

TOMMASO ARGENTO IN LONDON (Part Two)

by Chris Rose

On May 20th 1593, he received two very bad pieces of news. The first was the letter from his father, ordering him to come home. After reading the letter, he decided to try and find his friend Kit, to tell him the bad news. He went straight to the Mermaid. The Mermaid was empty apart from the barman and the young playwright who wanted to write about Venice and Verona.

"I'm looking for Kit," announced Tommaso. "Where is he?" The other two men looked worried.

"I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you," said the barman. "Marlowe's been arrested."

"Arrested! Why?" shouted Tommaso.

"The charge is heresy," said the barman. "It's a dangerous charge. If I were you, my boy, I'd just go straight home! You shouldn't tell anybody that you know Kit Marlowe. Deny everything!"

"Never!" shouted Tommaso and ran out of the pub. He started crying with anger, doubt and confusion, and it was some time before he noticed that the other young playwright was following him.

"Listen," said the man with the silver earring who looked a bit like Tommaso. "Kit can get out of prison for ten days on bail before he has to have a trial. I know that next week, on the 30th, he'll be in a house in Deptford to meet some of his old friends". The man wrote the address of a house in Deptford on a piece of paper for Tommaso, and told him to come. "Kit needs friends at the moment, and maybe you can take something to Italy for him."

Tommaso spent the next ten days feeling sad and gloomy. He did not want to return to Italy. He did not want to be a merchant like his father. He wanted to be a poet. He wanted to stay in London. But things in London were difficult for poets. Now his best friend was under arrest - only because he was a poet. That was what Tommaso understood. He thought about how he could possibly change his situation. He thought of lots of plans, but none of his plans seemed practical or possible. It was inevitable; he had to return to Italy.

On his last day he walked up to the hill at Greenwich to watch the tall ships sailing down the wide river for the last time, then went to find the house in Deptford to say goodbye to his friend. When he eventually found the house, Kit seemed happy to see Tommaso. They all sat down to dinner. Tommaso had expected to see a lot of their old friends there, but the only people present were three men who Tommaso had never seen before – they were part of the group of Kit's friends who Tommaso didn't like. He thought that the three men looked dangerous, possibly even criminal. The only person he knew who was there was the other playwright who had given him the address.

All the men seemed to be very serious, almost angry about something, but Tommaso could not understand what the problem was. They all drank a lot, and got more and more drunk. As they got more drunk, they got more angry. One of the men, called Ingram, started shouting, and Kit stood up and threw his plate at the man. Tommaso couldn't understand – they seemed to be arguing about the bill! Why were they becoming so violent about a stupid bill! Tommaso offered to pay for everybody in an attempt to stop the argument, but the others ignored him completely. Ingram was furious. He pulled out a knife. Tommaso was horrified, and then noticed that Kit too had a knife. Kit ran at Ingram and tried to stab him with the knife, but in the fight, Ingram stabbed Kit just above the eye. Tommaso shouted as Kit fell to the floor. But it was too late. Kit was obviously dead. Ingram looked around at the others. The other two men were obviously his friends, and said nothing. But Ingram looked at Tommaso and the playwright.

"These two have seen too much," he said. "We'll have to get rid of them as well." The men ran at Tommaso and the playwright. Tommaso saw that the knife that had stabbed Kit Marlowe now stabbed the playwright as well. He was dead.

Tommaso didn't hesitate. He jumped out of the window and ran as fast as possible.

He had been running for what seemed like hours before he stopped and turned round. Ingram and the other men hadn't followed him. Even if they had followed him, they had lost him now. There was nobody around. Tommaso had to think very quickly. The obvious thing to do was to leave as quickly as possible. His ship was ready and waiting. The people on the ship were expecting him to arrive. Nobody had seen him have dinner with Marlowe and the others. He could leave the country immediately, and be back at home soon, far away from any danger.

It was obvious – he started to walk towards the port where his ship was waiting for him. But as he walked there, he started to think about the life that was ahead of him. He could never be a poet at home. At home, he must be

a businessman like his father. If he left London now, it would mean goodbye forever to his dreams. But how could he stay in London now? Terrible things had happened, things which Tommaso did not understand. He understood only that he was in serious danger. Two men were dead – he could be the third! He had now reached the port where the ship waited. He looked at the ship and started to walk towards it. “If only I wasn’t me”, he thought, “if only I was somebody else, a different person.”

If only he could be somebody else! A different identity - that was the solution! The other playwright with the unusual surname...what was it? Tommaso realised that he could take on the identity of the other playwright. They looked like each other, and he was a poet! He had written stories about Italy – and Tommaso could also write stories about Italy. It was perfect! Tommaso Argento could disappear completely! What was the name of that writer? William something...yes, that was it, his new name was William. William Shakespeare.

THE END

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