold her jollity. Who is that, Laurence, comes in to hear our talk?

O 'tis, the boy, Nan, that tells us supper is ready.

Why then, Laurence, what say you to me? Have I not proved that in foisting and nipping we excel you, that there is none so great inconvenience in the commonwealth as grows from whores, first for the corrupting of youth, infecting of age, for breeding of brawls whereof ensues murder, insomuch that the ruin of many men comes from us, and the fall of many youths of good hope if they were not seduced by us, do proclaim at Tyburn that we be the means of their misery. You men-thieves touch the body and wealth, but we ruin the soul, and endanger that which is more precious than the world's treasure. You make work only for the gallows, we both for the gallows and the devil, aye, and for the surgeon too, that some lives like loathsome lazars, and die with the French marbles. Whereupon I conclude that I have won the supper.

*Laurence.* I confess it, Nan, for thou hast told me such wondrous villainies as I thought never could have been in women, I mean of your profession. Why, you are crocodiles when you weep, basilisks when you smile, serpents when you devise, and devils' chiefest brokers to bring the world to destruction. And so, Nan, let's sit down to our meat and be merry.

Thus, countrymen, you have heard the disputation between these two cozening companions wherein I have shaken out the notable villainy of whores, although Mistress Nan, this good oratress, hath sworn to wear a long Hamburg knife to stab me, and all the crew have protested my death. And to prove they meant good earnest, they beleaguered me about in the Saint John's Head within Ludgate. Being at supper, there were some fourteen or fifteen of them met, and thought to have made that the fatal night of my overthrow but that the courteous citizens and apprentices took my part, and so two or three of them were carried to the Counter, although a gentleman in my company was sore hurt. I cannot deny but they begin to waste away about London, and Tyburn (since the setting out of my book) hath eaten up many of them, and I will plague them to the extremity. Let them do what they dare with their bilbo blades; I fear them not. And to give them their last adieu, look shortly, countrymen, for a pamphlet against them called *The Black Book* containing four new laws never spoken of yet: the creeping law, of petty thieves that rob about the suburbs; the limiting law, discouraging the orders of such as follow judges in their circuits and go about from fair to fair; the jugging law, wherein I will set out the disorders at nine-holes and rifling, how they are only for the benefit of the cutpurses; the stripping law, wherein I will lay open the lewd abuses of sundry jailers in England. Beside, you shall see there what houses there be about the suburbs and town's end that are receivers of cutpurses' stolen goods, lifts, and suchlike. And lastly, look for a bead-roll or catalogue of all the names of the foists, nips, lifts and priggers in and about



London, and although some say I dare not do it, yet I will shortly set it abroad, and whosoever I name or touch, if he think himself grieved I will answer him before the honourable Privy Council.

#### The conversion of an English courtesan

Sith to discover my parentage would double the grief of my living parents and revive in them the memory of my great amiss, and that my untoward fall would be a dishonour to the house from whence I came; sith to manifest ye place of my birth would be a blemish (through my beastly life so badly misled) to the shire were I was born; sith to discourse my name might be holden a blot in my kindred's brow, to have a sinew [sic for 'scion'?] in their stock of so little grace, I will conceal my parents, kindred and country, and shroud my name with silence lest envy might taunt others for my wantonness. Know therefore I was born about threescore miles from London of honest and wealthy parents who had many children, but I their only daughter, and therefore the jewel wherein they most delighted, and more, the youngest of all, and therefore the more favoured, for being gotten in the waning of my parents' age they doted on me above the rest, and so set their hearts the more on fire. I was the fairest of all, and yet not more beautiful that I was witty, insomuch that being a pretty parrot, I had such quaint conceits and witty words in my mouth that the neighbours said I was too soon wise to be long old. Would to God either the proverb had been authentical or their sayings prophecies; then had I by death in my nonage buried many blemishes that my riper years brought me to. For the extreme love of my parents was the very efficient cause of my follies, resembling herein the nature of the ape, that ever killeth that young one which he loveth most with embracing it too fervently. So my father and mother, but she most of all, although he too much, so cockered me up in my wantonness that my wit grew to the worst, and I waxed upwards with the ill weeds. Whatsoever I did, be it never so bad, might not be found fault withal. My father would smile at it and say 'twas but the trick of a child, and my mother allowed of my unhappy parts, alluding to this profane and old proverb: *An untoward girl makes a good woman.*

But now I find in sparing the rod they hate the child, that over-kind fathers make unruly daughters. Had they bent the wand while it had been green, it would have been pliant, but I, ill-grown in my years, am almost remediless. The hawk that is most perfect for the flight [-and will] seldom proveth haggard, and children that are virtuously nurtured in youth will be honestly matured in age. Fie upon such as say: *Young saints, old devils*; it is no doubt a devilish and damnable saying, for what is not bent in the cradle will hardly be bowed in the saddle. Myself am an instance, who after I grew to be six years old was set to school, where I profited so much that I write and read excellently well, played upon the virginals, lute & cithern, and could sing prick-song at the first sight, insomuch as by that time I was twelve years old, I was holden for the most fair and best qualited young girl in all that country, but with this bewailed of my well-wishers in that my parents suffered me to be so wanton. But they so tenderly affected me and were so blinded with my excellent qualities that they had no insight into my ensuing follies. For I, growing to be thirteen year old, feeling the reins of liberty loose on mine own neck, began with the

wanton heifer to aim at mine own will, and to measure content by the sweetness of mine own thought, insomuch that, pride creeping on, I began to prank myself with the proudest, and to hold it in disdain that any in the parish should exceed me in bravery. As my apparel was costly, so I grew to be licentious, and to delight to be looked on, so that I haunted and frequented all feasts and weddings & other places of merry meetings, where as I was gazed on of many, so I spared no glances to surviue all with a curious eye-favour. I observed Ovid's rule right: *Spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur vt ipsi* [=They come to watch; they come to be watched themselves]. I went to see and be seen, and decked myself in the highest degree of bravery, holding it a glory when I was waited on with many eyes to make censure of my birth. Beside, I was an ordinary dancer, and grew in that quality so famous that I was noted as the chiefest thereat in all the country; yea, and to soothe me up in these follies, my parents took a pride in my dancing, which afterward proved my overthrow and their heart-breaking.

Thus, as an unbridled colt, I carelessly led forth my youth and wantonly spent the flower of my years, holding such maidens as were modest fools, and such as were not as wilfully wanton as myself puppies, ill brought up and without manners. Growing on in years, as tide nor time tarrieth no man, I began to wax passion-proud, and think her not worthy to live that was not a little in love, that as divers young men began to favour me for my beauty, so I began to censure of some of them partially, and to delight in the multitude of many wooers, being ready to fall from the tree before I was come to the perfection of a blossom, which an uncle of mine seeing, who was my mother's brother, as careful of my welfare as nigh to me in kin, finding fit opportunity to talk with me, gave me this wholesome exhortation.

#### A watchword to wanton maidens

Cousin, I see the fairest hawk hath oftentimes the sickest feathers; that ye hottest day hath the most sharpest thunders; the brightest sun, the most sudden shower; & the youngest virgins, the most dangerous fortunes. I speak as a kinsman, and wish as a friend. The blossom of a maiden's youth (such as yourself) hath attending upon it many frosts to nip it and many cares to consume it, so that if it be not carefully looked unto it will perish before it come to any perfection. A virgin's honour consisteth not only in the gifts of nature, as to be fair and beautiful, though they be favours that grace maidens much, for as they be glistering, so they be momentary, ready to be worn with every winter's blast, and parched with every summer's sun. There is no face so fair but the least mole, the slenderest scar, the smallest brunt of sickness will quickly blemish. Beauty, cousin, as it flourisheth in youth, so it fadeth in age. It is but a folly that feedeth man's eye, a painting that nature lends for a time, and men allow on for a while, insomuch that such as only aim at your fair looks tie but their loves to an apprenticeship of beauty, which broken either with cares, misfortune or years, their destinies are at liberty, and they begin to loathe you, and like of others.

*Forma bonum fragile est quantumque accedit ad annos*

*Fit minor et spacio carpitur ipsa suo* [=Beauty is a fleeting boon; it fades with the passing years, and the longer it lives, the more surely it dies].

Then, cousin, stand not too much on such a slippery glory that is as brittle as glass; be not proud of beauty's painting, that hatched by time, perisheth in short time, neither are women the more admirable of wise men for their gay apparel, though fools are fed with guards, for a woman's ornaments is the excellency of her virtues, and her inward good qualities are of far more worth than her outward braveries. Embroidered hair, bracelets, silks, rich attire and such trash do rather bring the name of a young maid in question than add to her fame any title of honour. The vestal virgins were not revered of the senators for their curious clothing, but for their chastity. Cornelia was not famozed [=famoused] for ornaments of gold, but for excellent virtues. Superfluity in apparel showeth rather lightness of mind than it importeth any other inward good quality, and men judge of maidens' rareness by the modesty of their raiment, holding it rather garish than glorious to be tricked up in superfluous and exceeding braveries.

Neither, cousin, is it seemly for maids to jet abroad, or to frequent too much company, for she that is looked on by many cannot choose but be hardly spoken of by some, for report hath a blister on her tongue, and maidens' actions are narrowly measured. Therefore would not the ancient Romans suffer their daughters to go any further than their mothers' looks guided them. And therefore Diana is painted with a tortoise under her feet, meaning that a maid should not be a straggler, but like the snail, carry her house on her head, and keep at home at her work for to keep her name without blemish and her virtues from the slander of envy. A maid that hazards herself in much company may venture the freedom of her heart by the folly of her eye, for so long the pot goes to the water that it comes broken home, and such as look much must needs like at last. The fly dallies with a flame, but at length she burneth; flax and fire put together will kindle. A maid in company of young men shall be constrained to listen to the wanton allurements of many cunning speeches. If she hath not either with Ulysses tasted of moly, or stopped her ears warily, she may either be enticed with the sirens or enchanted by Circes [=Circe]. Youth is apt to yield to sweet persuasions, and therefore, cousin, think nothing more dangerous than to gad abroad.

Neither, cousin, do I allow this wanton dancing in young virgins; 'tis more commendation for them to moderate their manners than to measure their feet, and better to hear nothing than to listen unto unreverent music. Silence is a precious jewel, and nothing so much worth as a countenance full of chastity. Light behaviour is a sign of lewd thoughts, and men will say: *There goes a wanton* that will not want one, if a place and person were agreeable to her desires. If a maiden's honour be blemished or her honesty called in question she is half deflowered, and therefore had maidens need to be chary lest envy report them for unchaste. Cousin, I speak this generally, which if you apply particularly to yourself, you shall find in time my words were well said.

I gave him slender thanks, but with such a frump that he perceived how light I made of his counsel, which he perceiving, shook his head, and with tears in his eyes departed. But I, whom wanton desires had drawn in delight, still presumed in my former follies, and gave myself either to gad abroad, or else at home to read dissolute pamphlets which

bred in me many ill-affected wishes, so that I gave leave to love and lust to enter into the centre of my heart, where they harboured till they wrought my final and fatal prejudice.

Thus leading my life loosely, and being soothed up with the applause of my too kind and loving parents, I had many of every degree that made love unto me, as well for my beauty as for the hope of wealth that my father would bestow upon me. Sundry suitors, I had, and I allowed of all, although I particularly granted love to none, yielding them friendly favours, as being proud I had more wooers than any maid in the parish beside. Amongst the rest there was a wealthy farmer that wished me well, a man of some forty years of age, one too worthy for one of so little worth as myself, and him my father, mother and other friends would have had me match myself withal, but I, that had had the reins of liberty too long in mine own hands, refused him, and would not be ruled by their persuasions, and though my mother with tears entreated me to consider of mine own estate, & how well I sped if I wedded with him, yet carelessly I despised her counsel and flatly made answer that I would none of him, which though it pinched my parents at the quick, yet rather than they would displease me, they left me in mine own liberty to love. Many there were beside him, men's sons of no mean worth that were wooers unto me, but in vain; either my fortune or destiny drove me to a worse end, for I refused them all, and with the beetle, refusing to light on the sweetest flowers all day, nestled at night in a cow-shard.

It fortuned that as many sought to win me, so amongst the rest there was an odd companion that dwelt with a gentleman hard by, a fellow of small reputation and of no living, neither had he any excellent qualities but thrumming on the gittern, but of pleasant disposition he was, and could gawl [sic for 'bawl?'] out many quaint & ribaldrous jigs & songs, and so was favoured of the foolish sect [sic for 'sort?'] for his foppery. This shifting companion, suitable to myself in vanity, would oft-times be jesting with me, and I so long dallying with him that I began deeply (oh, let me blush at this confession) to fall in love with him, and so construed of all his actions that I consented to my own overthrow. For as smoke will hardly be concealed, so love will not be long smothered, but will bewray her own secrets, which was manifest in me, who in my sporting with him so bewrayed my affection that he, spying I favoured him, began to strike when the iron was hot and to take opportunity by the forehead, and one day finding me in a merry vein, began to question with me of love, which although at the first I slenderly denied him, yet at last I granted, so that not only I agreed to plight him my faith, but that night, meeting to have farther talk, I lasciviously consented that he cropped the flower of my virginity. When thus I was spoiled by such a base companion, I gave myself to content his humour and to satisfy the sweet of mine own wanton desires.

Oh, let me here breathe, and with tears bewail the beginning of my miseries, and to exclaim against the folly of my parents, who by too much favouring me in my vanity in my tender youth laid the first plot of my ensuing repentance. Had they with one correction chastised my wantonness and suppressed my foolish will with their grave advice, they had made me more virtuous and themselves less sorrowful. A father's frown is a bridle to the child, and a mother's check is a stay to the stubborn daughter. Oh, had

my parents in over-loving me not hated me, I had not at this time cause to complain. Oh, had my father regarded the saying of the wise man, I had not been thus woe-begone.

*If thy daughter be not shamefast, hold her straitly lest she abuse herself through over-much liberty.*

*Take heed of her that hath an unshamefast eye, & marvel not if she trespass against thee.*

*The daughter maketh the father to watch secretly, and the carefulness he hath for her taketh away his sleep in her virginity, lest she should be deflowered in her father's house.*

*If therefore thy daughter be unshamefast in her youth, keep her straitly, lest she cause thine enemies to laugh thee to scorn, and make thee a common talk in the city, and defame thee among the people, and bring thee to public shame.*

Had my parents with care considered of this holy counsel, and levelled my life by the loadstone of virtue, had they looked narrowly into the faults of my youth, and bent the tree while it was a wand, and taught the hound while he was a puppy, this blemish had never beforgone me, nor so great dishonour had not befallen them. Then by my example let all parents take heed, lest in loving their children too tenderly they subvert them utterly, lest in manuring the ground too much with the unskilful husbandman, it wax too fat and bring forth more weeds than flowers, lest cockering their children under their wings without correction they make them careless and bring them to destruction. As their nurture is in youth, so will their nature grow in age. If the palm-tree be suppressed while it is a scion, it will, contrary to nature, be crooked when it is a tree.

*Quo semel est imbuta recens seruibit odorentesta [sic for 'odorem testa'] diu [=The jar will long keep the fragrance of what it was once steeped in when new].*

If then virtue be to be engrafted in youth lest they prove obstinate in age, reform your children betimes both with correction and counsel; so shall you that are parents glory in the honour of their good endeavours.

But leaving this digression, again to the looseness of mine own life, who now having lost the glory of my youth, and suffered such a base slave to possess it which many men of worth had desired to enjoy, I waxed bold in sin & grew shameless, insomuch he could not desire so much as I did grant, whereupon, seeing he durst not reveal it to my father to demand me in marriage, he resolved to carry me away secretly, and therefore wished me to provide for myself and to furnish me every way both with money and apparel, hoping, as he said, that after we were departed, and my father saw we were married and that no means was to amend it, he would give his free consent and use us as kindly and deal with us as liberally as if we had matched with his goodwill. I, that was apt to any ill, agreed to this, and so wrought the matter that he carried me away into a strange place, and then using me awhile as his wife, when our money began to wax low, he resolved secretly to go into the country where my father dwelt to hear not only how my father took my departure but what hope we had of his ensuing favour. Although I was loath to be left

alone in a strange place, yet I was willing to hear from my friends, who no doubt conceived much heart-sorrow for my unhappy fortunes, so that I parted with a few tears, and enjoined him to make all the haste he might to return.

He being gone, as the eagles always resort where the carrion is, so the bruit being spread abroad of my beauty, and that at such an inn lay such a fair young gentlewoman, there resorted thither many brave young gentlemen and cutting companions that, tickled with lust, aimed at the possession of my favour, and by sundry means sought to have a sight of me, which I easily granted to all as a woman that counted it a glory to be wondered at by many men's eyes, insomuch that, coming amongst them, I set their hearts more and more on fire, that there rose divers brawls who should be most in my company. Being thus haunted by such a troop of lusty rufflers, I began to find mine own folly that had placed my first affection so loosely, and therefore began as deeply to loathe him that was departed as erst I liked him when he was present, vowing in myself though he had the spoil of my virginity yet never after should he triumph in the possession of my favour, and therefore began I to affection these new-come guests, and one above the rest, who was a [-a] brave young gentleman, and no less addicted unto me than I devoted unto him, for daily he courted me with amorous sonnets and curious proud letters, and sent me jewels, and all that I might grace him with the name of my servant. I returned him as loving lines at last, and so contented his lusting desire that secretly and unknown to all the rest I made him sundry nights my bedfellow, where I so bewitched him with sweet words that he began deeply to dote upon me, insomuch that selling some portion of land that he had, he put it into ready money, and providing horse and all things convenient, carried me secretly away, almost as far as the Bath.

This was my second choice, and my second shame. Thus I went forward in wickedness, and delighted in change, having left mine old love to look after some other mate more fit for her purpose. How he took my departure when he returned I little cared, for now I had my content, a gentleman, young, lusty and endued with good qualities, and one that loved me more tenderly than himself. Thus lived this new-entertained friend and I together unmarried, yet as man and wife, for awhile, so lovingly as was to his content and my credit, but as the tiger, though for awhile she hide her claws, yet at last she will reveal her cruelty, and as the agnus castus leaf, when it looks most dry, is the most full of moisture, so women's wantonness is not qualified by their wariness, nor do their chariness for a month warrant their chastity forever, which I proved true, for my supposed husband, being every way a man of worth, could not covertly hide himself in the country, though a stranger, but that he fell in acquaintance with many brave gentlemen whom he brought home to his lodging, not only to honour them with his liberal courtesy but also to see me, being proud of [sic for 'if?'] any man of worth applauded my beauty. Alas, poor gentleman, too much bewitched by the wiliness of a woman, had he deemed my heart to be a harbour for every new desire, or mine eye a suitor to every new face, he would not have been so fond as to have brought his companions into my company, but rather would have mewed me up as a hen, to have kept that several to himself by force which he could not retain by kindness. But the honest-minded novice little suspected my change, although I, God, wot, placed my delight in nothing more than the desire of new choice, which fell out thus.

Amongst the rest of the gentlemen that kept him company, there was one that was his most familiar, and he reposed more trust and confidence in him than in all the rest. This gentleman began to be deeply enamoured of me, and showed it by many signs which I easily perceived, and I, whose ear was pliant to every sweet word, and who so allowed of all that were beautiful, affected him no less, so that love prevailing above friendship, he broke the matter with me, and made not many suits in vain before he obtained his purpose, for he had what he wished, and I had what contented me. I will not confess that any of the rest had some seldom favours, but this gentleman was my second self, and I loved him more for the time at the heel than the other at the heart, so that although the other youth bare the charges, and was made Sir Pay-for-all, yet this new friend was he that was master of my affections, which kindness betwixt us was so unwisely cloaked that in short time it was manifest to all our familiars, which made my supposed husband to sigh, and others to smile, but he that was hit with the horn was pinched at the heart. Yet so extreme was the affection he bare to me that he had rather conceal his grief than any way make me discontent, so that he smothered his sorrow with patience and brooked the injury with silence till our loves grew so broad before that it was a wonder to the world.

Whereupon one day at dinner, I being very pleasant with his chosen friend and my choice lover, I know not how, but either by fortune or it may be some set match, there was by a gentleman there present a question popped in about women's passions and their mutability in affections, that the controversy was defended *pro* and *contra* which [sic for 'with'] arguments whether a woman might have a second friend or no. At last it was concluded that love and lordship brooks no fellowship, and therefore none so base-minded to bear a rival. Hereupon arose a question about friends that were put in trust, how it was a high point of treason for one to betray another, especially in love, insomuch that one gentleman at the board protested by a solemn oath that if any friend of his, made privy and favoured with the sight of his mistress whom he loved, whether it were his wife or no, should secretly seek to encroach into his room and offer him the dishonour to partake his love, he would not use any other revenge but at the next greeting stab him with his poignado, though he were condemned to death for the action. All this fitted for the humour of my supposed husband, and strook both me and my friend into a quandary, but I scornfully jested at it, whenas my husband, taking the ball before it fell to the ground, began to make a long discourse what faithless friends they were that would fail in love, especially where a resolved trust of the party beloved was committed unto them, and hereupon to make the matter more credulous, and to quip my folly and to taunt the baseness of his friend's mind that so he might with courtesy both warn us of our wantonness and reclaim us from ill, he promised to tell a pleasant story performed, as he said, not long since in England, and it was to this effect.

A pleasant discourse how a wise wanton by her husband's gentle warning became to be a modest matron

There was a gentleman (to give him his due), an esquire here in England, that was married to a young gentlewoman, fair and of a modest behaviour, virtuous in her looks

howsoever she was in her thoughts, and one that every way with her dutiful endeavour and outward apparance of honesty did breed her husband's content, insomuch that the gentleman so deeply affected her as he counted all those hours ill spent which he passed not away in her company, besotting so himself in the beauty of his wife that his only care was to have her every way delighted. Living thus pleasantly together, he had one special friend amongst the rest whom he so dearly affected as ever Damon did his Pythias, Pylades his Orestes, or Titus his Gysippus. He unfolded all his secrets in his bosom, and what passion he had in his mind that either joyed him or perplexed him, he revealed unto his friend & directed his actions according to the sequel of his counsels, so that they were two bodies and one soul. This gentleman, for all the inward favour shown him by his faithful friend, could not so withstand the force of fancy but he grew enamoured of his friend's wife, whom he courted with many sweet words and fair promises, charms that are able to enchant almost the chastest ears, and so subtilly couched his arguments, discovered such love in his eyes and such sorrow in his looks that despair seemed to sit in his face, and swore that if she granted not him *le don du merci*, the end of a lover's sighs, then would present his heart as a tragic sacrifice to the sight of his cruel mistress. The gentlewoman waxing pitiful, as women are kind-hearted and are loath gentlemen should die for love, after a few excuses let him dub her husband knight of the forked order, and so to satisfy his humour made forfeit of her own honour.

Thus these two lovers continued by a great space in such pleasures as unchaste wantons count their felicity, having continually sith [sic for 'fit'] opportunity to exercise their wicked purpose sith the gentleman himself did give them free liberty to love, neither suspecting his wife or suspecting his friend. At last, as such traitorous abuses will burst forth, it fell so out that a maid who had been an old servant in the house began to grow suspicious that there was too much familiarity between the mistress and her master's friend, and upon this watched them divers times so narrowly that at last she found them more private than either agreed with her master's honour or her own honesty, and thereupon revealed it one day unto her master. He, little credulous of the light behaviour of his wife, blamed the maid, and bade her take heed lest she sought to blemish her virtues with slander whom he loved more tenderly than his own life. The maid replied that she spake not of envy to him, but of mere love she bare unto him, and the rather that he might shadow such a fault in time and by some means prevent it, lest if others should note it as well as she, his wife's good name and his friend's should be called in question. At these wise words spoken by so base a drug [=drudge] as his maid, the gentleman waxed astonished, and listened to her discourse, wishing her to discover how she knew or was so privy to the folly of her mistress, or by what means he might have assured proof of it. She told him that her own eyes were witnesses, for she saw them unlawfully together. *And please you sir, quoth she, to feign yourself to go from home, and then in the back-house to keep you secret, I will let you see as much as I have manifested unto you.* Upon this the master agreed, and warned his maid not so much as to make it known to any of her fellows.

Within a day or two after the gentleman said he would go a-hunting, and so rise very early, and causing his men to couple up his hounds, left his wife in bed and went abroad. As soon as he was gone a mile from the house he commanded his men to ride afore, and



to start the hare and follow the chase, and we will come fair and softly after. They, obeying their master's charge, went their ways, and he returned by a back-way to his house and went secretly to the place where his maid and he had appointed. In the meantime, the mistress, thinking her husband safe with his hounds, sent for her friend to her bedchamber by a trusty servant of hers in whom she assured, that was a secret pander in such affairs, and the gentleman was not slack to come, but making all the haste he could, came and went into the chamber, asking for the master of the house very familiarly. The old maid, noting all this, as soon as she knew them together, went and called her master, and carried him up by a secret pair of stairs to her mistress' chamber-door, where peeping in at a place that the maid before had made for the purpose, he saw more than he looked for, and so much as pinched him at the very heart, causing him to accuse his wife for a strumpet and his friend for a traitor. Yet for all this, valuing his own honour more than their dishonesty, thinking if he should make an uproar he should but aim at his own discredit and cause himself to be a laughing-game to his enemies, he concealed his sorrow with silence, and taking the maid apart, charged her to keep all secret whatsoever she had seen, even as she esteemed of her own life, for if she did bewray it to any, he himself would with his sword make an end of her days, and with that, putting his hand in his sleeve, gave the poor maid six angels to buy her a new gown. The wench, glad of this gift, swore solemnly to tread it underfoot, and sith it pleased him to conceal it, never to reveal it as long as she lived. Upon this they parted, she to her drudgery and he to the field to his men, where after he had killed the hare, he returned home, and finding his friend in the garden that in his absence had been grafting horns in the chimney, and entertained him with his wonted familiarity, and showed no bad countenance to his wife, but dissembled all his thoughts to the full.

As soon as dinner was done, and that he was gotten solitary by himself, he began to determine of revenge, but not as every man would have done, how to have brought his wife to shame & her love to confusion, but he busied his brains how he might reserve his honour inviolate, reclaim his wife, and keep his friend. Meditating a long time how he might bring all this to pass, at last a humour fell into his head how cunningly to compass all three, and therefore he went & got him [-a] certain slips, which are counterfeit pieces of money, being brass & covered over with silver, which the common people call slips. Having furnished himself with these, he put them in his purse, and at night went to bed as he was wont to do, yet not using the kind familiarity that he accustomed. Notwithstanding, he abstained not from the use of her body, but knew his wife as aforesaid, and every time he committed the act with her, he laid the next morning in the window a slip where he was sure she might find it, and so many times as it pleased him to be carnally pleasant with his wife, so many slips he still laid down upon her cushionet. This he used for the space of a fortnight, till at last his wife, finding every day a slip, or sometime more or less, wondered how they came there, and examining her waiting-maids, none of them could tell her anything touching them, whereupon she thought to question with her husband about it, but being out of her remembrance, the next morning as he & she lay dallying in bed it came into her mind, and she asked her husband if he laid those slips on her cushionet that she of late found there, having never seen any before. *Aye, marry, did I, quoth he, and I have laid them there upon special reason, and it is this. Ever since I have been married to thee, I have deemed thee honest, and*

*therefore used and honoured thee as my wife, parting coequal favours betwixt us as true loves, but alate, finding the contrary, & with these eyes seeing thee play the whore with my friend in whom I did repose all my trust, I sought not, as many would have done, to have revenged in blood, but for the safety of mine own honour, which otherwise would have been blemished by thy dishonesty, I have been silent, and have neither wronged my quandom [sic for 'quondam'] friend, nor abused thee, but still do hold bed with thee, that the world should not suspect anything. And to quench the desire of lust I do use thy body, but not so lovingly as I would a wife, but carelessly, as I would a strumpet, and therefore even as to a whore, so I give thee hire, which is for every time a slip, a counterfeit coin, which is good enough for such a slippery wanton that will wrong her husband that loved her so tenderly, and thus will I use thee for the safety of mine own honour till I have assured proof that thou becomest honest.*

And thus with tears in his eyes and his heart ready to burst with sighs, he was silent, when his wife, stricken with remorse of conscience, leaping out of her bed in her smock, humbly confessing all, craved pardon, promising if he should pardon this offence which was new begun in her, she would become a new reformed woman, and never after so much as in thought give him any occasion of suspicion of jealousy. The patient husband, not willing to urge his wife, took her at her word, and told her that when he found her so reclaimed, he would, as afore he had done, use her lovingly and as his wife, but till he was so persuaded of her honesty, he would pay her still slips for his pleasure, charging her not to reveal anything to his friend, or to make it known to him that he was privy to their loves. Thus the debate ended, I guess, in some kind greeting, and the gentleman went abroad to see his pastures, leaving his wife in bed full of sorrow and almost rending her heart asunder with sighs.

As soon as he was walked abroad, the gentleman his friend came to the house and asked for the goodman. The pander that was privy to all their practices said that his master was gone abroad to see his pastures, but his mistress was in bed. *Why then,* says he, *I will go and raise her up.* So coming into the chamber and kissing her, meaning as he was wont to have used other accustomed dalliance, she desired him to abstain, with broken sighs & her eyes full of tears. He, wondering what should make her thus discontent, asked her what was the cause of her sorrow, protesting with a solemn oath that if any had done her injury, he would revenge it, were it with hazard of his life. She then told him, scarce being able to speak for weeping, that she had a suit to move him in, which if he granted unto her, she would hold him in love and affection without change next her husband forever. He promised to do whatsoever it was. *Then,* says she, *swear upon a bible you will do it without exception.* With that he took a bible that lay in the window & swore that whatsoever she requested him to do, were it to the loss of his life, he would without exception perform it. Then she, holding down her head and blushing, began thus:

*I need not, quoth she, make manifest how grossly and grievously you and I have both offended God and wronged the honest gentleman my husband and your friend, he putting a special trust in us both, & assuring such earnest affiance in your unfeigned friendship that he even committeth me, his wife, his love, his second life, into your bosom. This love have I requited with inconstancy in playing the harlot; that faith that he reposeth in you*

*have you returned with treachery and falsehood in abusing mine honesty and his honour. Now a remorse of conscience toucheth me for my sins, that I heartily repent, and vow ever hereafter to live only to my husband, and therefore my suit is to you that from henceforth you shall never so much as motion any dishonest question unto me, nor seek any unlawful pleasure or conversing at my hands. This is my suit, and hereunto I have sworn you, which oath if you observe as a faithful gentleman, I will conceal from my husband what is past, and rest in honest sort your faithful friend forever.*

At this she burst into tears, and uttered such sighs that he thought for very grief her heart would have clave asunder. The gentleman, astonished at this strange metamorphosis [sic for 'metamorphosis'] of his mistress, sat a good while in a maze, and at last, taking her by the hand, made this reply: *So God help me, fair sweeting, I am glad of this motion, and wondrous joyful that God hath put such honest thoughts into your mind, & hath made you the means to reclaim me from my folly. I feel no less remorse than you do in wronging so honest a friend as your husband, but this is the frailness of man, and therefore to make amends I protest anew never hereafter so much as in thought as to motion you of dishonesty; only I crave you be silent.* She promised that, and so they ended. And so for that time they parted. At noon the gentleman came home, and cheerfully saluted his wife, and asked if dinner were ready, and sent for his friend, using him wonderfully familiarly, giving him no occasion of mistrust, and so pleasantly they passed away the day together. At night, when his wife and he went to bed, she told him all what had passed between her and his friend, and how she had bound him with an oath, and that he voluntarily of himself swore as much, being heartily sorry that he had so deeply offended so kind a friend. The gentleman commended her wit, and found her afterward a reclaimed woman, she living so honestly that she never gave him any occasion of mistrust. Thus the wise gentleman reclaimed with silence a wanton wife, and retained an assured friend.

At this pleasant tale all the board was at a mutiny, and they said the gentleman did passing wisely that wrought so cunningly for the safety of his own honour, but highly exclaiming against such a friend as would to his friend offer such villainy, all condemning her that would be false to so loving a husband. Thus they did diversly descant, & passed away dinner, but this tale wrought little effect in me, for as one past grace, I delighted in change, but the gentleman that was his familiar and my paramour was so touched that never after he would touch me dishonestly, but reclaimed himself, abstained from me, and became true to his friend.

I, wondering that according to his wonted custom he did not seek my company, he and I being one day in the chamber alone, and he in his dumps, I began to dally with him, and to ask him why he was so strange, and used not his accustomed favours to me. He solemnly made answer that though he had played the fool in setting his fancy upon another man's wife & in wronging his friend, yet his conscience was now touched with remorse, and & ever since he heard the tale afore rehearsed he had vowed in himself never to do my husband the like wrong again. *My husband, quoth I, he is none of mine; he hath brought me from my friends, and keeps me here unmarried, and therefore am I as free for you as for him, & thus began to grow clamorous because I was debarred of my lust.* The gentleman, seeing me shameless, wished me to be silent, and said: *Although*

*you be but his friend, yet he hold[s] you as dear as his wife, and therefore I will not abuse him; neither would I wish you to be familiar with any other, seeing you have a friend that loves you so tenderly.* Much good counsel he gave me, but all in vain, for I scorned it, and began to hate him, and resolved both to be rid of him and my supposed husband, for falling in [+with] another familiar of my supposed husband's, I so inveigled him with sweet words that I caused him to make a piece of money to steal me away, and so carry me to London, where I had not lived long with him ere he, seeing my light behaviour, left me to the world, and to shift for myself.

Here by my example may you note the inconstant life of courtesans and common harlots, who after they have lost their honesty care not who grow into their favour nor what villainy they commit. They fancy all as long as crowns last, and only aim at pleasure and ease. They cleave like caterpillars to the tree, and consume the fruit where they fall; they be vultures that prey on men alive, and like the serpent sting the bosom wherein they are nourished. I may best discourse their nature because I was one of their profession, but now being metamorphosed, I hold it meritorious for me to warn women from being such wantons, and to give a caveat to men lest they addict themselves to such straggling strumpets as love none though they like all, but affectionate only for profit, and when he hath spent all, they beat him out of doors with the prodigal child.

But stopping here till occasion serve me fitter to discover the manner of courtesans, to myself, who now being brought to London and left here at random, was not such a house-dove while any friend stayed with me but that I had visite[d] some houses in London that could harbour as honest a woman as myself. Whenas therefore I was left to myself, I removed my lodging and gat me into one of those houses of good hospitality whereunto persons resort commonly called a trugging-house, or to be plain, a whore-house, where I gave myself to entertain all companions, sitting or standing at the door like a stale to allure or draw in wanton passengers, refusing none that would with his purse purchase me to be his to satisfy the disordinate desire of his filthy lust. Now I began not to respect personage, good qualities, to [sic for 'nor'?] the gracious favour of the man when eye had no respect of person, for the oldest lecher was as welcome as the youngest lover, so he brought meat in his mouth; otherwise I pronounce[d] against him:

*Si nihil attuleris ibis homere [sic for 'Homere'] foras [=If, Homer, you do not bring anything, you will go outside].*

I waxed thus in this hell of voluptuousness daily worse & worse, yet having, as they term it, a respect to the main chance as near as I could to avoid diseases and to keep myself brave in apparel, although I paid a kind of tribute to the bawd according as the number and benefit of my companions did exceed, but never could I be brought to be a pickpocket or thievish by any of their persuasions, although I wanted daily no instructions to allure me to that villainy, for I think nature had wrought in me a contrary humour; otherwise, my bad nurture and conversing with such bad company had brought me to it. Marry, in all their vices I carried a brazen face & was shameless, for what ruffian was there in London that would utter more desperate oaths than I in mine anger, what to spet [sic for 'tossport'] quaff or carouse more devilishly or rather damnable [sic

for ‘damnably’] than my self, and for beastly communication, Messalina of Rome might have been waiting-maid. Besides, I grew so grafted in sin that *consueto* [*sic for ‘consuetudo’*] *peccandi tollebat sensum peccati*, custom of sin took away the feeling of the sin, for I so accustomedly use[d] myself to all kind of vice that I accounted swearing no sin. Whoredom? Why I smile[d] at that, and could profanely say that it was a sin which God laughed at. Gluttony I held good fellowship, & wrath, honour and resolution. I despised God; nay, in my conscience I might easily have been persuaded there was no God. I contemned the preachers, and when any wished me to reform my life, I bade *Away with the Puritan*, and if any young woman refused to be as vicious every way as myself, I would then say: *Gip, fine soul; a young saint will prove an old devil*. I never would go to the church, and sermons I utterly refused, holding them as needless tales told in a pulpit. I would not bend mine ears to the hearing of any good discourse, but still delighted in jangling ditties of ribaldry.

Thus to the grief of my friends, hazard of my soul and consuming of my body I spent a year or two in this base and bad kind of life, subject to the whistle of every desperate ruffian, till on a time there resorted to our house a clothier, a proper young man, who by fortune coming first to drink, espying me, asked me if I would drink with him. There needed no great entreaty for as then I wanted company, and so clapped me down by him and began very pleasantly to welcome him. The man, being of himself modest and honest, noted my personage and judicially reasoned of my strumpet-like behaviour, and inwardly, as after he reported unto me, grieved that so foul properties were hidden in so good a proportion, and that such rare wit and excellent beauty was blemished with whoredom’s base deformity, insomuch that he began to think well of me and to wish that I were as honest as I was beautiful. Again, see how God wrought for my conversion; since I gave myself to my loose kind of life I never liked any so well as him, insomuch that I began to judge of every part, and methought he was the properest man that ever I saw. Thus we sat, both amorous of other, I lasciviously, & he honestly. At last he questioned with me what countrywoman I was and why, being so proper a woman, I would beseem to dwell or live in a base ale-house, especially in one that had a bad name. I warrant he wanted no knavish reply to fit him, for I told him the house was as honest as his mother’s. Marry, if there were in it a good wench or two that would pleasure their friends at a need, I guesse[d] by his nose what porridge he loved, and that he hated none such. Well, seeing me in that voice he said little, but shook his head, paid for the beer, and went his way, only taking his leave of me with a kiss, which methought was the sweetest that ever was given me. As soon as he was gone I began to think what a handsome man he was, and wished that he would come and take a night’s lodging with me, sitting in a dump to think of the quaintness of his personage till other companions came in that shaked me out of that melancholy, but as soon again as I was secret to myself he came into my remembrance.

Passing over thus a day or two, this clothier came again to our house, whose sight cheered me up, for that spying him out at a casement, I ran down the stairs and met him at the door and heartily welcomed him, & asked him if he would drink. *I come for that purpose*, says he, *but I will drink no more below, but in a chamber*. Marry, sir, quoth I, *you shall*, and so brought him into the fairest room. In there sitting together drinking, at

last the clothier fell to kissing and other dalliance, wherein he found me not coy. At last told me that he would willingly have his pleasure of me, but the room was too lightsome, for of all things in the world he could not in such actions away with a light chamber. I consented unto him, and brought him into a room more dark, but still he said it was too light. Then I carried him into a farther chamber, where drawing a buckram curtain afore the window and closing the curtains of the bed, I asked him smiling if that were close enough. *No, sweet love, says he, the curtain is thin, & not broad enough for the window; peradventure some watching eye may espy us. My heart misdoubts, & my credit is my life. Good love, if thou hast a more close room than this, bring me to it. Why then, quoth I, follow me, & with that I brought him into a back loft where stood a little bed only appointed to lodge suspicious persons, so dark that at noondays it was impossible for any man to see his own hands. How now, sir, quoth I, is not this dark enough? He, sitting him down on the bedside, fetched a deep sigh, & said: Indifferent so-so, but there is a glimpse of light in at the tiles. Somebody may by fortune see us. In faith, no, quoth I, none but God. God, says he, why, can God see us here? Good sir, quoth I, why, I hope you are not so simple but God's eyes are so clear and penetrating that they can pierce through walls of brass, and that were we enclosed never so secretly, yet we are manifestly seen to him. And alas, quoth he, sweet love, if God see us, shall we not be more ashamed to do such a filthy act before him than before men? I am sure thou art not so shameless but thou wouldst blush & be afraid to have the meanest commoner in London see thee in the action of thy filthy lust, and dost thou not shame more to have God, the maker of all things, see thee, who revengeth sin with death, he whose eyes are clearer than the sun, who is the searcher of the heart, and holdeth vengeance in his hands to punish sinners? Consider, sweet love, that if man and wife would be ashamed to have any of their friends see them in the act of generation or performing the rights of marriage which is lawful and allowed before God, yet for modesty do it in the most covert they may, then how impudent or graceless should we be to fulfil our filthy lust before the eyes of the Almighty, who is greater than all kings or princes on the earth? Oh, let us tremble that we but once durst have such wanton communication in the hearing of his divine Majesty, who pronounceth damnation for such as give themselves over to adultery. It is not possible, saith the Lord, for any whoremaster or lascivious wanton to enter into the kingdom of God. For such sins whole cities have sunk, kingdoms have been destroyed, and though God suffereth such wicked livers to escape for a while, yet at length he payeth home, in this world with beggary, shame, diseases or infamy, and in the other life with perpetual damnation. Weigh but the inconvenience that grows through thy loose life: thou art hated of all that are good, despised of the virtuous and only well thought of of reprobates, rascals, ruffians and such as the world hates, subject to their lust and gaining thy living at the hands of every diseased lecher. Oh, what a miserable trade of life is thine, that livest of the vomit of sin, in hunting after maladies. But suppose while thou art young thou art favoured of thy companions; when thou waxest old, and that thy beauty is vaded, then thou shalt be loathed and despised, even of them that professed most love unto thee. Then, good sister, call to mind the baseness of thy life, the heinous outrage of thy sin, that God doth punish it with the rigour of his justice. Oh, thou art made beautiful, fair and well formed, and wilt thou then by thy filthy lust make thy body, which if thou be honest is the temple of God, the habitation of the devil? Consider this, and call*

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*to God for mercy, and amend thy life. Leave this house, and I will become thy faithful friend in all honesty, and use thee as mine own sister.*

At this such a remorse of conscience, such a fearful terror of my sin struck into my mind that I kneeled down at his feet, and with tears besought him he would help me out of that misery, for his exhortation had caused in me a loathing of my wicked life, and I would not only become a reformed woman, but hold him as dear as my father that gave me life, whereupon he kissed me with tears, and so we went down together where we had further communication, and presently he provided me another lodging where I not only used myself so honestly but also was so penitent every day in tears for my former folly that he took me to his wife, and how I have lived since, and loathed filthy lust, I refer myself to the Majesty of God, who knoweth the secrets of all hearts.

Thus, countrymen, I have published the conversion of an English courtesan, which if any way it be profitable either to forewarn youth or withdraw bad persons to goodness, I have the whole end of my desire, only craving every father would bring up his children with careful nurture, and every young woman respect the honour of her virginity.

But amongst all these blithe and merry jests, a little, by your leave, if it be no farther than Fetter Lane. Oh, take heed; that's too nigh the Temple. What, then, I will draw as near the sign of the White Hart as I can, and breathing myself by the bottle-ale house, I'll tell you a merry jest how a cony-catcher was used.

A merry tale taken not far from Fetter Lane end of a new-found cony-catcher that was  
cony-catched himself

So it fell out that a gentleman was sick and purblind, and went to a good honest man's house to sojourn, and taking up his chamber grew so sick that the goodman of the house hired a woman to keep and attend day and night upon the gentleman. This poor woman, having a good conscience, was careful of his welfare, and looked to his diet, which was so slender that the man, although sick, was almost famished, so that the woman would no longer stay, but bade his host provide him of some other to watch with him sith it grieved her to see a man lie and starve for want of food, especially being set on the score for meat and drink in the space of a fortnight four pounds. The goodman of the house at last, hearing how the poor woman did find fault with his scoring, the gentleman not only put her out of doors without wages, but would have arrested her for taking away his good name and defaming and slandering him, and with that, calling one of his neighbours to him, said: *Neighbour, whereas such a bad-tongued woman hath reported to my discredit that the gentleman that lies sick in my house wants meat, and yet runs very much on the score, I pray you, judge by his diet whether he be famished or no. First, in the morning he hath a caudle next his heart; half an hour after that, a quart of sugar-sops; half an hour after that a neck of mutton in broth; half an hour after that chickens in sorrel sops, and an hour after that, a joint of roast meat for his dinner. Now, neighbour, having this provision, you may judge whether he be spoiled for lack of meat or no, and to what great charges his diet will arise,* whereas in truth the poor gentleman would have been glad of

the least of these, for he could get none at all. But the cozening knave thought to verse upon him, and one day, seeing money came not briefly to the gentleman, took some of his apparel, his cloak, I guess, and pawned it for forty shillings, whereas, God wot, all he eat in that time was not worth a crown. Well, the gentleman, seeing how the knave went about to cony-catch him, and that he had taken his cloak, smothered all for revenge and watched opportunity to do it, and on a time, seeing the goodman out, borrowed a cloak far better than his own of the boy, saying that he would go to a friend of his to fetch money for his master, & discharge the house. The boy lending it him, away walks the gentleman, though weak after this great diet, and never came at the tailor's house to answer him cloak or money. And thus was he cony-catched himself that thought to have versed upon another.

FINIS