



# Maria Stuart

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER

TRANSLATED BY FLORA KIMMICH

INTRODUCTION BY ROGER PAULIN



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Translation and Notes to the text Flora Kimmich © 2020

Introduction Roger Paulin © 2020



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# MARIA STUART



# Characters

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ELIZABETH, Queen of England

MARY STUART, Queen of Scotland

ROBERT DUDLEY, Earl of Leicester

GEORGE TALBOT, Earl of Shrewsbury

WILLIAM CECIL, Baron Burghley, Lord High Treasurer

Earl of KENT

WILLIAM DAVISON, state secretary

AMIAS PAULET, knight, Mary's keeper

MORTIMER, his nephew

Count AUBESPINE, French ambassador

Count BELLIEVRE, extraordinary emissary of France

O'KELLY, Mortimer's friend

DRUGEON DRURY, Mary's second keeper

MELVIL, her steward

BURGOYNE, her physician

HANNA KENNEDY, her nurse

MARGARET CURLE, her lady-in-waiting

SHERIFF of the county

OFFICER of the bodyguard

French and English GENTLEMEN

GUARDS

COURTIERS of the Queen of England

ATTENDANTS of the Queen of Scotland





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*Tableau représentant Marie Stuart, reine de France et d'Écosse. Château de Blois.*  
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# Act One

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*A room in Fotheringhay Castle*

## Scene One

*Hanna Kennedy, nurse of the Queen of Scotland, in sharp dispute with  
Paulet, who is about to open a cabinet. Drugeon Drury, his assistant,  
with a crowbar.*

KENNEDY. Stand back, sir! What fresh impudence! Away from  
This chest!

PAULET. Who was it threw down all those jewels?  
Who? They were tossed down from the upper story  
And meant to bribe the gardener. Women's wiles!  
For all my watching, for all my sharp searching,  
Still secret valuables, still hidden treasure!  
(Attacking the cabinet)  
Where that was there is more!

KENNEDY. Back, shameless man!  
The Lady's secrets lie here.

PAULET. Just what I want! (Pulling out papers)

KENNEDY. Of no importance, idle jottings to shorten  
The long, sad hours of her imprisonment.

PAULET. Idleness is handmaid to the devil.

KENNEDY. These papers are all in French.

PAULET. So much the worse!  
That language England's enemy speaks.

KENNEDY. Drafts of letters

Intended for the Queen of England.

PAULET.

I will

Deliver them. — Look here! What's sparkling so?

*(He has opened a secret compartment and lifts jewels from a hidden drawer.)*

A royal coronet, all studded with stones,

Entwined and threaded by the lilies of France!<sup>1</sup>

*(He gives it to his companion.)*

Take care of it, Drury. Add it to the rest!

*(Drury goes off.)*

KENNEDY. Disgraceful force that we have to submit to!

20 PAULET. While she still has possessions, she can do harm.

In her hands everything becomes a weapon.

KENNEDY. Have mercy, sir. Don't take the last fine touch from

Our lives! Poor Lady! How she's cheered by the sight of

Old splendor. You have taken all else away.

PAULET. It's in good hands. And it will be returned

Safely and surely when the proper time comes.

KENNEDY. Who'd think from these bare walls to find a queen

Living here? Where's the baldachin above

Her chair? Must she not set her foot, accustomed

30 To softness, on raw common flooring? With

The coarsest pewter—plainest noblewomen

Would scorn it—they make bold to serve her table.

PAULET. That's how she saw her husband served at Stirling,

While she drank out of gold cups with her lover.<sup>2</sup>

KENNEDY. The simplest looking-glass is even denied her.<sup>3</sup>

PAULET. As long as she can still see her vain image

She will not give up hoping—hoping and scheming.

KENNEDY. There are no books here to engage her mind.

PAULET. They gave her a Bible to improve her heart.

40 KENNEDY. Even her lute they took away from her.

PAULET. Because she used to play her love songs on it.

KENNEDY. Is that a fate for one who's gently bred,

Who was crowned queen while still in the cradle, and

Then brought up at the court of a Medici

Amid all excess, every possible pleasure?<sup>4</sup>

Be it enough to rob her of her power.

Must one begrudge her little trinkets as well?

A *great* misfortune teaches the noble heart

To find itself, but it is painful to be

50 Entirely robbed of life's every *small* beauty.

PAULET. They only turn the heart to idle things,

When it should turn inward instead and repent.

A life of vice and excess is atoned

Alone by want, abasement, and repentance.

KENNEDY. If her tender years of youth went astray, may

*She* settle her accounts with God and her heart.

In England there is no judge over her.<sup>5</sup>

PAULET. She shall be judged where she committed her crimes.

KENNEDY. She is too tightly bound here to commit crimes.

60 PAULET. From these bonds she knew to extend an arm

Into the world and fling the torch of civil

War into the Realm and against our Queen,

God save her, and to arm mutinous mobs.

From inside these walls did she not incite

The villain Parry and then Babington, too,<sup>6</sup>

To regicide, that damnable deed? Did iron bars

Keep her from catching Norfolk in her web?<sup>7</sup>

The best head on this Island fell to the axe,

Sacrificed to her. Did this wretched example

70 Deter the madmen who now fling themselves in

Contest into the abyss on her account?

For her the scaffolds fill with ever new victims,

And that will not end till she, guiltiest of all,

Is sacrificed herself on a bloody scaffold.

Accursed the day when the hospitable shores

Surrounding this land received such a Helen!<sup>8</sup>

KENNEDY. Hospitable English shores received my Lady?

Unhappy creature, who since she set foot in

This land, a suppliant entreating help and

80 Protection from her reigning cousin, sees

Herself, against her rank and common law,

Held captive, wasting her young years in confinement.

Who, having known the bitterness of prison,

Is summoned into court like a cut-throat and meanly  
Accused on peril of her life—a queen!

PAULET. She came into this kingdom having murdered,<sup>9</sup>  
Chased by her subjects and removed from her throne,  
Which she had desecrated by her deeds.  
Sworn against England's fortunes now she came,  
90 Intending to bring back the bloody times of  
The Spanish Mary,<sup>10</sup> making England Catholic,  
Betraying England to the hopeful French.  
For why disdain to sign the Edinburgh Treaty,<sup>11</sup>  
Renouncing all claim to the English throne  
And opening a swift way out of her prison?  
She'd remain captive, be maltreated, sooner  
Than give up empty grandeur in a title.  
Why did she do that? She preferred to trust plots,  
The evil arts of schemes, conspiracies.  
100 Spinning disaster, she dreams conquest. She'd  
Conquer this Island from the depths of her cell.

KENNEDY. You surely mock us, sir. To hardship you add  
Derision. She should cherish dreams of this kind,  
Walled up alive here, whom no sound of comfort  
Reaches, no voice of friendship from her home?  
Who sees no human face but that of her jailer,  
Who now has a new guard, your ill-mannered kinsman,<sup>12</sup>  
And sees herself caged round in new iron bars?

PAULET. No iron bar protects from her perfidy.  
110 Do I know if these bars have not been filed through?  
If this floor and these walls that seem so solid  
Have not been hollowed out inside, admitting  
Treason while I'm asleep? A damnable office  
I've gotten, guarding these wiles that hatch ruin.  
Fear tosses me up out of sleep in the night,  
I go about like a tormented specter,  
Testing bolts on doors, good faith in the guards, and  
Tremble each morning lest my fears have come true.  
But to my great relief it's soon to end,  
120 For I would rather stand guard over the damned

Before the gates of Hell than over this  
 Queen full of intrigue, queen full of wiles!  
 KENNEDY. She's coming there herself!  
 PAULET. The Christ in her hand  
 Vainglory and worldly pleasures in her heart.

## Scene Two

*Mary, veiled and carrying a Crucifix. As above.*

KENNEDY (*hurrying to meet her*).

My Queen! Just look! They're trampling us underfoot!  
 Of harshness and tyranny there is no end!  
 Every new day heaps sorrows, heaps new shame  
 On your crowned head.

MARY. Come now! Compose yourself!  
 And tell me what new thing has happened.

KENNEDY. Look here!

130 Your desk is broken open. All your writings,  
 Your last remaining treasure, salvaged at great pain,  
 The rest of bridal jewelry taken from France  
 Is now in his hands. Nothing royal is yours.  
 You have been robbed. There is now nothing left you.

MARY. Take comfort, Hanna. Tinsel such as this  
 Makes no queen. They can treat us basely but  
 They cannot abase us. Here in England I've learned,  
 Accustomed myself to much and this, too,

140 I can endure. (*To Paulet*) You, sir, have seized what I  
 Was minded to surrender to you today.  
 Among these writings you will find a letter  
 Intended for my royal sister of England.  
 Give me your word that you'll deliver it  
 To her in honor and not into Burghley's<sup>13</sup>  
 Faithless hands.

PAULET. I'll decide what is to be done.

MARY. You are to know the content, sir. In this letter  
 I sue for a great favor: I request

An interview with her, whom I've never seen.  
 One summoned me before a court composed  
 150 Of men whom I do not know as my equals,  
 Men who are known to me only as strangers.  
 Elizabeth is my kinswoman, my rank,  
 My kind. To her alone, my sister, a queen,  
 A woman, am I able to speak freely.

PAULET. Often, my Lady, you've entrusted your honor  
 And fate to men less worthy your respect.

MARY. I ask another favor. To refuse me  
 Were inhumane. Imprisoned, I'm denied  
 160 The comforts of my Church, the blessing of Sacrament.  
 One who's robbed me of crown and freedom, indeed  
 Threatened my life, would not bar me from Heaven.

PAULET. If you desire, the local deacon would—

MARY (*interrupting him sharply*).

I'll have no deacon. I demand a priest of  
 My Church. And scribes and notaries. I require to  
 Record my last will. Sorrow, wretched confinement  
 Shorten my life. My days are numbered, I fear,  
 And I consider myself bound for death.

PAULET. You do well. Such reflection much becomes you.

MARY. Can I be sure that no swift hand will speed the  
 170 Slow workings of my pain and grief? I wish  
 To make my will, dispose of what is mine.

PAULET. That you are free to do. The Queen of England  
 Would not enrich herself by robbing you.

MARY. I have been separated from the ladies  
 Attending me and from my servants. Where are they?  
 What fate have they met? I can spare their service;  
 I would be assured they do not suffer or want.

PAULET. Your servants have been well provided for. (*He turns to go.*)

MARY. You are about to go? You'd leave me again  
 180 And not relieve my heart's uncertainty?  
 Thanks to your spies, I am removed from the world,  
 No news can reach me through these prison walls,  
 My fate lies in the hands of my enemies.

A long and painful month has passed since forty  
 Commissioners ambushed me here in this castle,  
 Erected barriers, with unseemly haste put  
 Me, unprepared and without counsel, before  
 A court no one had ever heard of, made me,  
 Surprised and stunned, respond then and there to  
 190 Sly legal points accusing me of grave crimes.  
 Like specters they appeared and vanished again.  
 From that day all men have kept silent before me,  
 In vain I try to read your gaze and your glances:  
 Whether my innocence, the efforts of friends, or  
 My enemies' foul influence has prevailed.  
 Break your long silence, let me know at last:  
 What must I fear—tell me—what dare I hope?<sup>14</sup>

PAULET (*after a silence*).

Settle all your accounts with Heaven, Madam.  
 200 MARY. I hope for Heaven's mercy, sir, and from  
 My earthly judges I hope for strict justice.  
 PAULET. Justice will be yours. Have no doubt of that.  
 MARY. My trial has been decided?  
 PAULET. I do not know.

MARY. I've been condemned?

PAULET. My Lady, I know nothing.

MARY. One goes to work with speed here. Is the assassin

To *ambush* me just as my judges did?

PAULET. Assume as much. He'll find you better prepared.

MARY. Nothing a Westminster court presumes to find, led  
 By Burghley's hate and Hatton's zeal,<sup>15</sup> shall shock me.

I know too well what England's Queen dare *do*.

210 PAULET. England's great rulers need fear but their conscience  
 And Parliament. What justice fearlessly has  
 Spoken, their might will execute in plain view.

## Scene Three

*As above. Mortimer, Paulet's nephew, enters, ignoring the Queen.*

MORTIMER (*to Paulet*). You're wanted, Uncle.

*(He goes off in the same fashion. The Queen turns to Paulet, who is about to follow.)*

MARY. Yet another request, sir.

If *you* have something you would say to me—  
From you I suffer much; I honor your years.  
The insolence of such a youngster I'll not  
Endure. Spare me his uncouth manners henceforth.

PAULET. What you would not endure endears him to me.

220

He's plainly not among the feeble fools  
Whom women's lying tears can soften soon.  
He's traveled. He returns from Paris and Reims,  
Bringing back home his loyal old-English heart.  
On him your arts are lost entirely, my Lady.<sup>16</sup> (*He goes off.*)

## Scene Four

*Mary. Kennedy.*

KENNEDY. May that great boor say such things to your face?

Oh, it is hard!

MARY (*lost in thought*).

Back in our days of glory we heard flatterers  
Too willingly. It's meet to hear reproach now.

KENNEDY. So downcast, so discouraged, dearest Lady?

230

You, once so merry that you would console me?  
I sooner had to scold your flightiness than  
To chide your darker moods.

MARY. Oh, I know him!<sup>17</sup>

The bloody shade of Darnley rises raging  
Out of the grave, to give me no earthly peace  
Until my wretchedness has reached full measure.

KENNEDY. What sort of thinking—

MARY. You forget, dear Hanna,



But I remember faithfully. Just see!  
 The day comes round again, the fateful deed.  
 In memory of *him* I fast and atone.<sup>18</sup>

240 KENNEDY. Lay this ghost, send this specter back to the grave.  
 You have atoned by years of pain and remorse.  
 The Church and Heaven have long forgiven you.

MARY. Guilt long forgiven, bleeding afresh, rises  
 Again, young ever, out of its shallow grave.  
 My husband's ghost demanding revenge—no Host  
 Raised in priest's hand, no sound of the bell can send  
 It back down into its last resting place.

KENNEDY. No! It was not you! Others murdered him.

MARY. I knew about it, let the deed go forward,  
 I lured him, flattering his pride, into the trap.

250 KENNEDY. Your tender years soften your guilt. You were  
 So young still.

MARY. So young and yet burdened my  
 Tender years with a guilt so heavy, so grave.

KENNEDY. A bloody insult angered you and the  
 Presumption of a man your love had lifted  
 From deep obscurity, like the hand of God,  
 Whom you led from your bridal bed to the throne,  
 Whom you enriched by giving him both your  
 Own person and your born right to the Crown.  
 Could he forget his more than brilliant lot  
 260 Was the creation of your love and great heart?  
 Full well he forgot, offended delicacy  
 By low suspicion and crude practices.  
 Thus he made himself loathsome in your eyes.  
 The magic that had dazzled you went dark;  
 Enraged, you rose and fled his shameful embraces,  
 And laid him open to the general contempt.  
 And he? Did he try to win back your favor?  
 Or ask forgiveness? Throw himself at your feet,  
 Promise to mend his ways? Defiance he offered.  
 270 This man who was your creature wanted to play  
 Your king. And had the singer Rizzio, your favorite,

Run through before your eyes.<sup>19</sup> And you, the Queen,  
 Avenged with blood a deed so bloodily done.

MARY. And bloodily will it seek revenge on me, too.

Comforting me so, you make me guilty of it.

KENNEDY. You were not yourself when you let it happen.

Madness of love, blind love, had seized you and put you  
 Under the yoke of that seducer, that Bothwell.

280 A man's overweening willfulness let him  
 Rule over you, brew hellish potions that  
 Heated your senses—

MARY. He had no other arts

Than his strength of a man and my weakness.<sup>20</sup>

KENNEDY. No, I say. One who numbed all your senses had

To call for help from all the demons in Hell.

You had no ear for warnings from a friend,

No eye for bearing that becomes a queen.

Modesty had forsaken you; your cheeks, once

Given to blushing, flamed now with desire.

290 You flung away the veil of reticence,  
 A man's bold vice crushed your timidity.

Barefaced, you put your disgrace on display:

You had him, Darnley's assassin, carry before you

The royal sword of Scotland through the streets

Of Edinburgh, cursed and scorned by the crowd; you

Surrounded Parliament with armed guards; in the

Temple of Justice you contrived his acquittal.

You did not stop there—God!

MARY. Go on and finish!

I married him, gave him my hand at the altar.

300 KENNEDY. May silence fall on such a deed! An outrage!  
 Worthy of one who's lost. But you are not lost.

I brought you up, I know you, know your soft heart,

Open to shame. Your sole vice is foolishness.

I tell you: There are evil spirits that

Come over us, do something dreadful, then

Flee back to Hell and leave us marked and aghast.

But since this wanton deed, which blackens your life,

310

You have committed no crime, I am witness.  
 Courage therefore! Make peace now with yourself!  
 Whatever your regrets, in England you're guiltless.  
 Neither Elizabeth nor Parliament  
 Can judge you. Force alone holds you. Before  
 This insolent court you may take your place  
 With all the courage of your innocence.  
 MARY. Who's coming there?

*(Mortimer appears in the doorway.)*

KENNEDY.

It is the nephew. Go in.

## Scene Five

*As above. Mortimer, entering cautiously.*

MORTIMER *(to the Nurse)*.

Go out. Keep watch before the door. I wish to  
 Speak with the Queen.

MARY *(firmly)*. You stay here with me, Hanna.

MORTIMER. You need not fear, my Lady. Know who I am.

*(He hands her a card.)*

MARY *(reads the card and steps back in surprise)*. Ha!

MORTIMER *(to the Nurse)*. Go then, Dame Kennedy. See that my uncle  
 Does not surprise us.

MARY *(to the Nurse, who hesitates)*. Go! Go! Do as he says.

*(The Nurse goes out, baffled.)*

## Scene Six

*Mortimer. Mary.*

320

MARY. The Cardinal of Lorraine, my uncle!<sup>21</sup> He writes:

"Trust him who brings this, Mortimer, a knight.  
 You've no more loyal friend in all England."

*(Looking at Mortimer in astonishment)*

It's possible? No fraud? A friend so near, when

I thought myself abandoned by all the world—

I find him in my keeper's nephew, in whom

I thought I saw my worst foe—

MORTIMER (*throwing himself at her feet*). Lady, forgive this

Despicable disguise that cost me much

But lets me come near you to offer you

Rescue and help.

MARY. Stand up. Oh, what a surprise!

330 How sudden this great leap to hope from despair!

Speak, sir. Am I to believe this happiness?

MORTIMER (*standing up*). We've little time. My uncle is coming soon.

A hateful man comes with him. Before their terrible

Errand surprises you, learn Heaven's rescue.

MARY. These are the workings of Almighty God!

MORTIMER. Permit me to begin with myself.

MARY. Speak, sir!

MORTIMER. Brought up and taught in strictest duty, my Queen, and

Black hate of popery, I was twenty when a

Resistless desire drove me to the Continent.

340 I left the puritans' airless closets of preaching

Behind in my homeland, crossed over France,

Seeking my precious Italy with my heart.

It was the festival time, all the ways

Were thronged with pilgrims, as if all humanity

Were wandering, making pilgrimage toward Heaven.

Their throng swept me along till I reached Rome.

What joy seized me, my Queen, as I arrived.

The victory arches and towering columns came

Toward me, the shining Colosseum embraced me,

350 A spirit of creation and high art

Enclosed me in a serene wonderland!

I'd never known the power of the arts.

The church that raised me hates the charms of the senses,

Suffers no image, only bodiless words. And

What joy to enter those churches! Music cascaded

From Heaven, figures sprang in fullness from walls

And ceilings: the Annunciation, the birth of

Our Lord, the blessed Virgin, the Three in One come  
 Among us, and the glorious Transfiguration.  
 360 The Pope in splendor celebrated High Mass  
 And blessed the people. What then is kings' gold?  
 He only is divine, His house a Kingdom  
 Of Heaven, for these forms are not of this world.

MARY. Oh, spare me! Do not spread life's carpet before me.  
 I am a prisoner deep in wretchedness.

MORTIMER. I too was one. The prison doors sprang open,  
 My spirit felt itself free, hailed life's new day.  
 I cursed stale books, I swore to wreath my temples  
 And dedicate myself to joyful things.  
 370 Noble Scots, lively Frenchmen brought me to  
 Your worthy uncle, Cardinal Guise. What a man!  
 The model of a king's priest, true Prince of the Church.

MARY. You saw him? Guide of my young years! Oh, say!  
 He thinks of me? Is still a rock of the Church?

MORTIMER. Graciously he became my teacher, showed me  
 That reason misleads, eyes must see, and that the  
 Faithful require a visible Head of the Church.  
 My childish notions vanished under his teaching  
 And his persuasion. I abandoned my error,  
 380 I believed, came back into the fold of the Church.

MARY. Thus you are one of thousands whom he moved by  
 His speaking, like the Preacher on the Mount,<sup>22</sup>  
 And whom he led to their eternal salvation.

MORTIMER. When he was called back to France, he sent me to Reims,  
 Where Jesuits trained priests and sent them to England.<sup>23</sup>  
 I met the exiles Morgan and Lesley, learned  
 Bishop of Ross, there,<sup>24</sup> in whose parlor I  
 Then saw a woman's portrait of such charm,  
 So gripping I could not contain my feelings.  
 390 The Bishop said: "Full well might you be touched.  
 The loveliest of women is the most pitiful.  
 She suffers for our faith—in your very country."

MARY. An honest man! His constant friendship in  
 Misfortune shows me I have not yet lost all.

MORTIMER. He told me of your martyrdom, of your enemies'  
 Bloodlust, of your descent from Henry Tudor,  
 Your claim more strong than that false queen's, a bastard  
 Whom Henry himself denied. I consulted,  
 Took counsel in law and heraldry. All things  
 Confirmed: Your just right to England is your injustice.  
 The Realm belongs to you, is your possession,  
 Where, guiltless, you are held a prisoner.

MARY. Wretched right! The one source of all my sorrow!

MORTIMER. I learned you'd been removed from Talbot's castle,  
 Delivered to my uncle. I saw Heaven's  
 Rescue in this, fate's call to lend you my arm  
 And free you. All agree. The Cardinal gives me  
 His blessing, teaches me the arts of disguise.  
 I turn toward home and land here ten days ago. (*He pauses.*)  
 I saw you, Lady, you yourself, no portrait.  
 A treasure locked here in this castle—  
 No prison, this, instead a hall of the gods,  
 More brilliant than the royal court of England.  
 Happy the man who breathes this air with you!  
 Quite right that she should keep you hidden from view!  
 England's youth would all rise up, insurrection  
 Sweep through the land, should Britons see their Queen.

MARY. Happy is she, should they see her with your eyes!

MORTIMER. Were they, like me, witness to your pain, your patience,  
 Composure before unworthy things. A queen still,  
 You go forth from all trials, your beauty still brilliant.  
 Deprived of all things that make our lives sweet,  
 You yet live bathed always in light and life.  
 Just to behold you is torment and delight!  
 But let me not delay yet longer. One must  
 Decide, for danger presses. I'll not conceal—

MARY. Judgment has fallen? I am able to hear it.

MORTIMER. Has fallen. Forty-two lords have found you guilty.  
 Both the Lords and the Commons, London, too,  
 Demand a speedy execution, only  
 The Queen delays, a ruse so others will force her—

Not out of pity or intention to spare you.

MARY (*composed*). Sir Mortimer, you bring me no surprise,

No shock. I've long expected this outcome.

I know my judges. Given wrongs I have suffered,

One cannot set me free. I know what they aim for.

They'll keep me in perpetual prison, bury

My claim to justice and my rightful revenge,

Along with me, in prison's eternal night.

440 MORTIMER. They'll not stop there, my Lady. Tyranny does its

Work thoroughly. As long as *you* live, the fear

Of England's Queen lives on. No prison can bury

You deep enough. Your death alone saves her throne.

MARY. She'd dare lay *my* crowned head down on the block?

MORTIMER. She *will* dare. Do not doubt it.

MARY.

She would so blot

Her majesty and that of all Europe's kings?

Does she not fear revenge exacted by France?

MORTIMER. She'll soon conclude an endless peace with France.

She's offered the Duke of Anjou hand and throne.<sup>25</sup>

450 MARY. The King of Spain will not declare war?

MORTIMER.

She

Does not fear a whole world at war as long

As she can count on peace at home—with her people.

MARY. She'd offer such a spectacle to Britons?

MORTIMER. Britons, my Lady, have seen lately more

Than one fair woman leave the throne for the scaffold.

Elizabeth's own mother went that way

And Catherine Howard and young Lady Jane Grey.<sup>26</sup>

MARY (*after a pause*). Noble concern for me deceives you, Mortimer.

I fear no scaffold. Other means, more quiet,

460 Can assure England's Queen peace from my claims.

A murderer is hired before a headsman's found.

*That's* what I fear. I never set a wine glass

To my lips but I think it spiced with her love.

MORTIMER. Secret nor open murder shall succeed here.

For twelve young noblemen of the land in my

Alliance swore this morning on the Host

To lead you from this castle by force of arms.  
 Count Aubespine, French ambassador, knows of our vow  
 And offers help. We gather in his palace.

470 MARY. I tremble, sir, and not for pleasure. Do  
 You know what you are doing? Babington's  
 And Tichbourne's bloody heads hoist up on pikes  
 On London Bridge—do they not warn you?<sup>27</sup> Not  
 The countless others daring death like them?  
 Who only made my chains the heavier? Flee,  
 Misguided boy. Flee while there is still time. If  
 The sharp-eyed Burghley does not know of you,  
 Has not already set a traitor among you.  
 Flee from this realm! No happy man has ever  
 480 Saved Mary Stuart.

MORTIMER.               Neither Babington's  
 Nor Tichbourne's bloody head hoist up on pikes  
 On London Bridge, nor countless others daring  
 Death can deter me. Did they not all find  
 Eternal fame? My joy is dying to save you.

MARY. In vain! No force nor ruse can save me. No help.  
 The foe is ever watchful, power is his.  
 Not Paulet, not his watchmen—no!—all England  
 Hovers, keeps watch and guards my prison's gates.  
 Elizabeth alone, of her free will,  
 490 Can open them for me.

MORTIMER.               Never hope that!

MARY. One man there is yet able to do so.

MORTIMER.                               Name him!  
 Name him!

MARY.               Earl Leicester.

MORTIMER (*stepping back, astonished*). Leicester! Earl Leicester! Your  
 Bloodiest pursuer, favorite of Elizabeth—

MARY. If I am to be rescued, then by him.  
 Go to him. Tell him all. As proof that I sent you,  
 Give him this letter with my likeness enclosed.

(*She takes a paper from her bosom; Mortimer hesitates.*)



Do take it. I've long carried it—your uncle  
Blocked every path. My angel sent you to me—

MORTIMER. My Queen, this riddle—

MARY. Earl Leicester will solve it.

500 If you trust him, he will trust you. — Who's coming?

KENNEDY (*entering hurriedly*). Sir Paulet with a lord from Court.

MORTIMER. Lord Burghley.

Prepare yourself, Queen! Steel your heart for what he brings.

(*He goes out by a side door; Kennedy follows.*)

## Scene Seven

*Mary. Baron Burghley, Lord High Treasurer of England. Knight  
Paulet.*

PAULET. Today you wished for certainty of your fate.

That my Lord Burghley brings you. Bear it with patience.

MARY. With dignity of innocence, I hope.

BURGHLEY. I come as emissary of the court.

MARY. Lord Burghley lent the court his mind. Dutifully

He now comes to me to lend it his mouth.

BURGHLEY. You speak as if you knew the verdict already.

510 MARY. Lord Burghley brings it. Therefore it is known.

To business, sir.

BURGHLEY. You have submitted yourself to

The court of two and forty lords, my Lady—

MARY. Forgive me that I break in here at the start.

"Submitted myself," I hear you say? No wise

Could I submit, could I so much concede of

My rank, my people's worth, and my son's,<sup>28</sup> and

The worth of all the princes of this world.

English law orders and prescribes that one

Accused be tried by jury of his peers.

520 What man of that tribunal was my peer?

My peers are kings, kings only.

BURGHLEY. You heard the articles

Of accusation read you, spoke to the

Point in court—

MARY. I let myself be misled  
By Hatton's bad faith. Believing my grounds good and  
For honor's sake I heard the accusation  
And showed its bad grounds. This I did in respect of  
The person of the lords and not of their office,  
Which I reject.

BURGHLEY. That you accept or reject them  
Is a formality, my Lady, no more,  
530 And cannot hamper the proceedings of court.  
You breathe the air of England, enjoy protection  
Of England's laws, are subject to its justice.

MARY. I breathe the air of an English prison. Is that  
Protection of the laws? I hardly know  
English law, never have consented to keep it.  
I am no citizen of this realm but  
Queen of another.

BURGHLEY. Holding license to sow  
Dissension here among us? What then if  
The sword of justice could not reach a royal  
540 Stranger any more than a poor man's bare head?

MARY. I have no wish to escape a reckoning;  
I take exception only to my judges.

BURGHLEY. Your judges? Are they outcasts? Barkers? Shop boys?  
Are they not men of the first order, truthful  
And independent, above bribery and fear?  
The men who rule a noble people, free  
And just, whose names alone suffice to banish  
Doubt and suspicion? At their head the Primate  
Of Canterbury, the wise Talbot, who keeps the  
550 Great Seal,<sup>29</sup> and Howard, our Lord High Admiral?  
Say! Could the ruler over England do better  
Than choose the noblest and appoint them judges  
Of a dispute of royalty? Could base  
Motives unite forty such men in one verdict?

MARY (*after a silence*).

I hear, astonished, the pure force of that mouth,

Ever for me a harbinger of doom.

How shall I, untaught woman, take up the challenge

A speaker of such eloquence throws down?

560

Fine! Were these lords as you describe them, I'd

Fall silent, my cause lost, should they find me guilty.

I see these men, whose names are meant to crush me,

Play roles quite different in the history of England.

I see high noblemen play seraglio slave to

The sultan's moods of Henry Tudor, my uncle.

I see both the Lords and the biddable Commons

Make laws, revoke them, bind and loose wedlock to

King's orders, disown princes' daughters today, brand

Them bastards, and then crown them queen, come the morrow.

I see these worthy peers change their confession

570

*Four* times precisely, under *four* reigns.<sup>30</sup>

BURGHLEY. You call yourself a stranger to England's laws,

England's misfortunes are no stranger to you.

MARY. I would be just toward you, my Lord High Treasurer,

Be you no less so toward me. They say you

Are well-intentioned toward the State, toward your Queen,

Are incorruptible, watchful and tireless.

I believe it. You are ruled alone by interests

Of country and sovereign. For that reason, beware! Let

Interests of state not seem like justice to you.

580

I doubt not there are noble men beside you

Among my judges; they are *Protestants*;

Defending England's welfare, they pass judgment

Upon me, Queen of Scotland and a Catholic.

Briton nor Scot is ever just toward the other.

That is proverbial. Neither may bear witness

Against the other. Ancient custom is honored!

Nature herself threw them together on

A slender plank in the sea, said, "Fight it out!"

The narrow Tweed presents too thin a boundary.

590

No foes press England whom Scots do not join,

On civil war in Scotland England heaps tinder.

Hatred will not die until *one* Parliament

Joins them, a single scepter rules this Island.

BURGHLEY. A Stuart is to bring this joy to the Realm?

MARY. Should I deny it? I admit: I dreamt of

Uniting both folk in the shade of the olive.

I never dreamt that I'd be sacrificed to

Their ancient hatred. Like my ancestor Richmond,

I wished to entwine the two kingdoms like roses.<sup>31</sup>

600 BURGHLEY. You chose a crooked path to reach this end,

Gaining the throne through flames of civil war.

MARY. Never did I want that, by all that is holy!

When did I want that? Tell me! Where are the proofs?

BURGHLEY. I did not come here to dispute. It is proven.

Forty against two have concluded you broke

The Act of last year and are subject to justice.<sup>32</sup>

That law provides: "If tumult arise in the Kingdom

To the advantage and in name of one who

Asserts rights to the Crown, that person shall be

610 Arraigned and if found guilty, put to death."

It being proven—

MARY. My Lord Burghley! I

Do not doubt that a measure framed expressly

For *me*, to ruin me, lets itself be applied.

Pity the victim when one same hand made law,

Then passes judgment. Do you deny, my Lord, that

This law was thought up to undo me?

BURGHLEY. Rather,

To warn you. It's *you* have made it into a trap.

You saw the abyss before you and plunged in. You

Were one with Babington, the traitor, and

620 His henchmen, knew of everything, directed

The plot from prison.

MARY. When did I do that?

Produce the proofs.

BURGHLEY. All these were shown you in court.

MARY. Copies I saw! And in an unknown hand!

Let proof be brought that I dictated those notes

And in the form in which they were read aloud.

BURGHLEY. That Babington, before he died, attested  
Them in the form he had received.

MARY. And why  
Was he not brought before me? He was bustled  
Out of the world beforehand. Why the great haste?

630 BURGHLEY. Your two scribes, Curle and Nau, assert on oath  
They wrote exactly as you told them to do.<sup>33</sup>

MARY. One damns me on the witness of my servants?  
Men who, betraying me, betray their duty?

BURGHLEY. You, too, declared the Scot Curle honest and true.

MARY. As such I knew him. Only danger tests virtue.

He thought to save himself, with scant harm to me.

BURGHLEY. He swore it freely.

MARY. Not to my face! What, sir?

Those witnesses live yet! Let them be brought  
Before me, let both testify to my face!  
640 I know from Talbot, once my keeper, of a  
New measure passed providing that accuser  
Meet accused face to face. Is it not so,  
Sir Paulet? I know you an honest man.  
In England there is such a law?

PAULET. There is such, Lady. That is law among us.

I must speak truth.

MARY. How now, my Lord? If one  
Is strict where English law's against me, may one  
Evade a law turned in my favor? An answer!  
Wherefore was Babington not brought before me  
650 According to law? Why not both my scribes,  
Who are yet living?

BURGHLEY. Not alone your collusion  
With Babington—

MARY. Alone that. That alone puts me to the law,  
That charge alone am I obliged to defeat.

BURGHLEY. It's proven you had contact with the Spanish  
Ambassador—

MARY (*heated*). But you evade me, my Lord!

BURGHLEY. —and that you schemed to bring down our land's religion,

You stirred up all the kings in Europe against us.

MARY. And if I did? I did not. But if I did?

660 My Lord! I am held here against all law  
Of nations. A suppliant, I entered here,  
Requiring sacred hospitality,  
Asking protection of a queen of my kin.  
They seized me, shackled me— Just tell me this!  
Is my conscience bound to this state? Have I duties  
Toward England? It is my most sacred right  
To struggle against such bonds, meet force with force,  
To raise all states in Europe to my defense.  
670 All that is accepted, right and honest in war—  
That I may do. Not murder. Pride and conscience  
Forbid that. Murder dishonors me—dishonors,  
Not damns me, does not subject me to justice.  
Of justice there can be no question between  
England and me. Force is our sole resort.

BURGHLEY (*with meaning*).

Do not presume the awful rights of raw power,  
My Lady. For they little favor a prisoner.

MARY. Quite right. I am the weak one, she the strong.

680 So be it. Let her use her power, let  
Her kill me, bring such victim to her safety.  
But let her then confess that she has used  
Force and not justice. Let no claim noise abroad,  
Fooling the world, that it's a lawful sword  
She wields to rid herself of her hated foe!  
Murder me—that she can, but not judge me.  
She cleanse her face of the paints of virtue's charade  
And show herself to the world just as she is made.  
(*She goes off.*)

## Scene Eight

*Burghley. Paulet.*

BURGHLEY. She spites us, will spite us until she reaches  
 The scaffold steps. She will not let us break her.  
 Was she surprised to hear the verdict? Did you  
 See her face change? She has no need of our pity.  
 She knows the doubts of England's Queen and our  
 Fears give her courage.

PAULET. This defiance will vanish  
 When it has lost its grounds. We've not proceeded  
 Faultlessly here, sir, if I may say so.  
 Tichbourne and Babington ought to have been brought  
 Before her, and her scribes.

BURGHLEY (*quickly*). Oh, no! One dared not!  
 Her influence and the force of woman's tears  
 Are too great. Curle, obliged to speak against  
 Her to her face, would retract his confession—

PAULET. And England's foes will fill the world with rumors  
 And make a shameless crime of her solemn trial.

BURGHLEY. Exactly what our Queen fears. Had this trouble-  
 Maker but died before she set foot in England!

PAULET. Amen to that!

BURGHLEY. Or sickness in prison snatched  
 Her away!

PAULET. That had spared us much.

BURGHLEY. Or pure chance  
 Removed her. — They'd still call us murderers though.

PAULET. True. Men will always think whatever they please.

BURGHLEY. No one could prove it. It would raise less noise—

PAULET. Let it! One fears not loud but just reproach.

BURGHLEY. Why even holy justice does not escape blame.

The sword of justice, ornament in a man's hand,

Abhorrent wielded by a woman, becomes

Abomination used *against* a woman.

The world believes woman never just toward woman.

We judges spoke our conscience in vain. Mercy is a

King's right. She dare not let the law run its course.

PAULET. The Lady then—

BURGHLEY (*quickly*). Should live? No! Not at all!

She cannot live. Just that is what our Queen fears.

I read her struggle in her eyes. She'll not speak;

Her eyes ask: Is there none among my servants

To spare me the choice: or fear and trembling on

My throne or royal kin put to the knife?

PAULET. Such is necessity. It's not to be changed.

BURGHLEY. It would be changed were her servants attentive.

PAULET. Attentive!

BURGHLEY. Acting on a silent charge.

PAULET. A silent charge!

BURGHLEY. Not keeping a poisonous snake

Like treasure.

PAULET (*with meaning*). Good name is a treasure like none.

One guards the Queen's unspotted name like gold.

BURGHLEY. Back at the time one took the Lady from Shrewsbury,

Confided her to Paulet's keeping, the thought was—

PAULET. The thought, I hope, was to entrust the hardest

Task to the cleanest hands. By God! I'd have never

Taken this odious office, did I not think it

Required the best man in all England. Let me

Not think it owed to other than my good name.

BURGHLEY. One spreads abroad she is failing, lets her become

More and more sick, then vanish in all stillness—

Thus she will die in the memory of men—

And your name is ever spotless.

PAULET. Not my conscience.

BURGHLEY. If you'll not lend your own hand, just not block—

PAULET (*interrupts*). Under my roof no murderer shall come near her.

My house gods keep her, her head's sacred to me.

That of the Queen of England is no more so.

You are the judges! So judge! Break the staff!

And when the time comes, let your workmen with axe and

Saw enter and erect the scaffold. Sheriff

And headsman shall find my castle's gates open.



She's given me to keep safe. Safe I shall keep her.  
No evil shall she do, and no evil reach her.

*(They go off.)*



Elizabeth I of England, ca. 1580, oil on panel. English School. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:English\\_School\\_Elizabeth\\_I\\_of\\_England\\_c.\\_1580.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:English_School_Elizabeth_I_of_England_c._1580.jpg)

# Act Two

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*The Palace of Westminster*

## Scene One

*Earl Kent and Sir William Davison meet.*

750      DAVISON. Is that you, Lord Kent? Back from the lists so soon?  
            The festival's done?  
KENT.                      Were you not at the games?  
DAVISON. I could not get away.  
KENT.                      A brilliant spectacle!  
            A feat of good taste and good manners. Just listen!  
            A virginal stronghold of Beauty is  
            Assaulted by Desire. Lord Marshal, Chief Judge,  
            The Seneschal and other knights of the Queen  
            Defend it. France's cavaliers attack.  
            A Herald in a madrigal had called out  
            The fortress, the Chancellor answered from the wall.  
760      Artillery now comes into play, fires bouquets and perfumes.  
            In vain! The storm repulsed, Desire must withdraw.  
DAVISON. An evil augury for the French suit, I fear.  
KENT. Oh, only jest. The fort will yield in the end.  
DAVISON. You think so? I doubt it.  
KENT.                      The difficult points are  
            Settled, admitted all: Monsieur<sup>34</sup> will worship  
            In a closed chapel, honor our Church, defend it  
            Abroad. Had you but seen how all men rejoiced!

Eternal fear in this Kingdom is that she  
 Die without issue and this Stuart, a Catholic,  
 Succeed her.

770

DAVISON. England need fear such a succession  
 No longer. *She* goes into the bridal chamber,  
 My Lady Mary to the steps of the scaffold.  
 KENT. The Queen is coming!

## Scene Two

*As above. Elizabeth, escorted by Leicester. Count Aubespine,  
 Bellievre, Earl Shrewsbury, Lord Burghley, with other French and  
 English Lords, enter.*

ELIZABETH (*to Aubespine*). Count! I do lament  
 These noble lords, whom gallant zeal has brought us  
 Across the waters, that they not find the courtly  
 Glories of Saint Germain<sup>35</sup> here at my Court.  
 Magnificent feasts of the gods the Queen Mother  
 Of France<sup>36</sup> invents are all beyond me. A  
 Contented, mannerly folk thronging my litter  
 Wherever I appear—this spectacle I  
 Can offer strangers' gaze with some pride. Brilliance  
 Of noble damsels all abloom in Catherine's  
 Gardens of beauty simply would eclipse my  
 Less glorious deserts along with their author.  
 AUBESPINE. Westminster's court shows but *one* lady, to the  
 Stranger's surprise, but all that pleases in  
 The charming sex is gathered up in this *one*.  
 BELLIEVRE. Exalted Majesty of England, grant  
 That we take leave, to delight Monsieur, our royal  
 Lord, with the much-desired news. His heart's impatience  
 Has driven him from Paris. He awaits  
 The messengers of his good fortune in Amiens,  
 And he has sent his posts as far as Calais  
 To bring acceptance that your royal mouth speaks  
 With lightning speed to his ecstatic ear.

780

790

ELIZABETH. Count Bellievre, do not press me. It is not time, I  
Repeat, to light the wedding torch. A cloud  
Hangs over England, mourning would become me  
Far more than blinding bridal display. A painful  
800 Blow is about to strike my heart and my House.

BELLIEVRE. A promise to be honored in happier times, then.

ELIZABETH. Kings are the slaves of their rank, never free  
To follow their heart. Ever have I wished  
To die unmarried, have inscribed on my tomb:  
"Here lies the virgin Queen." That had been fame!  
My subjects will have none of it. They only  
Think of when I am gone. Not enough that *now*  
Blessing lies on this land. I'm taxed with their future.  
My virgin freedom I'm to give for my people,  
810 A lord and master they would force on me, too.  
He will make clear that I am a mere woman,  
And I thought I'd ruled like a man and a king.  
I understand God is not served when one  
Departs from Nature's order. All praise to those  
Before me who opened cloisters, restored whole thousands  
To Nature's duties.<sup>37</sup> But a queen who does  
Not spend her days in idle reflection, rather  
Takes up the heaviest duties undiscouraged—  
Let *her* be excepted from the natural purpose  
820 That makes one half our kind submit to the other.

AUBESPINE. With every virtue glorified on your throne,  
My Queen, you need but light the way of the sex  
Of which you are the glory by offering it  
A model of its signal deserts. To be sure,  
There lives no man on earth who is worthy of  
Your bringing him the sacrifice of your freedom.  
But if high birth, high rank, heroic virtues  
And manly beauty should make a mortal worth  
That honor—

ELIZABETH. There's no doubt, Ambassador,  
830 That marriage to a royal son of France does  
Me honor! I confess most frankly if it

Must be, if I *must* yield to my people's insistence,  
 Which, as I fear, will prove yet stronger than I am,  
 I know no prince in Europe whom I would give  
 My greatest treasure, freedom, with less reluctance.  
 Let this confession be enough for you.

BELLIEVRE. It is the *loveliest* of hopes but only

A *hope*. My Lord would wish more—

ELIZABETH.

What would he wish?

(*She draws a ring from her finger and contemplates it.*)

In nothing the queen exceeds the commoner's wife!

840

One and the same sign points to one same duty,

And one same servitude. A ring makes a marriage.

It's rings, too, that make chains. Present His Highness

This gift. It is no chain yet, does not bind me,

But it can yet become a link that does bind.

BELLIEVRE (*kneeling to receive the ring*).

In his name, great Queen, I receive this gift

And press the kiss of homage on my Queen's hand.

ELIZABETH (*to Earl Leicester, at whom she gazed throughout this last speech*).

My Lord, permit me!

(*She removes his blue sash<sup>38</sup> and drapes it on Bellievre.*)

Drape this ornament

About His Highness as I drape you here and

Receive you into the duties of my Order.

850

*Honny soit qui mal y pense!* All suspicion

Between our nations vanish, let a sash

Of trust embrace the Crowns of France and Britain!

AUBESPINE. Great Queen, this is a day of joy for all.

May no afflicted soul on this Island feel pain!

Mercy shines on your brow. Oh, that a glimmer

Of its joyful light fall upon an unhappy

Princess of equal interest to both Britain

And France—

ELIZABETH. No more, Count. Let us not mix two

Affairs that can in no way be related.

860

If France desires alliance with me in earnest,

It must take part in every concern of mine.

It cannot be the friend of my foe—

AUBESPINE. Unworthy

In your eyes, too, were it, should it forget in  
This bond an unhappy soul of its confession  
And widow of its king.<sup>39</sup> Mere honor, human  
Feeling—

ELIZABETH. In this sense I know how to value  
Its plea. France answers to its duty of friendship.  
It shall be granted me to act as a queen.

*(She bows to the French Lords, who withdraw respectfully with the  
other Lords.)*

## Scene Three

*Elizabeth. Leicester. Burghley. Talbot.*

*The Queen takes her seat.*

BURGHLEY. Most glorious Queen! Today you answer the wishes

870

Of all your people. Now at last we can  
Enjoy the blessed days you grant us, no longer  
Staring into a stormy future. But one  
Thing more would all demand. Grant this and today  
Has founded England's welfare for all time.

ELIZABETH. What more do my people want? Tell me, my Lord.

BURGHLEY. They

Demand the head of Mary Stuart. If you  
Would give them precious freedom, the light of Truth,  
*She* must no longer be. If we are not to  
Fear for your life, your foe must perish. You know  
Not all our Britons think alike. Full many  
Pay secret tribute to Roman idolatry.  
Sworn to the brothers Lorraine,<sup>40</sup> they have vowed you  
War to the death. The Bishop's seat at Reims is  
Their arsenal. There they forge hot thunderbolts,  
Teach regicide and send out missions, fanatics

880

In all kinds of disguise. Three times they've attempted  
Your life. They hatch more of their likes in this pit.

At Fotheringhay sits the Ate<sup>41</sup> of this war,  
Enflaming the Realm with the torch of love.

890 She flatters youths with hope, to certain destruction.  
The lure is to free her, to replace you their purpose.  
Lorraine believes you a usurper, crowned by chance.  
They led the foolish Mary to call herself queen.  
There'll be no peace with her, none with her House!  
Or you must strike the blow or you must receive it.  
Her life is death to you, her death your life!

ELIZABETH. My Lord, yours is a dismal office. I know  
Your chaste zeal, know the solid wisdom you speak.  
This wisdom, though, demands blood, which I loathe.  
900 Find milder counsel. Lord Shrewsbury, what say you?

TALBOT. You justly praise the zeal inspiring loyal  
Burghley's breast. I, though far less eloquent,  
Nurture a heart no less true. Long live my Queen,  
The joy of her folk, long live the peace that she brings us!  
This Island has not seen such days since ruled  
By its own princes. May it not redeem its  
Good fortune at the price of its good name.  
May Talbot's eyes be closed if ever this be!

ELIZABETH. God save us if we ever blot our good name!

910 TALBOT. You then will think of other means of saving  
The Realm. For executing Mary Stuart  
Is no lawful means. You cannot pronounce  
Judgment against one who is not your subject,  
As she is not.

ELIZABETH. My Council of State then  
Is wrong, and wrong my Parliament and the law courts  
Of England, which all recognized this right—

TALBOT. Vote of majority is no proof of justice.  
England is not the world, your Parliament  
No union of all humankind. Nor is  
920 Present-day England to be our England in future  
As it is not the England of the past.



As inclination rises, then falls, so judgment,  
 Too, rises and falls, a wandering wave on the sea.  
 Do not claim you must yield to what is needful,  
 To your people's clamor. Every moment you  
 Can prove your will free. But try it. Declare  
 That you loathe blood, *wish* to see your sister saved.  
 Show those of different counsel truth of king's anger.  
 Necessity you'll see vanish, justice become  
 Injustice. *You* must judge, *you* only. You  
 Cannot lean on this broken reed. Heed your goodness.  
 God laid no rigor in a woman's heart,  
 Our Forebears, who let women rule, too, decreed  
 That rigor be no virtue among *our* kings.

ELIZABETH. Lord Shrewsbury gives warm counsel for my foe.

I would hear counsel in my favor instead.

TALBOT. One granted *her* no counsel, no one dared speak

In her behalf, expose himself to your wrath.  
 Grant me, an old man on the brink of the grave  
 Whom earthly hope no longer seduces, right to  
 Protect her now she is abandoned. Let  
 One not say passion and self-seeking spoke  
 Loudly in your State Council, mercy was silent.  
 The world entire unites in league against her,  
 And you yourself have never seen her face.  
 Nothing in your heart speaks for this stranger.  
 I do not speak here in defense of her guilt.

They say she had her husband murdered. Proven  
 Is that she wed the murderer—a grave crime!

These things took place in dark times—civil war.  
 Beset by hostile vassals, in her weakness  
 She threw herself into a bold man's strong arms.  
 Who knows what artful force had mastered her?  
 For woman is but weak and easily broken.

ELIZABETH. Woman is not weak. There are strong souls among us.

I'll not hear weakness spoken of in my presence.

TALBOT. Ill fortune served you as a hard school. You saw

No far-away throne, but a grave at your feet.

- At Woodstock, in the Tower you were brought up  
 960 In sorrow, without flatterers.<sup>42</sup> Far from the world,  
 You learned reflection, insight, life's true goods.  
*She*, still a child, was brought to France, to the court  
 Of thoughtless pleasure and frivolity,  
 Dazzled by brilliant vice and swept toward ruin.  
 She had received the idle gift of beauty,  
 She outshone all her kind in rank and figure—
- ELIZABETH. Come to yourself, Lord Shrewsbury! We sit in Council.  
 What charms must they be to enflame an old man!  
 Lord Leicester, you alone are silent? What  
 970 Makes *him* so eloquent, does it strike *you* dumb?
- LEICESTER. Surprise dumbfounds me, Queen. One fills your ear  
 With horrors, tales that terrify the riffraff  
 Of London's back lanes make their way into your  
 State Council, occupy the minds of grave men.  
 Amazement seizes me that the landless Queen  
 Of Scotland, powerless to keep her own throne,  
 Derision of her vassals, dregs of her land,  
 Should terrify you now she is in prison!  
 What makes her so frightful? That she claims your realm? That  
 980 The House of Guise will not know you as Queen?  
 Can their dispute reach a right yours from birth?  
 Confirmed by act of Parliament? Is *she*  
 Not silently refused by Henry's last will?  
 Will England, content in this new Light, now throw  
 Itself into a papist's arms, desert its  
 Adored Queen for the one who murdered Darnley?  
 What do they want, these men who torment you, yet  
 Alive, with this heir? Cannot marry you soon  
 Enough to save both Church and Kingdom from danger?  
 990 Are you not still in the first bloom of youth?  
 Does she not fade daily into the grave?  
 By God! I hope you tread that grave yet many  
 A year without having to cast her into it.
- BURGHLEY. Lord Leicester has not always judged things so.

LEICESTER. It's true, before the *court* I voted her death.

In Council I say otherwise. We speak

Here not of justice but of our advantage.

Is now the time to fear her? France, her sole shield,

Deserts her, now that you would give the king's son

1000 Your hand and hope of new heirs blooms in the land.

Why kill her? She *is* dead! Contempt is true death.

Beware lest pity bring her back to life!

My counsel: Let the sentence stand in full force.

She live, but under the keen blade of the axe.

An arm raised in her behalf and the axe falls.

ELIZABETH (*rising*). My Lords, I thank you. I have heard your counsel.

With God's help, who lights kings' way on this earth,

I shall consider and choose what seems best.

## Scene Four

*As above. Knight Paulet with Mortimer.*

ELIZABETH. Here's Amias Paulet. What do you bring, sir?

1010 PAULET. My glorious Queen, my nephew, newly returned from

Far travels, throws himself at your feet and swears

Allegiance. Pray receive him into your favor.

MORTIMER (*dropping to one knee*).

Long live my royal Lady, crowned in glory!

ELIZABETH. Stand up. I welcome you in England, sir.

You have made the Grand Tour, crossed France to Rome,

And stopped at Reims. What are our foes plotting now?

MORTIMER. Confusion fog their minds and turn their arrows

Back on their bowmen!

ELIZABETH. You saw Morgan and Ross?<sup>43</sup>

MORTIMER. I met all Scottish exiles plotting against us

1020 At Reims and gained their trust.

PAULET. They gave him letters

In cipher for the Scottish Queen. He has

Delivered them all into *our* hands, my Queen.

ELIZABETH. And what are they preparing for us now?

MORTIMER. They were all thunderstruck that France forsakes them

And binds itself to England. They put their hopes now  
In Spain.

ELIZABETH. As Walsingham has written me.<sup>44</sup>

MORTIMER. A bull against you, hurled from Rome by the Pope,

Arrived at Reims just as I left. The next ship  
Brings it to England.<sup>45</sup>

LEICESTER. England fears such no longer.

1030 BURGHLEY. A fearful weapon in fanatics' hands.

ELIZABETH (*with a searching look at Mortimer*).

At Reims, they say, you studied and converted?

MORTIMER. I'll not deny that I gave myself the air.

My great desire to serve you went so far!

ELIZABETH (*to Paulet, who presents papers*).

What's this?

PAULET. A letter from the Queen of Scotland.

BURGHLEY (*reaching for the letter*). Give it to me.

PAULET (*giving the letter to the Queen*).

Pardon, my Lord High Treasurer! Into the Queen's  
Own hands. These are my orders. She always says  
That I am her foe. I am not. I oppose  
Only her vices. What agrees with my duties  
1040 I gladly render her.

(*While the Queen reads the letter, Mortimer and Leicester speak  
secretly.*)<sup>46</sup>

BURGHLEY (*to Paulet*). What's in that letter?

Complaints that should be spared the Queen's soft heart.

PAULET. That she has told me. She begs as a great favor

To see the Queen face to face.

BURGHLEY (*quickly*). Not on my life!

TALBOT. Why not? She asks for nothing unlawful.

BURGHLEY. The favor of the Queen's face she has undone

As one who plotted murder. No true and faithful  
Counsel would give such treasonous advice.

TALBOT. If our Queen wishes to oblige her, would

You hamper such a merciful impulse?

1050 BURGHLEY. She is condemned. Her head is under the axe.

It ill becomes Her Majesty to see  
A head condemned to death. And judgment cannot  
Be carried out. The royal presence brings mercy—

ELIZABETH (*having read the letter, drying her tears*).

Oh, what is man? What earthly happiness?  
How far this queen has fallen, who set out  
With proud hopes, was called to the oldest throne  
In Christendom, and thought to wear three crowns!<sup>147</sup>  
How different her words from when she assumed

1060 The arms of England and let herself be called  
Queen of the British Isles!<sup>148</sup> Your pardon, my Lords.  
Sorrow and sadness seize me, seeing earthly  
Things stand no faster, feeling human fate,  
The terrifying, brush just past *my* head.

TALBOT. Oh, merciful Queen, God has touched your heart.  
Obey this heavenly urging! Gravely she has  
Atoned a grave crime. Let her trials now end!  
Give her your hand, descend, a light in her darkness.

BURGHLEY. Stand fast, great Queen. Let no grand feeling mislead you.  
Do not rob yourself of your freedom to do  
1070 What must be. Pardon her you *cannot*, nor save her.  
Do not invite blame that you looked in triumph  
Upon your victim, feasted on the sight.

LEICESTER. Let's keep ourselves in proper bounds, my Lords.  
The Queen has no need of our wisdom to choose  
The worthiest course. Meeting of the two queens  
Is unrelated to proceedings at court.  
Mary's condemned by England's law, not the Queen's will.  
Becoming to Elizabeth's great soul  
Is that she follow urgings of her heart,  
1080 So far the law keeps to its proper course.

ELIZABETH. Go now, my Lords. Leave us to find means, duly  
To join requirements mercy makes of us  
With what necessity imposes upon us.  
Now take your leave.

(The Lords go off. She calls Mortimer back from the threshold.)

Sir Mortimer! One word!

## Scene Five

*Elizabeth. Mortimer.*

ELIZABETH (*having measured him with her gaze*).

You showed bold courage and rare self-restraint for  
Your years. A man who masters arts of deception  
So young matures soon, shortens his probation.  
Destiny calls you to a grand career.  
*I prophesy it of you and, to your*

1090 Good fortune, I can make my prophecy come true.

MORTIMER. Exalted Mistress, what I am and can do  
Is dedicated to your service only.

ELIZABETH. You, who have come to know the enemies of England,  
Know, too, their fierce hate cannot be reconciled,  
Nor can their murderous projects be exhausted.  
Almighty God has shielded me until now, but  
The crown on my head trembles while she lives,  
Giving fanatics a pretext, feeding their hopes.

MORTIMER. She lives no longer once you give the order.

1100 ELIZABETH. I believed that once and I have gotten no further.

I wanted to let the law act and keep  
My hands clean. Judgment has been passed. What have  
I gained? A verdict must be executed.  
And *I* must give the order. Mine is the deed.  
It's I must own it. There's no saving appearance.

MORTIMER. What harm appearance where the cause is just?

ELIZABETH. How little you know the world, Knight!

1110 What one *appears* has everyone for a judge,  
What one *is* has none. Of my justice I'll  
Persuade no one. My part in this must be doubtful.  
Darkness alone protects so double a deed.

Most foolish of all is to own to a thing.

One does not lose what one does not give away.

MORTIMER (*feeling his way*).

The best thing then would be—

ELIZABETH (*swiftly*). Of course it would!

My guardian angel speaks through you. Go on!

You grasp the matter, unlike Paulet, your uncle.

MORTIMER (*startled*). You put it to the Knight?

ELIZABETH. To my great regret.

MORTIMER. Forgive the old man. Age makes him uncertain.

Such daring demands youth.

ELIZABETH (*quickly*). From you I may—

1120 MORTIMER. I lend you my hand. Save your name as you're able—

ELIZABETH. If you should wake me with the news one morning:

The Stuart Queen has gone out of this life—

MORTIMER. Count on me.

ELIZABETH. When shall I sleep peacefully again?

MORTIMER. Let the next new moon bring you peace.

ELIZABETH. Farewell, sir.

My gratitude must take the colors of night.

But silence is the god of men of good fortune.

Secrecy fastens tenderest bonds warm and tight. (*She goes off.*)

## Scene Six

*Mortimer alone*

Go now, dissembling Queen. As *you*, the world

Just so will *I* deceive you. Do I look like

1130 A murderer? Is there ruthlessness in my face?

Just you trust in *my* arm, hold yours back, take on

A merciful air, and wait for my aid—

And we'll gain time to join force for her rescue!

Advance me, dangle a great prize— And were *you*

That great prize—you and all your woman's favors!

Who are you? What can *you* give? The *one* highest good,

Life's greatest ornament, when one heart, self-  
 Forgetting, rapt, gives itself to another—  
 This crown of womanhood you've never known  
 1140 Nor ever been the happiness of a man.  
 I must await Lord Leicester—odious errand!  
 I'll save her, I alone, by my design,  
 Danger, fame and the prize— They shall be mine!  
 (*As he is about to go, Paulet enters.*)

## Scene Seven

*Mortimer. Paulet. Then Leicester.*

PAULET. What did the Queen say?

MORTIMER. Nothing, Uncle, nothing  
 At all important.

PAULET (*fixing him*). Listen, Mortimer!  
 You're stepping onto a slippery slope. A king's  
 Favor seduces, youth craves honor. Don't let  
 Ambition draw you down the wrong path!

MORTIMER. But Uncle—  
 Were you not the one who brought me to court?

1150 PAULET. And how I wish I had not! *Our* house did not  
 Gain its good name at this Court. You stand firm,  
 My nephew. Do not pay too high a price!  
 Do not offend your conscience!

MORTIMER. What are you thinking?

PAULET. However great the Queen would make you, mistrust  
 Her flatteries. When you have done her bidding, she will  
 Deny you and avenge the bloody deed  
 To keep her name spotless.

MORTIMER. You say, bloody deed—

PAULET. Enough such shamming! I know what she has  
 Presumed of you. She hopes to find your youthful  
 1160 Ambition willing as my brittle old age  
 Was not. Did you consent? *Did* you?

MORTIMER. My uncle!



LEICESTER (*entering*).

Good sir, permit a word with your nephew here.  
The Queen is well-disposed toward him, she wishes  
That Lady Stuart's person be committed  
To him without condition. She puts her trust  
In his good faith.

PAULET. In his good faith—well, fine!

LEICESTER. You say—

PAULET. Her trust in his good faith! And I,  
My Lord, put *my* trust in my two open eyes. (*He goes off.*)

## Scene Eight

*Leicester. Mortimer.*

LEICESTER (*astonished*). What has come over the Knight?

1170 MORTIMER. I do not know. The unexpected trust—

LEICESTER (*with a searching gaze*).

Tell me, Knight, do you deserve to be trusted?

MORTIMER (*equally searching*).

I put the same question to you, Lord Leicester.

LEICESTER. You wished to speak to me in confidence.

MORTIMER. Assure me first that I dare do so, my Lord.

LEICESTER. And who gives me assurance for you, sir?

Let my mistrust not be thought an insult! I

See you assume two faces at this Court.

One necessarily is false. Which is it?

MORTIMER. That is just as I find it with you, Earl Leicester.

1180 LEICESTER. Who is to make a start?

MORTIMER. One with less to lose.

LEICESTER. Well, then. That's you!

MORTIMER. It's you. The witness of one

So eminent and powerful can destroy me.

Mine's null and void against your rank and favor.

LEICESTER. Quite wrong! In all else I am powerful,

But not on the sore point I am about to

Betray to you. There I can be brought to fall.

MORTIMER. If almighty Lord Leicester condescends  
 To make such a confession to me, then I  
 Can think more highly of myself and set an  
 Example.

LEICESTER. Go before me. I will follow.

MORTIMER (*producing the letter*).

A letter sent you by the Queen of Scotland.

LEICESTER (*starts and reaches for the letter*).

Speak softly, sir. What's this? Oh! It's her likeness!

(*He kisses it, then contemplates it in silence.*)<sup>49</sup>

MORTIMER (*having observed Leicester sharply while he reads*).

My Lord, I believe you now.

LEICESTER (*having read*). You know what this says?

MORTIMER. Not in the least.

LEICESTER. She will have told you—

MORTIMER. Nothing

At all. I'm baffled that Elizabeth's  
 Favorite, Earl Leicester, Mary's sworn enemy,  
 One of her judges, is the man from whom  
 That Queen hopes rescue. Yet your eyes tell me  
 Too clearly what you feel for her.

LEICESTER. First tell me

Why her fate interests you so hotly, sir, how  
 You gained her trust.

MORTIMER. In few words: I was converted

At Rome, allied with the Guises, and commended  
 By the Archbishop to the Queen of Scotland.

LEICESTER. I know of your conversion. It stirred my trust.

Your hand, sir. Pardon my doubts. I cannot be  
 Too careful. Walsingham and Burghley hate me.  
 You could have been their tool—

MORTIMER. What small steps a great  
 Lord must take at this Court—

LEICESTER. What happiness to

Confess to a friend how I was constrained!

I never hated Mary. Force of events  
 Set me against her. Long before Darnley,

She was intended for me—favor I scorned.

I seek her now, imprisoned, at death's door,  
At risk of my life.

MORTIMER. An act that calls for courage.

LEICESTER. The shape of things has changed in the meanwhile, sir.

Ambition made me cold to youth and beauty.

I hoped yet to possess the Queen of England.

MORTIMER. And it is known to all that she preferred you.

LEICESTER. It seemed so. But after ten lost years of an

1220 Unflagging courtship, hated constraint— Oh, sir,  
My heart swells! Why, if only they knew what chains  
They envy me for! After ten years of burning  
Incense to her vanity, submitting  
To every ripple in her sultan's moods,  
A plaything of her whims and stubbornness,  
Caressed now by her tenderness, now repulsed  
By her stiff pride, tormented equally  
First by her favor, then by her cold rigor,  
1230 Watched like a prisoner by her Argus-eyed  
Jealousy, cross-examined like a child,  
Shamed like a servant—words fail for this hell—  
I'm cheated at the post of my prize. Another  
Comes and I lose my long-possessed rights to a  
Blossoming young bridegroom, am pushed off the stage.  
Her hand *and* favor I lose—he is lovable.

MORTIMER. He's Catherine's son and pupil. He knows to please.

LEICESTER. I look for a spar in this shipwreck and

Return to my first hope. Ambition drives me  
No longer. Youth and beauty move me. I  
1240 Compare and see the treasure I have lost.  
I see her plunged deep into wretchedness by  
My fault. If I could save her now and possess her?  
I reach her and reveal my changed heart.<sup>50</sup> You bring  
A letter saying she forgives and accepts me.

MORTIMER. But nothing have you done that would save her!

You let her be condemned and voted her death!  
A miracle must happen, light of Truth

Must strike me, her guard's nephew, Heaven must  
Prepare a savior in Rome's Vatican. Or

1250 She'd not have found a way to contact you!

LEICESTER. It cost me quite enough! Just then they took her  
From Talbot. Fotheringhay became her prison,  
Paulet her warden. I was blocked. Before the  
World I must prosecute her. Do not think  
I'd let her die. I hoped, still hope to hinder  
The worst until means can be found to free her.

MORTIMER. Means have been found. My secret given for yours. I  
Shall be the one to free her. I'm here for that.  
We're ready. Your support assures our success.

1260 LEICESTER. What's that? You frighten me. You would—

MORTIMER. Throw open

Her prison by force. I have confederates, all's—

LEICESTER. Confederates? Confidants? Who know *my* secret?

MORTIMER. Be unconcerned. Our plan was made without you,  
It can be done without you.

LEICESTER. I am assured  
My name will not be mentioned?

MORTIMER. Quite sure. So  
Cautious, my Lord? You would save Lady Stuart,  
Possess her? You find friends as if sent from Heaven,  
And you show more unease than joy and relief?

LEICESTER. No use of force! Too dangerous!

MORTIMER. So is delay!

1270 LEICESTER. Sir, I insist. It is not to be dared.

MORTIMER (*bitter*). No indeed! Not by you, who want to *possess* her!  
We only want to save her, *we* don't dither.

LEICESTER. Knight, you are hasty in a thorny cause.

MORTIMER. And you slow and cold in a case of honor.

LEICESTER. I see us caught up and entangled in nets.

MORTIMER. I feel the courage to cut all of them through.

LEICESTER. This courage is called madness, courage of fools.

MORTIMER. This prudence is less than true valor, my Lord.

LEICESTER. You'd like to find your way to Babington's end?

1280 MORTIMER. And you'd not imitate Lord Norfolk's great heart?<sup>51</sup>  
 LEICESTER. Norfolk's fortune was not to lead a bride home.  
 MORTIMER. He proved that he was worthy of doing so.  
 LEICESTER. If we are lost in this, *she* is lost, too.  
 MORTIMER. And if we shy back, she will not be saved.  
 LEICESTER. You will spoil all that's just now well underway.  
 MORTIMER. A way, no doubt, that *you've* opened before us?  
 What have you ever done to help or to save her?  
 Were I rascal enough to *murder* her, as  
 The Queen expects of me just as we speak,  
 1290 What measure had you taken to save her life?  
 LEICESTER (*astonished*). The Queen gave you this murderous instruction?  
 MORTIMER. She mistook me as Mary mistook you.  
 LEICESTER. And you consented? Did you?  
 MORTIMER. As you say.  
 To stop her purchasing another's hands  
 I offered mine.  
 LEICESTER. You have done well. We've won  
 Breathing space. She depends on you. The sentence  
 Lies idle. We gain time.  
 MORTIMER (*impatient*). We're losing time!  
 LEICESTER. She counts on you. The less will she scruple to  
 Assume an open air of clemency.  
 1300 I can perhaps lead her to come upon  
 Her rival face to face. That binds her hands,  
 As Burghley says.<sup>52</sup> Yes! I'll give it all I can!  
 MORTIMER. And where do you arrive? If Mary lives,  
 All goes on as before. It's life-long prison,  
 And will come to my bold attempt after all.  
 Why not begin so? Bring an army together,  
 Just arm the nobles in your many castles!  
 Mary has countless secret friends, the houses  
 Of Howard and Percy,<sup>53</sup> rich in heroes still,  
 1310 Only attend a powerful lord's example.  
 Enough of this deception! Act openly!  
 Defend, like a knight, the woman you love.  
 You rule the person of the Queen of England,

If you wish to. Lure her to one of your castles,  
 Show her a man! Keep her your captive there  
 Until she release Mary Stuart again!

LEICESTER. What an extravagance! Do you know this ground?

This Court? How tight this female kingdom  
 Has bound our spirits? You just look for the  
 Heroic spirit that once ruled this land!

Crushed! Under lock and key! And to a woman!  
 Every heart's mainspring unwound! Heed my example.  
 Nothing imprudent. — Someone's coming. Go now!

MORTIMER. Mary has hopes! What am I to bring her?

LEICESTER. Bring her the vow of my undying love!

MORTIMER. Bring that yourself! I offered to serve in  
 Her rescue, not to serve you as your Cupid! (*He goes off.*)

## Scene Nine

*Elizabeth. Leicester.*

ELIZABETH. Who left you just now? I thought I heard talking.

LEICESTER (*whirling around at her entrance*).

It was Sir Mortimer.

ELIZABETH. What is it, my Lord?

You're startled?

LEICESTER (*composing himself*).

At the sight of you, my Lady.

I'm dazzled by your beauty and your charm.

Ah, me!

ELIZABETH. You sigh?

LEICESTER. Have I not reason to sigh?

To see your beauty renews nameless pain, my  
 Sadness at coming loss.

ELIZABETH. But what do you lose?

LEICESTER. Your heart I shall lose and your lovable self.

Your youthful husband will hold you in fiery  
 Embrace. He will possess your heart entirely,  
 Though none on earth adores you as I do.

- 1340       The Duc d'Anjou has never seen you, loves  
           Only your glory. In his place I'd lay down a crown.  
 ELIZABETH. Pity me, Dudley. Do not scold me. I  
           May not consult my heart. Oh, it had chosen  
           Otherwise. How I envy other women,  
           Those who may love as they choose. I may not  
           Award a crown to the man whom I treasure.  
           To Lady Stuart it was granted to give  
           Her hand as she chose, she permitted herself  
           Everything, drained pleasure's cup to the lees.  
 LEICESTER. Now she must drain the cup of sorrow instead.  
 1350       ELIZABETH. She scorned opinion, chose to live at her ease.  
           Never did she assume the yoke of duty  
           That I bent under. She won all men's favor  
           Because her sole aim was to be a woman,  
           And she is courted by both young and old.  
           Such are men. All are mere slaves of their senses.  
           This Talbot—did he not become young again  
           Just as he came to speak of her great charm?  
 LEICESTER. Forgive him. He was once her keeper, and her  
           Flattery and fawning, her wiles turned his head.  
 1360       ELIZABETH. And *is* she then the beauty that they say?  
           Portraits will flatter and descriptions lie.  
           Only my eyes would tell me what to believe.  
           Why the strange look?  
 LEICESTER.               I pictured you next to Mary.  
           I'd like to have that pleasure, if it's secret.  
           The pleasure of a victory then would be yours.  
           She, too, would see how you exceed her in  
           Your noble figure as in every virtue,  
           For envy has sharp eyes.  
 ELIZABETH.               But she is the younger.  
 LEICESTER. Younger! Her suffering aged her before her time.  
 1370       And then to see you as a bride—and bride of  
           The French king's son—she who made so much of her  
           French marriage, boasts of help from mighty France.  
 ELIZABETH (*with a shrug*). They're pressing me to see her.

LEICESTER (*vivid*).

She asks it as

Favor, grant it as penalty! When she sees  
 Your beauty, guarded by your honor, made more  
 Glorious by spotless reputation and heightened  
 Again by a bright crown, and graced by the chaste  
 Wreath of a bride, the hour of her destruction  
 Has struck. No, never were you better armed for  
 Triumph of beauty. If you went straight before her  
 Just as you are?

1380

ELIZABETH. Now? No, oh no. Not now.

No. That I must think through, consult with Burghley—

LEICESTER (*breaking in*). Burghley! He reckons only reasons of state.

You have rights as a woman, too. A point so  
 Tender is for you only to judge. — But no!  
 Reasons of state also require that you meet—to  
 Persuade your people of your greatness of heart.  
 Then you can rid yourself of her as you please.

ELIZABETH. It's unbecoming that I see her in want

1390

And need. They say she is not royally kept.

LEICESTER. Chance

Comes to our aid. Today the great chase leads  
 Past Fotheringhay, and Lady Stuart can be  
 Found walking in the park. You happen by,  
 Nothing appears to have been planned in advance.  
 Should it offend you, you need not address her.

ELIZABETH. If this is foolishness, then, Leicester, it's yours.

Today I'd not deny you any request.  
 Of all my subjects I've hurt you the most.  
 (*Looking at him tenderly*)

Even if it's an idle notion of yours,  
 Honest affection shows itself by permitting  
 That which it knows neither wise nor befitting.

1400

(*Leicester throws himself at her feet.*)

*The curtain falls.*







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George Talbot, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury, 1580. Artist unknown. National Portrait Gallery, London. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George\\_Talbot\\_6th\\_Earl\\_of\\_Shrewsbury\\_1580.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Talbot_6th_Earl_of_Shrewsbury_1580.jpg)

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# Act Three

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*A park. Trees at the front, a wide prospect behind.*

## Scene One

*Mary emerges from among the trees, walking swiftly. Hanna Kennedy follows more slowly.*

KENNEDY. You're rushing as if you had wings, my Lady.

I cannot keep up with you. Wait for me!

MARY. Let me but feel new-found freedom's full measure,

Let me be a child and you be one, too!

On this green carpet embrace a new pleasure,

Striding along in weightless, winged shoe.

Have I escaped the dark dampness of prison?

Does it entrap me no longer, that lair?

1410 Let me run after, receive in my bosom,

Drink in deep drafts Heaven's free air!

KENNEDY. Oh, but my Queen, your narrow prison has been

Widened by little. You do not see how

A wall encloses us still, even here,

Because the trees' thick foliage hides its cold heights.

MARY. Oh, endless thanks to each and every green tree,

For they conceal these prison walls from my sight.

I want to dream myself full happy and free,

Suffused as I am now in heavenly light.

1420 Just over there, past fog-gray mountains' display,

The capes of my own realm advance,

And these bright clouds, ships with sails set to midday,  
Are seeking the fair coasts of France.

Hurrying clouds! Ships sailing in air!  
Only to sail with you! With you to fare!  
I am a captive. I am bound tight here.  
I have no one else I can send right there.

Carry my love to France, precious and rare.

KENNEDY. Dear Lady, you are beside yourself. Freedom,

1430 So painfully missed, makes you giddy with joy.

MARY. There a poor fisher steers his skiff toward land.

That wretched small sailboat could take me away,  
Bring me to cities where my kinsmen hold sway.  
What a scarce living for so poor a man!  
Oh, how I'd like to load it with treasure,  
Have him land a catch great as ever he can,  
Find in his nets good fortune past measure,  
In return for the offered help of his hand.

KENNEDY. Vain wishes! Do you not see that from a distance

1440 Spies observe us and follow in our footsteps?  
Some evil spell scares pitying creatures away.

MARY. No, Hanna. Believe me! Not in vain has my

Prison so suddenly been opened wide.  
So small a favor foretells grander joy.  
I cannot be wrong. This is love's hand at work.  
I see Lord Leicester's strong arm acting here.  
They want to widen my jail bit by bit,  
Until I see the face that frees me forever.

KENNEDY. I cannot make sense of this. Yesterday they

1450 Announced your coming death and today you  
Know such freedom as this. They say chains fall  
For those, too, whom *eternal* freedom awaits.

MARY. Just hear the hunting horn! How it sounds

Its plangent voice over forest and heath!  
Longing now seizes me to ride to the hounds,  
Gallop up hillsides, down steep glens beneath.  
This voice I recall from first youth,  
Memory that sweetly pierces my heart.

1460 I rode after the stag with high hopes,  
Down the Highlands' dark hollows, up its bright slopes,  
Hearing the horn's far call, after the hart.

## Scene Two

*Paulet. As above.*

PAULET. Have I at last done right, my Lady? Have I  
Deserved your thanks?

MARY. It's you, sir, found me this favor?  
*You?*

PAULET. And why not? I was at Court, I brought  
Your letter—

MARY. Freedom is a gift of the letter—

PAULET (*significantly*).

And not the only one! Expect something greater—

MARY. Something greater?

PAULET. Surely you hear the horns—

MARY (*shrinking back*).

You frighten me!

PAULET. The Queen is chasing nearby.

MARY. What?

PAULET. And quite soon she will be standing before you.

KENNEDY (*rushing to Mary, who is about to faint*).

1470 Dear Lady, what is wrong? You're white as a sheet.

PAULET. Is this not right? Is it not what you asked?

Granted before you knew it! You who are

Always so quick with words, now find your words.

The moment has come!

MARY. Why was I not made ready?

I'm not prepared for this. Not now. What I

Requested as high favor now seems a fright—

Come, Hanna. Lead me back in—to recover—

PAULET. No, stay. You must wait for her here. Oh, I can

Believe it is frightening—coming before your judge.

## Scene Three

*Earl Shrewsbury. As above.*

- 1480 MARY. Oh, Shrewsbury! Sent me like an angel from Heaven!  
 I cannot see her, cannot. Save me from this!
- SHREWSBURY. Recover yourself, Queen. Take courage. Stand firm.  
 This is the moment, the hour of decision.
- MARY. I've waited years for this, prepared myself,  
 Rehearsed, recited, learned by heart just how  
 I wanted to move her, to touch her feelings.  
 Forgotten, vanished! It all escapes me now.  
 Only my suffering remains. My heart turns  
 Against her, full of hatred. Hellish spirits
- 1490 Surround me, shaking their coiled, tangled hair.
- SHREWSBURY. Master your bitterness, compose yourself.  
 It brings no good when hate and hatred collide.  
 She's the one who wields power. Humble yourself!
- MARY. Before her? I cannot.
- SHREWSBURY. Do so nonetheless.  
 Speak with respect. Appeal to her great heart.  
 Do not defy her. This is not the moment.
- MARY. I have requested this thing to my ruin.  
 Never, no, never should we see one another.  
 I have been injured far too deeply. *Her* doing!
- 1500 We never ever can be reconciled!
- SHREWSBURY. Calm yourself. Only see her face to face.  
 Hard-hearted she is not. I saw that myself:  
 She read your letter and she wept. Have trust.  
 For this I came ahead: to guide and prepare you.
- MARY (*seizing his hand*). Oh, Talbot, you were always fair and my friend.  
 If only I'd remained safe in your keeping!  
 It has been so hard—
- SHREWSBURY. Do not think of that now.
- MARY. Burghley is with her?
- SHREWSBURY. Only Leicester—
- MARY. Lord Leicester!
- SHREWSBURY. You need fear nothing of him. He moved the Queen

1510 To grant this meeting.  
 MARY. Oh, I knew it!  
 SHREWSBURY. What's that?  
 PAULET. The Queen is coming!

*(All move to the side. Only Mary remains, leaning on Kennedy.)*

## Scene Four

*As above. Elizabeth. Earl Leicester. Retinue.*

ELIZABETH *(to Leicester)*. How is the country seat called?  
 LEICESTER. Fotheringhay, Madam.  
 ELIZABETH *(to Shrewsbury)*. Send our hunting party  
 Ahead to London. Crowds there throng the streets.  
 Let us take refuge in this quiet park.

*(Talbot dismisses the Retinue. Elizabeth fixes Mary, as she addresses Paulet.)*

My people love me too much. They show their joy  
 In excess, as if it were meant for an idol.  
 Such worship is right for a god, not a woman.

*(Mary, who has been leaning on Hanna, now stands straight. She meets Elizabeth's steady gaze, shudders, and throws herself again into the arms of her Nurse.)*

MARY. Dear God! No heart can be found in that face!  
 ELIZABETH. Who is the lady?

*(General silence)*

LEICESTER. You're at Fotheringhay, Queen.  
 ELIZABETH *(showing surprise, then glowering at Leicester)*.

1520 Who has done this to me? Lord Leicester!

LEICESTER. It  
 Has happened, Queen. Now Heaven has directed  
 You here, let pity and large mind prevail.  
 SHREWSBURY. Be so good, royal Mistress, as to turn  
 Your eye upon misfortune here before you.

(*Mary pulls herself together and starts toward Elizabeth, then stops halfway, unable to go forward.*)

ELIZABETH. Who led me to expect a woman humbled?

Unsoftened pride is what I see.<sup>54</sup>

MARY (*resolved at last*).                      So be it!

I'll submit even to this. Helpless pride of

A noble soul, be gone! I will forget who

I am and what I suffered at her hand.

(*She turns to the Queen.*)

1530 Heaven decided for you, Sister! Your head  
Is crowned. I worship the Godhead that raised you.

(*She drops to her knees.*)

But you be noble-minded, too, my sister!

Extend your hand, the royal right hand, and

Raise me from these depths.

ELIZABETH (*stepping back*).      I see you at your right  
Place, Lady Mary! And praise God, who would not  
Put *me* at your feet, like you now at *mine*.

MARY (*with rising emotion*).

Think of the flux of all things that are human!

Fear the unyielding gods that punish pride!

It's they who have thrown me down at your feet.

1540 Honor yourself in me before these nobles,

Honor the blood of Henry Tudor's house,

The blood that flows through my veins as through yours.

Do not stand like a rock against the sea,

Against a castaway lost in a storm.

Extend your hand, touch *my* heart, let me touch yours

With words, with tears on which my life depends.

Your cold stare freezes my heart, words die in my throat.

ELIZABETH (*cold and stern*).

What have you to say to me, Lady Stuart?

I shall forget the queen, so deeply offended,

1550 To meet the duty of a sister to you.

You have the comfort of the sight of me.

I risk reproach for bounty such as this, for



You know it was your wish to have me murdered.

MARY. Where to begin? How to place words, so that

They seize your heart, yet do not offend you!

Since I cannot speak for myself and not

Gravely accuse you—something I would not do.

— You have treated me unjustly, for

I am a queen no less than you are a queen.

1560 I came to you a suppliant, and you, a-

Gainst law and sacred hospitality,

Locked me behind walls, seized my servants and friends.

I am delivered over to sorry want,

Tried for my life before an unworthy court—

Enough! Eternal silence cover my suffering.

— But see! We'll call it fate. An evil spirit

From the abyss enflamed our hearts with hate that

Estranged us. It grew as we grew, bad men fanned

The flame, zealots armed others. Such is the fate

1570 Of kings: They, set at odds, loose Furies of discord.

*(Approaching Elizabeth, confiding, flattering)*

No stranger stands between us here. We have met.

Speak, Sister. Tell me my offense. I'll give you

Full satisfaction. Had you heard me before!

It never would have come to this sad encounter.

ELIZABETH. Not fate should you accuse, but your black heart,

The wild ambition of your native house. Hear

Me! Unprovoked, your uncle, priest who reaches

For every crown in Europe, launched a feud.

He turned your head, led you to take up my arms,

1580 Appropriate my royal title, enter

Battle against me, at the risk of your life.

What did he not call out against me! Priests' words,

Civil war, arms of pious delusion deep in

My peaceful kingdom—fanatics' weapons! Why,

My very head was threatened. God is with me.

Yours falls.

MARY. I am in God's hands. You would not—

ELIZABETH. Who hinders me? At Saint Bartholomew

Your uncle set the example for all kings.<sup>55</sup>

Thus one makes peace with one's foes! What is blood kinship?

1590

What natural law? The Church breaks all bonds, sanctions

Perfidy, regicide. What pledge have I for

You once I free you? What lock on your good faith

That the keys of Saint Peter cannot open?<sup>56</sup>

MARY. You've always seen me as a foe, a stranger.

Had you declared me your heir,<sup>57</sup> you would have found

A friend, a kinswoman.

ELIZABETH. Out there, Lady Stuart,

Is friendship for you. Your house is the papacy,

The monk your brother, and your family that Church.

You as my heir! Who in my lifetime seduced

1600

My people, caught the noble youth in the toils of

Your charms, so that all turned to this rising sun—

MARY. Rule now in peace! I give up claim to this realm.

I have been broken, you've wrecked me in my bloom!

Now make an end, just say the word to release me.

For surely you have not come here to gloat. Say,

"Mary, I grant your freedom. You have felt my

Power, now learn to honor my noble heart."

I will receive my freedom and my life as

Gift from your hand. But if not, woe betide you!

1610

Not for this Island, not for all lands on earth

Would I stand before you as you now before me.

ELIZABETH. Do you confess you have been defeated? Is there

An end now to your scheming? No new murderer

Dispatched? And no adventurer willing to risk

This dismal knighthood for you ever again?

Yes, Lady Mary, it is over. None more

Will you seduce. The world has other concerns.

No one longs to become your *fourth* husband—you

Who kill your suitors as those husbands you killed!

1620

MARY (*taking offense*). Oh, Sister, Sister! Oh, God give me restraint!

ELIZABETH (*gazing at her contemptuously*).

Such are the charms that no man glimpses unpunished,

Beside which no other woman dare stand.

Fame acquired at small price, Lord Leicester, for to  
 Be an uncommon beauty one need but be  
 A beauty common to all—

MARY. That is too much!

ELIZABETH (*scornful*).

There! The mask falls. You show me your true face!

MARY (*furious, but with dignity*).

My fault was human, was a fault of youth.

Power seduced me, I made it no secret.

I scorned appearance with king's candor, and

1630 The world knows the worst of me. I can safely  
 Say I am better than repute has me.

The worse for you should it draw back the cloak

Of honor from your many secret hot passions.

Honor's not something you acquired from your mother.

The world all know why Anne Boleyn climbed the scaffold.<sup>58</sup>

SHREWSBURY (*stepping between the two Queens*).

Oh, God in heaven! Must it come to this?

Is that restraint, submission, Lady Mary?

MARY. Restraint? I have endured beyond all endurance.

Enough lamb-like composure! Patient suffering!

1640 Now break your bonds, cold rage, long stifled, burst from  
 Your pit! And you who gave the basilisk

Its gaze, arm my tongue—

SHREWSBURY. She is beside herself!

Forgive her! She's mad, she's too badly provoked!

(*Elizabeth stares speechless at Mary.*)

LEICESTER (*anxiously trying to lead Elizabeth away*).

Don't listen. Come away from this grim place!

MARY. The throne of England is profaned by a bastard,

The noble British duped by a mountebank.

If justice ruled, you would be lying before *me*.

I am your king.<sup>59</sup>

(*Elizabeth goes off quickly. The Lords follow in dismay.*)

## Scene Five

*Mary. Kennedy.*

KENNEDY. What have you done? She goes away enraged.

MARY (*still beside herself*).

1650 She goes enraged! She carries death in her heart!

(*Falling into Kennedy's arms*)

What a relief! At last! At last! Whole years

Of suffering, of abasement! Now at last

A moment of revenge, a moment of triumph!

It falls from my heart like an avalanche!

KENNEDY. Oh, no! You wounded her. She'll not forgive you.

She carries thunderbolts, she is the queen.

You mocked her before her own chosen favorite!

MARY. Before him! He saw it. He witnessed my triumph!

His presence and his nearness gave me strength!

## Scene Six

*As above. Mortimer.*

1660 KENNEDY. A fine outcome, sir!

MORTIMER. I heard everything!

(*He signals the Nurse to keep watch and approaches. He is alight with desire.*)

You've won! *You* were the queen and *she* the outlaw.

I am bewitched, adore you like a goddess.

Such courage!

MARY. You saw Leicester, brought my letter,

Gave him my gift? Oh, speak!

MORTIMER (*observing her with burning eyes*). Your royal anger

Shone all about you, transformed all your charms!

MARY. I beg you, sir! Do answer. What says my Lord?

What can I hope?

MORTIMER. Who? Him? He is a coward!

Hope nothing, not from him. Despise him, forget him!

MARY. What are you saying?

MORTIMER. He should save you? Possess you?

- 1670       He, you? Just let him dare! He'll have to do  
            With me, a battle at the risk of his life!  
MARY. He does not have my letter? All is lost!  
MORTIMER. He loves his life.  
MARY.                               He will do nothing for me?  
MORTIMER. No more of him. I, I alone can save you.  
MARY. What can *you* do?  
MORTIMER.                       Do not deceive yourself.  
            Now all is changed. The way the Queen just left you,  
            All is indeed lost, there will be no mercy.  
            A *deed* is what it takes now, *boldness* decides.  
            You'll be delivered before daybreak tomorrow.
- 1680 MARY. This very night?  
MORTIMER.                       Just hear what is decided.  
            I gathered my companions in a secret  
            Chapel. A priest heard our confessions, gave us  
            Remission of sins committed, sins to come.  
            We have all taken the last sacrament and  
            Are ready to embark on our last journey.  
MARY. What frightful preparations these all are!  
MORTIMER. Tonight we scale these walls. I've gained the keys.  
            We'll murder all your keepers, snatch you from  
            Your chamber by force. Every living soul must
- 1690       Die by our hand, that no one live to betray us.  
MARY. Paulet, your uncle, too? Your second father?  
MORTIMER. Must die by my hand!  
MARY.                               Bloody sacrilege!  
MORTIMER. All sacrilege is pardoned. I can do my  
            Worst and I *will*.  
MARY.                               Oh, dreadful, terrible—this!  
MORTIMER. Even to have to run the Queen through— I've  
            Sworn on the Host—  
MARY.                               Too much blood—  
MORTIMER.                               What is all life  
            Against *you* and my love. The bonds of the world  
            May break, a second Flood sweep all away—

I'll not give you up till the end of time!

MARY (*stepping back*).

1700 What language, sir, what looks! They frighten me!

MORTIMER (*expressing a quiet madness*). Life

Is but one moment, death another! They may

Drag me to Tyburn,<sup>60</sup> tear me apart with tongs

(*rushing to her with open arms*)

As long as I embrace you, my Beloved—

MARY (*retreating*). Back, madman—

MORTIMER. On this breast, this mouth that breathes love—

MARY. For God's sake, let me go in!

MORTIMER. I will save you,

And I shall also possess you—

MARY. Wretched Fate,

You fling me from one horror to another!

Was I born only to stir rage? Love and hate?

MORTIMER. Commit to love what you must lose to hate,

1710 Enchant a happy lover with these charms

No longer yours. This silken hair in the power

Of death—use to entwine your loving slave!

MARY. What words! My sorrows should be sacred to you,

If not my royal head.

MORTIMER. Your crown has fallen,

Nothing of earthly majesty remains.

Try it now, just speak like a ruler—if

A friend, a savior stands up? Nothing remains

But the high beauty of your touching figure.

It drives me on—

MARY. Who'll save me from this madness?

1720 MORTIMER. Life is life's greatest good. A fool, one who'd waste it!

Let me first lie on life's most comforting breast—

(*He presses her against him.*)

MARY. Must I seek help against him who would save me?

MORTIMER. You are not cold. You let that Bothwell carry

You off and trembled while you loved him.

MARY. Shameless!

MORTIMER. If only terror wins you, I'll make you tremble—

KENNEDY (*rushing in*). Someone is coming. They are getting closer.

Armed men are filling the garden.

MORTIMER (*reaching for his sword*). I shall defend you!

MARY. Oh, Hanna, save me from him! Where to turn?

Out here is mayhem and in there is murder.

(*She flees toward the house. Kennedy follows.*)

## Scene Seven

*Mortimer. Paulet and Drury rush in.*

*Attendants run onto the stage.*

1730 PAULET. Close all the gates! Draw up the bridges, all!

MORTIMER. Uncle, what is it?

PAULET. Where is she, that murderess?

Into the darkest dungeon with her!

MORTIMER. What has happened?

PAULET. The Queen!

MORTIMER. What Queen?

PAULET. Of England! Murdered in London's streets!

(*He rushes into the house.*)

## Scene Eight

*Mortimer. Then O'Kelly.*

MORTIMER. Did someone say the Queen's been murdered? Or

Was it but a dream? I must have been dreaming.

Who's coming? It's O'Kelly. Beside himself.

O'KELLY (*rushing in*). Flee, Mortimer! Flee! All is lost!

MORTIMER. What is lost?

O'KELLY. Don't ask. Just run!

MORTIMER. What is it?

O'KELLY. Savage,<sup>61</sup> the madman,

Launched the attempt.

MORTIMER. It's true?

O'KELLY. Too true!

MORTIMER. She's murdered,

1740 Mary ascends the throne of England!

O'KELLY. Murdered?

She lives! And you and I and all will be dead!

MORTIMER. She lives?

O'KELLY. The blow failed. Got caught in her mantel.

And Shrewsbury disarmed the murderer.

MORTIMER. She lives!

O'KELLY. To destroy

Us all. They have the park surrounded.

MORTIMER. Who did it?

O'KELLY. The Toulon cleric with us in chapel, who looked

So thoughtful when the anathema against the Queen was read.<sup>62</sup>

He meant to take the short way to martyrdom.

Told only the priest who confessed and blessed us.

MORTIMER (*after a silence, to himself*).

Grim fate pursues you. Now, yes, now *you* must die.

1750 Your very angel has prepared your fall.

O'KELLY. I go to hide in the forests of the North.

MORTIMER. God keep you. I stay, make one last effort to save.

Failing, I make my last bed on her grave.

(*They go off to different sides.*)<sup>63</sup>







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Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, ca. 1564, oil on panel. Anglo-Netherlandish School. Waddesdon Manor. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert\\_Dudley\\_Leicester.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Dudley_Leicester.jpg)

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# Act Four

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*Antechamber*

## Scene One

*Count Aubespine. Kent and Leicester.*

AUBESPINE. How is Her Majesty? My Lords, you see me  
Beside myself. How could this be, among her  
Most loyal people?

LEICESTER. No one among the people  
Did this thing. But a subject of your king,  
A Frank.

AUBESPINE. A madman surely.

KENT. A papist, Count Aubespine.

## Scene Two

*As above. Burghley enters, speaking to Davison.*

BURGHLEY. The writ of execution must be drawn up  
And sealed. Be quick! Present it to the Queen to  
Be signed. Now go.

DAVISON. It shall be done. *(He goes off.)*

AUBESPINE *(acknowledging Burghley)*. My Lord,  
My loyal heart shares in the rightful joy of  
This Island. Heaven be praised, which turned the murderous

Blow from the royal head!

BURGHLEY. Praised, too, that it

Thwarted our enemies' evil will.

AUBESPINE. May God

Condemn the doer of this evil deed!

BURGHLEY. Both

The doer and the author.

AUBESPINE (*to Kent*). Does it please

Your Honor to admit me to Her Majesty

That I may lay best wishes of my Lord

1770 And King most humbly at her feet—

BURGHLEY. Don't trouble,

Count Aubespine.

AUBESPINE (*officious*). I know my office, Lord Burghley.

BURGHLEY. Your office is to clear this Island at speed.

(*In response to Aubespine's expression of amazement*)

Your rank shields you today, tomorrow no more.

AUBESPINE. What is my crime?

BURGHLEY. *Named*, it cannot be pardoned.

AUBESPINE. The right of missions, my Lord, I would hope—

BURGHLEY. Does not protect traitors—

LEICESTER and KENT. Ha! What's this!

AUBESPINE. My Lord,

Consider well—

BURGHLEY. A passport signed by your hand

Was found in the assassin's pocket.

KENT. Indeed?

1780 AUBESPINE. I issue many passports. Motives are hidden.

BURGHLEY. The murderer was confessed in your hotel.

AUBESPINE. My house is open.

BURGHLEY. To the enemies of England.

AUBESPINE. I demand inquest.

BURGHLEY. Fear one!

AUBESPINE. In my person

My King is injured. He'll tear up our pact.

BURGHLEY. The Queen has torn it up already. England

Will not be wed to France. Lord Kent, you will bring

The Count in safety to the coast. The angry  
 Mob stormed his hotel; a great arsenal of weapons  
 Was found; they threaten to tear him limb from limb.

1790 Conceal him well. I charge you with his life!

AUBESPINE. I leave a land where common rights are trampled  
 And treaties merely toyed with. My Monarch will seek  
 A bloody reckoning—

BURGHLEY. Let him come and fetch it!

*(Kent and Aubespine go off.)*

## Scene Three

*Leicester and Burghley*

LEICESTER. Thus you dissolve the bond that you so busily  
 Buckled. You've earned yourself scarce thanks from England.  
 You'd better spared yourself the trouble, my Lord.

BURGHLEY. My goal was good. And God wrought otherwise.  
 Happy the man who knows no worse of himself!

1800 LEICESTER. Yes, one knows Cecil's dark and secretive bearing  
 When he makes chase after crimes of high treason.

It's a fine season for you now, my Lord.

A truly monstrous misdeed has occurred and

Its authors still lie hidden deep in darkness.

A court of inquest will now be convened

And words and glances carefully weighed up.

Why, thoughts themselves will be called into court.

You are the very man there, our own Atlas

Of State who carries all England on his shoulders.

1810 BURGHLEY. In you, my Lord, I recognize my master.

Such victory as your arts of persuasion gain

My powers never have brought home.

LEICESTER. Your meaning?

BURGHLEY. Were you not who, behind my back, knew to lure  
 The Queen to Fotheringhay?

LEICESTER. Behind your back!

When have I hidden my deeds from your knowledge?

BURGHLEY. *You* lured the Queen to Fotheringhay? Oh, no!

Surely it was the Queen who kindly lured *you*.

LEICESTER. What would you say, my Lord?

BURGHLEY.

Oh, what a fine figure

You let the Queen cut there! The splendid triumph

Prepared her, unsuspecting. Gracious Princess!

1820 Such shameless mockery, such unsparing exposure!

This therefore is the large mind and the mercy

That overcame you suddenly in Council!

That's why this Stuart is a foe so feeble

And nil one does not spot oneself with her blood!

LEICESTER. Wretch! Come with me. You'll answer me at the throne.

BURGHLEY. Expect me there. Let your persuasion not fail you!

*(He goes off.)*

## Scene Four

*Leicester alone, then Mortimer*

I am discovered, seen through. How did he

Get on my track? If he has proofs, I am done.

And if the Queen learns of my understanding

1830 With Mary—God! How guilty I'll be in her eyes!

My counsel, leading her to Fotheringhay—it

Will all seem a ruse, a trick. And she will feel mocked,

Betrayed to her worst enemy! Never will she

Forgive me. It all seems a plot: the turn in

The conversation, Mary's triumph and scorn,

Even the murder that surprised us—I will

Have set it up! It is hopeless! — Who is coming?

MORTIMER *(entering, uneasy and wary)*.

Earl Leicester? We've no witnesses?

LEICESTER.

What's this?

What do you want?

MORTIMER.

They're on our track, on yours, too.

1840 LEICESTER. Be gone!  
 MORTIMER. The secret meeting at Aubespine's—  
 LEICESTER. Not my concern!  
 MORTIMER. The murderer's presence there—  
 LEICESTER. Your care and not mine! Leave me out of this!  
 MORTIMER. But listen—  
 LEICESTER (*very angry*). Go to hell! Why hang yourself on  
 My heels? I do not know you, with assassins  
 I have no traffic.  
 MORTIMER. Your steps, too, are betrayed.  
 LEICESTER. Ha!  
 MORTIMER. The Lord High Treasurer was at Fotheringhay.  
 There was a great search, where they found—  
 LEICESTER. Found what?  
 MORTIMER. A letter to you that the Queen had begun—  
 LEICESTER. Ah!  
 MORTIMER. —asking you to keep your word, renewing  
 1850 The promise of her hand, remembering the likeness—  
 LEICESTER. Death and damnation!  
 MORTIMER. Burghley has the letter—  
 LEICESTER. I'm lost!

(*During Mortimer's next speech Leicester walks up and down.*)

MORTIMER. Act quickly! Act first! Save *yourself*! Save *her*!  
 Swear your way out of this. Invent excuses.  
 I myself can do nothing more. Our band is  
 Scattered. I go to Scotland to find friends.  
 It comes down to you. Use all your prestige,  
 Use quick wits—  
 LEICESTER (*stands still, then, suddenly resolved*).  
 I shall do exactly that.  
 (*He goes to the door, opens it, and calls*)  
 Hey! Guards! (*To the Officer who enters with armed Guards*)  
 A traitor! Seize him! Guard him well!  
 A foul plot come to light. Now straight to the Queen! (*He goes off.*)  
 MORTIMER (*stunned at first, recovers himself and gazes after Leicester*).  
 1860 Scoundrel! But I deserve this! Who said to trust him?

I fall, become a bridge that he will walk over.  
 Save yourself! I'll not take you down in *my* fall.  
 Even in death I do not like your league.  
 Life is the only good thing bad men have.  
*(To the Officer who steps forward to seize him)*  
 Don't touch me, you slave. I am free. *(He draws a dagger.)*

OFFICER. He's armed!  
 Disarm him!

*(They press around him, he fends them off.)*

MORTIMER. Free, too, heart and soul, in death.  
 A curse on those who deny God and their Queen,  
 Turn from the earthly as from the heavenly Mary!

OFFICER. Treason and blasphemy! Lay hand on him!

1870 MORTIMER. Mary, my love, I could not bring you release.  
 Mary, sweet Mother, fold me into your peace.  
*(He stabs himself and falls into the arms of the Guard.)*

*Room of the Queen*

## Scene Five

*Elizabeth, a letter in her hand. Burghley.*

ELIZABETH. To take me there! Show me in triumph to  
 His mistress! Never such a betrayal, Burghley!

BURGHLEY. I cannot grasp how he—by what arts—could  
 Surprise the good sense of my Queen so badly.

ELIZABETH. I'm dying of shame! How he must laugh at me!  
 I thought I would humiliate *her*, and myself  
 Became an object of scorn.

BURGHLEY. Now you see how  
 Faithfully *I* advised you!

ELIZABETH. I am punished.

1880 But should I not have believed him? Who suspects  
 A trap among great oaths of love? Dear God!



Who can I trust? I raised him above all others,  
Gave him the place next to my heart, let him  
Carry himself like a king at this Court!

BURGHLEY. And he betrayed you to the false Queen of Scotland!

ELIZABETH. She'll pay with her blood! Is the warrant drawn up?

BURGHLEY. Done as you ordered.

ELIZABETH. She shall die! And he shall

See her fall and fall after. I have cast  
Him from my heart, filled it with vengeance. Let him  
Fall deep as he was lofty, monument to  
My rigor as he was to my weakness.  
Into the Tower! I shall name peers to judge him  
After the strictest sense of the law.

BURGHLEY. Oh, but

He'll reach you, justify himself—

ELIZABETH. How so? The

Letter convicts him—

BURGHLEY. But your kindness, the mere

Sight of him—

ELIZABETH. Never will I see him again!

You've ordered him refused if he comes?

BURGHLEY. Just so.

PAGE (*entering*). My

Lord Leicester!

QUEEN. I am not to be seen. Tell him that.

PAGE. I dare not!

QUEEN. My servants fear him more than me!

BURGHLEY (*to the Page*). The Queen forbids his approach.

(*The Page goes out reluctantly.*)

QUEEN (*after a pause*). Could it be—if he justified himself—

Could it not be a trap to estrange us?

If Mary wrote the letter to make me

Suspect him? To bring him to fall—

BURGHLEY. But, my Queen—

## Scene Six

*As above. Leicester.*

LEICESTER (*tears open the door and strides in*).

I'll just see the one who forbids me my Queen!

ELIZABETH. Such insolence!

LEICESTER. To turn *me* away! If she

Is present for a Burghley, she's present for me.

BURGHLEY. Quite bold, my Lord, to burst in here without  
Asking.

LEICESTER. Quite pert, my Lord, to speak first. Asking!

1910 There's no one at this Court whom Leicester asks,  
Whom he obeys. (*Approaching Elizabeth, submissive*)  
I'll hear from my own Queen—

ELIZABETH (*refusing to look at him*).

Out of my sight, worthless—

LEICESTER. I hear, not my kind  
Elizabeth, but this Lord, whose— My appeal is  
To *my* Elizabeth— You lent *him* your ear, I  
Lay claim to nothing less.

ELIZABETH. Speak! Own or deny it!

LEICESTER. First let this burdensome third take his leave.

Step out, my Lord. What I have to discuss with  
My Queen requires no witness. Go now!

ELIZABETH (*to Burghley*). Stay here!

LEICESTER. What business has a third between you and me?

1920 I claim the rights of my place—sacred rights!  
The Lord remove himself!

ELIZABETH. How haughtiness  
Becomes you!

LEICESTER. Becomes me well. I am the chosen  
One. Your great favor lent me this rank, and  
What love has given I shall assert. Two minutes—

ELIZABETH. Of chatter—

LEICESTER. Chatter is for him. *I* speak to  
Your heart! What I have dared do by your favor

I'll justify to your heart. I know no court but  
Your heart!

ELIZABETH. And that is what damns you. Lord Burghley,  
I bid you show him the letter.

LEICESTER (*reading the letter, unruffled*). That is her hand.

1930 ELIZABETH. Read and fall silent.

LEICESTER (*calmly*). All appearance is  
Against me. I hope not to be judged by that.

ELIZABETH. Do you deny a secret understanding  
With Mary Stuart? You received her likeness  
And gave her hope of rescue.

LEICESTER. I could discount  
My enemy's words if I felt guilty, but  
My conscience is clear. What she writes is true.

ELIZABETH. Now then!

BURGHLEY. He damns himself!

ELIZABETH. Out of my sight!  
Into the Tower, you traitor!

LEICESTER. I am none.  
My error was to make a secret of it.

1940 This was my effort to discover—

ELIZABETH. Excuses!

LEICESTER. I've played a dangerous game. Only Earl Leicester  
Could be so bold at this Court. All the world knows  
How I hate Mary Stuart. My high rank, the  
Trust of my Queen remove all doubt. The man picked  
Out by your favor can risk a bold path.

BURGHLEY. And why the silence?

LEICESTER. You hang a bell on your deeds,  
My Lord. I act, then talk.

BURGHLEY. You talk since you must.

LEICESTER (*fixing him contemptuously*).

1950 You claim the fame of having put into action  
A fabulous deed, saved your Queen, unmasked a  
Great treason. You know it all, nothing escapes you.  
Braggart! For all your keen nose, Mary Stuart

Were free as of today, had I not blocked it

BURGHLEY. *You?*

LEICESTER. *I, my Lord. The Queen confided in Mortimer.*

She went so far as to give him against

Mary a bloody charge the uncle refused.

*(The Queen and Burghley look at one another, appalled.)*

BURGHLEY. How did *you*—

LEICESTER. Is it not so? Where did you have

Your thousand eyes, not to see this Mortimer was

Double? He was a raging papist, a tool of

The Guises, Stuart's creature, scheming fanatic

1960 Come to free Stuart and to murder our own Queen—

ELIZABETH *(utterly astonished)*.

Mortimer?

LEICESTER. He was go-between for Mary

With me. That's how I came to know him. Today

Yet she was to be snatched out of her prison.

He told me himself. I had him arrested.

Despairing, he took his own life.

ELIZABETH. Deceived! Deception

Beyond words!

BURGHLEY. And all this just since I left you?

LEICESTER. A poor outcome. His witness would have cleared me.

That's why I turned him over to the courts.

Strict justice was to prove my innocence.

1970 BURGHLEY. He killed himself, you say—

LEICESTER. Unworthy suspicion!

Question the Guards—

*(He goes to the door and calls. The Officer of the Bodyguard enters.)*

Submit report to the Queen how

That Mortimer died!

OFFICER. I held the watch in the

Anteroom when my Lord threw open the door

And ordered me to seize the Knight as a traitor.

He pulled a dagger, raged, insulted the Queen,

And stabbed himself before we could stop him—

LEICESTER. That will do. You may go.

*(The Officer goes off.)*

ELIZABETH. What an abyss—

LEICESTER. Who was it saved you? Was it my Lord Burghley?

He saw the danger? And turned it aside?

1980 BURGHLEY. This Mortimer died timely for you, my Lord.

ELIZABETH. What should I say? I believe you, I don't believe you.

I believe you guilty, don't believe it. Oh, hateful

Woman! To cause me such pain!

LEICESTER. She must die.

Now I, too, say so. Not till an arm is raised, I

Had said. That has now happened. Judgment must

Be executed forthwith. The Queen's safety

Demands this bloody extreme, much as it grieves me.

BURGHLEY *(to the Queen)*. Since my Lord's meaning is so earnest and true

I would propose that execution of judgment

1990 Be removed onto him.

LEICESTER. Me!

BURGHLEY. You! No better

Way to lay suspicion that rests on you than

That *you*, accused of loving her, should see her

Beheaded.

ELIZABETH *(fixing Leicester)*. Well advised, Lord. Let it be so.

LEICESTER. My rank should free me of a charge so dismal,

Suited in all respects much better to Burghley.

One nearest my Queen ought do nothing baneful.

To prove my zeal and satisfy my Queen I

Renounce the privilege of my rank, assume

This loathsome duty.

ELIZABETH. Lord Burghley share it with you.

2000 *(To Burghley)* See that the order be issued right away.

*(Burghley goes off. Sounds of a disturbance off-stage.)*

## Scene Seven

*Earl Kent to join the others*

ELIZABETH. What is it Lord, Kent? What's the noise?

KENT. The people

Queen. They surround the palace, demand to see you.

ELIZABETH. What does my folk want?

KENT. Rumor goes through London

That your life is threatened and assassins

Are sent by Rome, that Catholics are in league to

Free Lady Stuart by force, proclaim her queen.

The mob believes it. They are demanding her head. They

Refuse to go home until judgment is signed.

ELIZABETH. What? Shall I be forced to?

## Scene Eight

*Burghley and Davison with a writing. As above.*

ELIZABETH. What's this, Davison?

DAVISON (*approaching, grave*).

2010 Your orders, my Queen.

ELIZABETH (*reaches for the sheet, then shrinks back*).

Oh, God!

BURGHLEY. Heed the voice of

The people, it is the voice of God.

ELIZABETH (*struggling with herself*). Oh, but

My Lords, who says if I indeed hear the voice

Of all my people, of the world? Oh, how

I fear, if I obey the voice of the mob,

Another voice will make itself heard, those who

Drive me to act now will blame me when it's done.

## Scene Nine

*Earl Shrewsbury to join the others. Kent goes off.*

SHREWSBURY (*very aroused*).

They're rushing you, Queen. Stand fast—(*He notices Davison with the writing.*)

Is it too late?

Let that not come before the eyes of my Queen!

ELIZABETH. My noble Shrewsbury, they are forcing me!

2020 SHREWSBURY. But who can force you? You are our ruler,

Now is the time to show your majesty!

Order those voices to fall silent that

Make bold to force your royal will, your judgment.

Fear moves the crowd; you, too, are beside yourself.

You are but human, cannot pass judgment now.

BURGHLEY. Judgment has long since been passed. No decision

Is to be reached, but *executed* rather.

KENT (*returning*). The crowd is growing, and the mob will not

Let itself be held back!

ELIZABETH (*to Shrewsbury*). See how they press me!

2030 SHREWSBURY. Only delay. This pen stroke will decide your

Happiness and your peace. You've pondered for years;

A moment should rip you along? Collect

Yourself, attend a quiet hour.

BURGHLEY (*impatient*). Oh, wait

And hesitate, waste time, until the Realm

Stands in flames and your rival meets with success.

Three times a god has shielded you, today it

Came *close*. To invite a fourth is to tempt God.

SHREWSBURY. The God whose wonder-working hand has

Kept you four times and enabled this old man

2040 To crush a madman—*He* is to be trusted!

I shall not speak of justice. This is not the moment.

Merely this: You tremble at the living

Mary and not before the dead one? She will

Rise from the grave, a goddess of strife, and swoop

Over your Kingdom, turn your people against you.

The Briton hates her now, soon he'll *avenge* her,

Enemy no longer of his one true faith, but  
 Granddaughter of his kings and victim of hate.  
 Process through London when the deed is done,  
 2050 Show yourself to your people— You'll find them changed.  
 Your element is justice no longer, but *fear*,  
 Making a desert every street where you pass.  
 What head is safe if this one must fall!

ELIZABETH. Ah, Shrewsbury, you saved my life. To what effect?  
 All strife were at an end, all doubt resolved, and  
 Unstained by guilt, I would lie in my grave.  
 For truly! I have tired of living and ruling.  
 Must one queen fall? Can that not be me? Let  
 My people choose. I lived for it, God knows,  
 2060 And not for myself. If it hopes for this Mary,  
 The younger queen, I'll seek the stillness of Woodstock.  
 I am not born to rule—alas I am not!  
 A ruler must be hard and my heart is soft.  
 I've ruled this Island happily, needing but to  
 Make happy. Come the first *hard* royal duty,  
 And I feel my weakness—

BURGHLEY. By all that's holy!  
 When I hear such unkinglike words from my Queen,  
 It were betrayal of my duty and land to  
 Keep silent here among you any longer.

2070 You say you love your people more than yourself.  
 Show us that love. Do not choose peace for yourself  
 And give the Realm up to these raging storms.  
 Think of the Church. Is Mary Stuart to bring the  
 Old idols back? The Roman legate to come close  
 Our churches and dethrone our anointed kings?  
 I yet require your subjects of you—saved or lost  
 In consequence of what you choose to do now.  
 This is no time for soft heart and compassion.  
 Shrewsbury saved your life—I would save England!

2080 ELIZABETH. Let me be left to myself! There's no counsel  
 Among men in this matter. I go before  
 A higher Judge to do His bidding. Leave me,



My Lords! (*To Davison*) You, sir, I'd have remain close by.

(*The Lords go off. Shrewsbury lingers before the Queen, then follows slowly, expressing great pain.*)

## Scene Ten

*Elizabeth alone*

Serving the people—slavery, bondage! How it  
 Revolts me, flattering this false god I despise!  
 When shall I ever stand free upon this throne!  
 Honor opinion, court praise from the mob,  
 And make it right to those who want to be fooled!  
 Oh, he's no king who still must please the world!

2090 Why have I always been just, never despotic,  
 Only to tie my own hands at the first  
 Forced act of violence! My example damns me!  
 A tyrant like the Spanish Mary<sup>64</sup> before me,  
 I could shed king's blood. Did I so choose? I  
 Am forced. Necessity imposes forbearance.  
 Surrounded by foes, I am held on my  
 Contested throne by public favor alone.  
 The powers of the Continent conspire to destroy me.

2100 From Rome the Pope renews his ancient ban,  
 From France, betrayal in a Judas kiss, and  
 From Spain the threat of war on the high seas.<sup>65</sup>  
 With spotless virtue I must mask a stain on  
 My birth, a defect in my rights. In vain!  
 The enemy sets this Stuart up against me.  
 Where I have planted pleasure or hope, I find her  
 Across my path, a snake sent me from Hell!  
 My lover she seduces, costs me my bridegroom,  
 My every sorrow is called *Mary Stuart*!  
 This fear must end. Her head must fall. I *will* have peace!  
 2110 Once she's removed from this world, I'm free as the wind.  
 (*She falls silent.*)

Bastard you'd call me? Your misfortune, that!

*(She goes to the table and seizes a pen.)*  
 Only as long as *you* live am I so,  
 If I destroy you, I destroy all doubt.  
 And when the Briton can no longer choose,  
 Then I was born and bred in lawful bed!  
*(She signs firmly and rapidly, drops the pen, and steps back, horrified. After a pause, she rings.)*

## Scene Eleven

*Elizabeth. Davison.*

ELIZABETH. Where are their lordships?

DAVISON. They have gone to calm  
 The mob. It fell still when it saw Earl Shrewsbury.  
 He used soft words, reproached their violence,  
 And calmed them till they crept away from the square.

2120 ELIZABETH. The fickle crowd! Do not lean on this reed!  
 You may go. Very good.

*(As Davison turns toward the door)*

Here, this. Take it back.

DAVISON *(casting a glance at the writing she has given him)*.

My Queen! Your name here! You have decided?

ELIZABETH. I was to sign. I have signed. A sheet of paper  
 Does not decide yet. A mere name does not kill.

DAVISON. *Your* name, Queen, on *this* writing decides *all*,  
 Kills, is a thunderbolt. This sheet commands  
 The sheriff and commissioners to Fotheringhay to  
 The Queen of Scotland to announce her death and  
 To execute the warrant before day.

2130 No respite. She *has* lived when I release this.

ELIZABETH. God lays a heavy fate in your weak hands.  
 Beseech Him that He shine the light of his  
 Wisdom on you. I'll leave you to your duty.

DAVISON *(blocks her path)*.

Tell me your wishes first, my Queen. Is

It wisdom just to follow your command? You

Give me this writing for swift execution?

ELIZABETH. That you with your good sense—

DAVISON (*breaking in, frightened*). Oh, not with mine!

That God forbid! Obedience is my good sense.

Your servant should be left to decide nothing.

2140 A small mistake and a queen dies. Tell me

Clearly: What should I do with this death warrant?

ELIZABETH. Its name says it—

DAVISON. You wish it executed right away?

ELIZABETH (*hesitating*). That I don't *say* and tremble to think it.

DAVISON. You want me then to keep it for the moment?

ELIZABETH (*quickly*). What? At your peril! You answer for it.

DAVISON. Me? Holy God! Speak, Queen! *What* is it you want?

ELIZABETH (*impatient*). I want this foul case never thought of again,

I want to have peace at last and forever!

2150 DAVISON. It costs you only one word. Tell me, decide:

What is to be done with this writing, my Queen?

ELIZABETH. I've *said* it. Torment me no further with this.

DAVISON. You've said it? You've said nothing to me. It please

My Queen to recall—

ELIZABETH (*stamping her foot*). Unbearable!

DAVISON. Have patience

With me. I came into this office only

A few months ago. I do not know the language

Of court and kings. I grew up with plain manners.

Have patience, teach me what my duty is—

(*He approaches her, entreating; she turns her back;  
he stands despairing; then, in a firm tone*)

Take this back! Take it! It burns my hands. Do not

2160 Choose me to serve you in this frightful business.

ELIZABETH. You do your duty! (*She goes off.*)

## Scene Twelve

*Davison. Then Burghley.*

DAVISON. She's gone. What shall I do?

Am I to keep it? Am I to hand it over?

*(To Burghley, who enters)*

Oh, good! Good that you come, my Lord. It was you

Who brought me to this office. Free me of it!

I did not know its reach. Let me go back

Into obscurity. I do not belong here.

BURGHLEY. What's this? Compose yourself. Where is the warrant?

The Queen had you called.

DAVISON. She left me in a rage.

Advise me! Help me! Here is the warrant. It's signed.

BURGHLEY *(in haste)*.

2170 Signed? Give it here! Give here!

DAVISON. I'm not allowed.

BURGHLEY. What?

DAVISON. She has not told me clearly what she wants—

BURGHLEY. Not told you? She has signed it. Give it here!

DAVISON. I am to have it executed, *not* have

It executed—God knows what I'm to do.

BURGHLEY *(pressing)*.

Right now, this minute have it executed.

Give here! You're lost forever if you delay.

DAVISON. I'm lost if I rush ahead and act too soon.

BURGHLEY. You are a fool! Give here!

*(He snatches the writing from Davison and rushes off.)*

DAVISON *(hurrying after)*. Oh, stop! I'll be ruined!





William Cecil, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Burghley, late 1580s. Attributed to the Workshop of Marcus Gheeraerts, the Younger. Wikimedia, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William\\_Cecil\\_Lord\\_Burghley\\_Gheeraerts\\_Workshop.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Cecil_Lord_Burghley_Gheeraerts_Workshop.jpg)

# Act Five

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*The scene is that of Act One.<sup>66</sup>*

## Scene One

*Hanna Kennedy, dressed in deep mourning, her eyes red with weeping, is tying up packets and sealing letters. Her work is often broken by grief and pauses for prayer. Paulet and Drury, also in black, enter, followed by servants carrying gold and silver vessels, mirrors, paintings, and other treasures, which then fill the background. Paulet delivers a jewelry case to Hanna and a list of its contents, as he indicates by gestures. The sight renews the Nurse's pain. The others withdraw. Melvil enters.*

KENNEDY (*cries out as she sees him*).

Melvil! It's you! I see you once again!

2180 MELVIL. Dear Kennedy, yes. We meet here again.

KENNEDY. After a long, long painful separation!

MELVIL. A sorrowful and painful meeting again!

KENNEDY. Oh, God! You've come—

MELVIL. To take last leave of my Queen.

KENNEDY. Now at last, on the morning of her death,

It's granted her to see her people again.

Oh, I'll not ask how you have fared meanwhile,

Nor will I tell how we have suffered since

The long-ago day you were torn from our side.

There will be time for that yet. Oh, Melvil, that we

2190 Should have to see the dawn of this day!

MELVIL. Let us

Not weaken one another. I shall weep  
 As long as I live, no smile brighten these cheeks,  
 Nor shall I lay aside black mourning. Always  
 Shall I mourn. But today I would stand firm.  
 Promise me you will master your grief and,  
 When others give way to despair, let *us* go  
 Before her, her staff on the way to her death!

KENNEDY. Melvil, you are mistaken if you believe  
 The Queen needs our support to go to her death. She  
 2200 Sets an example for us. Never fear!

For Mary Stuart dies a heroine and a queen.

MELVIL. And how did she receive the news of her death?

I heard it said she had not been prepared.

KENNEDY. She had not. Wholly different fears disturbed her,  
 Not death but rescue. Mortimer had promised  
 To free her last night, and between hope and fear—  
 Whether she trust him with her honor and person—  
 The Queen awaited him and looked for the morning.  
 A sudden thud of footsteps, hammering and knocking.

2210 We think we hear our rescuers come at last.  
 Hope beckons, will to live assails us— The door  
 Opens, Sir Paulet comes to say carpenters  
 Are setting up a scaffold down below us.  
 (*She turns away, overcome by grief.*)

MELVIL. Dear God in heaven! How did Mary respond?

KENNEDY (*after a pause in which she steadies herself*).

One does not lay life aside slowly. *All*  
 At once, swift, in an instant must come the change  
 From Time to the Eternal. And God granted  
 My Lady in this moment strength to cast off  
 All earthly hope with a firm spirit and  
 2220 Attach herself to Heaven full of faith.  
 No sign of fear, no complaint tarnished her honor.  
 Only on learning of Lord Leicester's bad faith,  
 Of the fate of that boy who gave his life  
 For her, on seeing the old knight's distress,  
 Whose last hope had died for her cause and for her,



Did she shed tears. She passed the rest of the night  
 In prayer, wrote to her dearest friends, and made  
 Her will with her own hand. She's resting now, her  
 Last sleep.

MELVIL.           Who's with her?

KENNEDY.                       Her physician, her women.

## Scene Two

*As above. Margaret Curle enters.*

2230 KENNEDY. Mistress, what news? The Lady is awake?

CURLE (*drying her eyes*).

Already dressed. And asking for you.

KENNEDY.                               I'm coming.

(*To Melvil, who is about to follow*)

Not yet. Wait till I have prepared the Lady. (*She goes off.*)

CURLE. It's Melvil, our old steward!

MELVIL.                               Yes, it's me.

CURLE. Oh, this house needs no steward anymore!

You come from London? Have you news of my husband?

MELVIL. He's to be freed when—

CURLE.                               When the Queen is no more!

And it's his witness that condemned her?

MELVIL.                               Just so.

CURLE. He gave false witness—

MELVIL.                               But consider, Mistress—

CURLE. I'll swear to it in court, swear to his face.

2240 She dies without guilt.

MELVIL.                               God grant it be so!

## Scene Three

*As above. Burgoyne enters, then Hanna Kennedy.*

BURGOYNE (seeing Melvil).

Ah, Melvil!

MELVIL (*embracing him*). Burgoyne!

BURGOYNE (*to Margaret Curle*). Bring us a glass of wine for  
Our Lady. Quickly!

*(Curle goes off.)*

MELVIL. Is the Queen not well?

BURGOYNE. She believes herself strong and she will not eat, but  
Hard struggle awaits her. Let no one say  
Fear blanched her cheek, when it was Nature's weakness.

MELVIL (*to the Nurse, who enters*). Will she see me?

KENNEDY. She'll be here right away. —  
You look about, see these magnificent things?  
In life we suffered need, in death we have plenty.

## Scene Four

*As above. Two other waiting women enter, dressed in mourning.  
Seeing Melvil, they burst into tears.*

MELVIL. What a reunion! Gertrude! Rosamond!

2250 SECOND ATTENDANT. She sent us out, to speak with God alone.

*(Two more waiting women enter, in mourning and expressing deep  
grief.)*

## Scene Five

*Margaret Curle returns. She carries a golden cup of wine, sets it on the table, and supports herself on a chair.*

MELVIL. What is it, Mistress?

CURLE. Oh, God!

BURGOYNE. What is wrong?

CURLE. Oh, what I saw!

MELVIL. Be calm. Tell us what it is.

CURLE. As I came up the grand stair with this wine cup,

The door sprang open in the hall. Oh, God!

MELVIL. You saw what?

CURLE. Walls draped in black. Before them

A scaffold hung in black rose from the floor.

A block, a cushion, both black, a gleaming axe,

The room of men with greedy, blood-thirsty looks.

THE WOMEN. God bless our Lady!

MELVIL. Steady now! She is coming.

## Scene Six

*As above. Mary. She is dressed in festive white, an Agnus Dei<sup>67</sup> hangs on a chain at her neck, a rosary at her belt. She carries a Crucifix and, in her hair, a diadem. Her long black veil is thrown back. At her entrance all present step back to both sides, with expressions of pain. Melvil instinctively sinks to his knees.*

MARY (*looking about, poised and calm*).

2260

Why do you weep? Why grieve? Be joyful with me.

The end of all my sorrow is here at last,

My fetters fall, my prison doors swing open,

And my soul mounts toward freedom on angels' wings.

When I was in the power of my proud rival,

Suffering disgrace, what a great queen is spared—

That was the proper time to weep for me.

Beneficent and healing, Death now approaches,

That grave friend. With his dusky wings he will cover

- Base pain. Last fate ennobles fallen mankind.  
 2270 I feel the crown on my head, pride in my soul!  
*(Advancing a few steps)*  
 What? Melvil here? Not thus, brave Knight! Stand up!  
 You've come to your Queen's triumph, not her death.  
 I had not hoped to know such happiness:  
 My history will not rest in enemies' hands,  
*One friend, of my faith witnesses my death.*  
 Tell me, Knight, how you fared in this hostile land  
 Since they took you away from me.
- MELVIL. I suffered  
 No want but care for you, whom I could not serve.
- MARY. And Didier, my old chamberlain? He sleeps an  
 2280 Eternal sleep? He was advanced in years.
- MELVIL. He's not so blessed. He lives to mourn your youth.<sup>68</sup>
- MARY. Had I but lived to embrace my loved kinsmen!  
 I die among strangers, see your tears only.  
 Last wishes for my own I lay in your hands.  
 I bless the Most Christian King, my brother,<sup>69</sup>  
 The royal house of France, my uncle the Cardinal,  
 And Henry Guise, my cousin. I bless the Pope,  
 Vicar of Christ, who blesses me, and the  
 Catholic King,<sup>70</sup> who wished to be my savior.  
 2290 They all are named in my will and testament,  
 They will not scorn my gifts, however poor.  
*(Turning to her servants)*  
 You I commend all to my brother in France.  
 He'll give you a new country. Honor my last  
 Request: Do not remain in England, let  
 The Briton not feed on your sorrow. *(Showing her Crucifix)* By  
 The Savior, promise me not to remain in  
 This wretched land.
- MELVIL *(touching the Crucifix)*. I swear in the name of all.
- MARY. What I possessed once I give to you all. My  
 Last will be honored. What I wear to my death  
 2300 Is yours, too. Grant me once more to enjoy  
 An earthly brilliance on my way to Heaven!

*(To the Attendants)*

To you, my Alix, Gertrude, Rosamond,  
 My pearls and my clothes. Young, you love fine things.  
 You, Margaret, have next claim upon my bounty.  
 I leave you behind unhappiest of all.  
 My will shows I do not impose your husband's  
 Guilt on you. You, my Hanna, find no charm  
 In gold or stones. Your treasure is my memory.  
 This cloth is yours. I've worked it for you with my  
 Own hands in hours of sorrow, woven my tears  
 Into it. Bind my eyes with this when it's time.  
 I would receive this at the last from my Hanna.

2310

KENNEDY. Oh, Melvil, I can't bear it!

MARY. Come, one and all!

Come and receive my last farewell.

*(She extends her hands. One after another they kneel and  
 kiss the offered hand, weeping.)*

Farewell!

Margaret, farewell. Alix, goodbye. My thanks,  
 Burgoyne, for faithful service all these years.  
 Gertrude, your lips burn. Much loved and much hated  
 I was. Your glowing heart, Gertrude, demands love.  
 A worthy husband seal your happiness.  
 Berta, chaste bride of Heaven, take your vows soon!  
 The goods of this world deceive. Learn from your Queen.  
 No more! Farewell! Farewell! Forever farewell!

2320

*(She turns away. All except Melvil go off.)*

## Scene Seven

*Mary. Melvil.*

MARY. All temporal things are now in order. I hope  
 To leave this world as debtor to no man. But  
 One thing weighs on my soul, holds it earthbound.

MELVIL. Tell a true friend. And lighten your burdened heart.

MARY. I stand at the edge of Eternity  
 And have not reconciled the Holy One yet.  
 A priest of *my* Church is denied me. I  
 2330 Refuse the service of another. I would  
 Die faithful to my sole redeeming Church.

MELVIL. For Heaven the wish is as good as the deed.  
 Tyranny binds the hands but not the heart.

MARY. Melvil, the heart alone is not enough.  
 Faith needs a token. God thus became flesh,  
 Invisible gifts in the visible.  
 The Universal Church, the Catholic Church,  
 Builds a great ladder heavenward, for faith  
 Strengthens faith where ten thousands kneel to pray,  
 2340 Coals become flame and the winged spirit takes flight.  
 Happy who gather in the House of the Lord!  
 The bishop in white vestments stands at the altar,  
 Where candles flicker, incense rises, bells sound.  
 He takes the chalice, blesses it, proclaims  
 The wonder of the bread and the wine, and  
 The faithful people, believing, drop to their knees  
 Before God present. I alone am shut out!

MELVIL. You are received and God is present. Trust him.  
 For a dry rod can put forth green shoots and the  
 2350 One who struck water from the rock can prepare  
 An altar in your prison, turn *this* earthly  
 Vessel into a holy chalice for you.<sup>71</sup>

*(He takes up the wine cup from the table.)*

MARY. I understand you. The Redeemer said:  
 When two are gathered in *my* name, I am

Present among you.<sup>72</sup> What consecrates a priest? A  
Pure heart and spotless life. Thus *you* are a priest  
Sent me by God to give me comfort. To  
You would I make my last confession and learn  
From your mouth of forgiveness and salvation.

2360 MELVIL. Then know, my Queen, that God can also perform  
A miracle to comfort you. You err:  
Here *is* a priest and God is present here, too.  
(*He uncovers his head and presents a Host in a golden vessel.*)  
I am a priest. To hear your last confession  
And give you peace now on your way to death, I  
Have taken holy orders and I bring you  
This Host sent by the Holy Father, who blessed it.

MARY. God's joy is given me on the threshold of death!

Like the apostle whom the angel led  
From prison, whom no lock and no sword held—<sup>73</sup>  
2370 He strides through closed gates and stands shining in jail—  
I am surprised by Heaven's herald when  
All earthly rescuers have failed me and foundered.  
And you, my servant once, are now God's and  
His holy mouth. Your knee bent once before me,  
I now bend mine before you. (*She kneels before him.*)

MELVIL (*making the sign of the Cross*). In the name of  
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!  
Mary, Queen, have you well examined your heart?  
And swear to confess truth before the true God?

MARY. My heart is open before Him and you.

2380 MELVIL. What sin does conscience reproach you since you  
Were reconciled last with your God?

MARY. My heart was filled with envious hate and wish  
For revenge on my rival. I hoped God would  
Forgive me and myself could not forgive her.

MELVIL. Do you rue it and wish to die reconciled?

MARY. As surely as I hope God will forgive me.

MELVIL. What other sin does your heart accuse you of?

MARY. Oh, not by *hate* alone, by sinful *love*  
I have offended highest God yet more.

- 2390        My empty heart was drawn to a man who  
              Deceived me shamelessly and deserted me.<sup>74</sup>
- MELVIL. Do you rue it? And has your heart turned away?
- MARY. My hardest struggle. The last bond is broken.
- MELVIL. What other guilt does conscience yet reproach you?
- MARY. An early blood guilt, long ago confessed,  
              Returns with terrors like none known before,  
              Now that I settle my accounts before dying.  
              Darnley, my husband, I worked to have murdered,  
              Then gave my seducer my hand in marriage.
- 2400        I have atoned with proper penalties, but  
              It gnaws at my soul and gives me no peace.
- MELVIL. Your heart accuses no sin not yet confessed?
- MARY. You now know everything that burdens my heart.
- MELVIL. Think of the nearness of all-knowing God!  
              Think of the penalties for sins not confessed.  
              That is the sin of eternal death. Committed  
              Against the Holy Spirit, it condemns you.
- MARY. Then let eternal mercy grant me victory  
              In the last struggle. I have hidden nothing.
- 2410        MELVIL. You would conceal from God the crime of which  
              All men accuse you? Nothing here of your part  
              In Babington's and Parry's high treason?  
              You die a temporal death for this deed. Would  
              You also die eternal death for it?
- MARY. I shall appear in the presence of God  
              Before the minute hand has turned a full round,  
              And I repeat: I have confessed all things.
- MELVIL. The heart deceives. Have you evaded the *word*  
              While the *will* took part in the crime? His eye,  
              Which sees the deepest things, will not be deceived.
- 2420        MARY. I called all princes, charged them to free me  
              Of unworthy bonds. Never by intention  
              Or deed did I attempt the life of my rival!
- MELVIL. Your scribes both gave false witness, you would say?
- MARY. It is as I have told you. God be their judge!
- MELVIL. You climb the scaffold believing you are guiltless?



MARY. God finds me worthy to atone early crime by  
Dying, this last, a death I have not deserved.<sup>75</sup>

MELVIL (*making the sign of the Cross*).

2430 Go now, repent. Blood can redeem blood crime.  
You erred of weakness. Mortal weakness does not  
Follow the soul into death's transfiguration.  
By the power vested in me to loose and to bind  
I grant you remission of all your sins.  
May coming events accord with your faith.  
(*He offers her the Host.*)  
This is the Body given for you. Take, eat.  
(*He lifts the chalice from the table, consecrates it in silent prayer and offers it to her.*)  
This is the Blood shed for you.

(*She hesitates with a gesture of refusal.*)<sup>76</sup>

Take it. Accept!

The Pope extends this favor, gives you in death  
The priest's privilege and the anointed king's.

(*She receives the chalice.*)

2440 Just as your earthly body now is joined to God,  
Just so you join eternal Godliness in Heaven,  
Where there is no guilt, where there is no weeping.

(*He sets down the chalice. A noise at the door. He covers his head and goes to answer. Mary kneels still in silent devotion.*)

MELVIL (*returning*). A hard test lies before you. Are you strong  
Enough to conquer all hate, all bitterness?

MARY. I fear no lapse. I've given both to God.

MELVIL. Prepare yourself to receive Lords Leicester and Burghley.

## Scene Eight

*As above. Burghley. Leicester and Paulet.*

*Leicester remains at a distance and does not look up. Burghley, noticing his state, places himself between Leicester and the Queen.*

BURGHLEY. I am here, Lady Stuart, to receive  
Your last orders.

MARY. I thank you.

BURGHLEY. It is the wish of  
My Queen that nothing meet be denied you.

MARY. My testament names my last wishes. I  
2450 Have laid it in Knight Paulet's hands and ask  
That it be executed faithfully.

PAULET. You may depend on it.

MARY. I bid you to release my servants unharmed  
To France or Scotland, as they require to go.

BURGHLEY. It shall be as you wish.

MARY. Since my body  
Is not to lie in hallowed ground, I ask that  
*This faithful servant (indicating Melvil)* bring my heart to my friends in  
France. It was ever there!

BURGHLEY. That, too, shall be done.  
Have you yet other—

MARY. To the Queen of England  
2460 A sister's greetings. Tell her I forgive her  
My death with all my heart and rue and regret my  
Hot words of yesterday. God keep her and grant her  
A happy reign!

BURGHLEY. Have you not reconsidered?  
Will you still not accept the deacon's attendance?

MARY. I have been reconciled with God. Knight Paulet!  
Guiltless, I've greatly pained you, robbed your comfort  
In old age. I hope you will not think of me  
With hatred.

PAULET (*gives her his hand*). God be with you! Go in peace!

## Scene Nine

*As above. Hanna Kennedy and the Queen's other women enter, showing horror; the Sheriff follows, carrying a white staff; behind them, through the open door, one sees armed Guards.*

MARY. What is it, Hanna? — Ah, yes. It's time. The sheriff  
2470 Comes now to lead us to death. Now we must part.

*(Her women cling to her, weeping.)*

Farewell! Farewell! *(To Melvil)* You, sir, and my Hanna shall  
Go with me on this last walk. You, my Lord,  
Would not deny me this last favor, I hope.

BURGHLEY. I've no authority.

MARY. You would deny me  
This last? Respect my sex, sir. Who is to render  
Me this last service? Never would my sister  
Intend our sex insulted by men's rough hands!

BURGHLEY. No woman at the block! Her wailing—

MARY. There  
Will be no wailing. You, my Lord, would not  
2480 Remove me in death from my nurse. Her arms brought  
Me into life, her hand lead me into death.

PAULET *(to Burghley)*. Permit it.

BURGHLEY. So be it.

MARY. Now I have nothing  
More in this world— *(She raises the Crucifix and kisses it.)*  
My Savior! My Redeemer!  
As you spread your arms on the Cross, now  
Open them wide and receive me in grace.

*(She turns to go and her eye falls on Earl Leicester, who has looked up at her departure. Mary shudders, her knees give way, and she is about to fall when Leicester catches her. She gazes at him long and steadily; he cannot meet her gaze; finally she speaks.)*

You keep your word, Lord Leicester, you who promised  
Your arm on which to lead me from my prison.

*(He stands as if destroyed. She continues softly)*

Not only freedom would I credit your hand.

You were to make my freedom *precious* to me.

2490 And now on the way out of this world, tempted

No more by earthly longing, I admit,

With no shame, weakness I have overcome.

Farewell. Live happy, too, if you are able!

Your fortune was to sue for two queens; one,

A loving heart, you spurned, to win a proud one.

Kneel at the feet of your Elizabeth!

May your reward not become your punishment.

Farewell! Now I have nothing more in this world!

*(She goes off, led by the Sheriff, Melvil and her Nurse at her side. Burghley and Paulet follow; the others, grieving, follow her with their eyes until she is out of sight. They then go off through two other doors.)*

## Scene Ten

*Leicester alone*

And I still live! Endure yet to live on!

2500 This roof does not fall? No abyss opens?

What have I not lost! What divine happiness!

She goes, pure spirit now. I stay behind, damned.

And what of my resolve to stifle my heart?

To see her head fall with a steady gaze?

Must she, in death, catch me again in love's toils?

Wretch! You have no more claim to womanish feelings!

There'll be no love on *your* path anymore!

Armor your breast with steel, your brow be a rock!

Would you not lose the prize of this shameful deed,

2510 You must hold to it boldly and complete it.

Silence, soft feelings! Turn to stone, you eyes!

I shall see her fall, I will be witness.

*(He strides toward the door Mary went out, then stops.)*

No use. Hellish dread holds me. I cannot look.

Listen! What was that? They are down there already,  
Beneath my feet. Yes. I hear voices. Away from  
This house of death!

*(He wants to go out by another door and finds it locked.)*

What binds me to this floor?

Must I hear what I cannot bear to see?

The deacon's voice, he cautions her, she breaks in,  
She prays in a loud voice, a steady, loud voice.

2520

Stillness and silence. Only sobbing—the women.

She's being disrobed. The stool is placed. She kneels.

*(He speaks these last words with mounting anxiety, then stops. One  
sees him start and shudder, then sink to the floor. A murmur of  
voices rises from below and lasts long.)*

*Elizabeth's room in Act Four*

## Scene Eleven

*Elizabeth enters from the side, visibly uneasy.*

No one here. Still no word. Will evening not come?<sup>77</sup>

A torment, waiting this way. Has it happened?

Has it not? Both fill me with dread. I daren't ask.

No sign of Leicester, none of Burghley either.

If they've left London, then the arrow's in flight.

Cost it my realm, I've cannot stop it. — Who's there?

## Scene Twelve

*Elizabeth. A Page.*

ELIZABETH. You come back all alone? Where are their lordships?

PAGE. My Lord Earl Leicester and the Lord High Treasurer—

2530

ELIZABETH *(in suspense)*. Where are they?

PAGE.

They are *not* in London.

ELIZABETH.

Not?

Where *are* they then?

PAGE.

That no one knew to tell me.

It's said that they left London before dawn,

In a great hurry and quite secretly.

ELIZABETH (*exclaiming*). I am Queen of England! (*Pacing up and down*) Go and call—

No. Stay here. — She is dead! At last I have space

On earth. Why do I tremble? Why so anxious?

The grave hides it. Who dares say I did it? (*To the Page*)

Are you still here? My scribe shall come this instant.

Send for Earl Shrewsbury. — Here he is himself!

(*The Page goes off.*)

## Scene Thirteen

*Elizabeth. Earl Shrewsbury.*

2540 ELIZABETH. Welcome, my Lord. What brings you here so late?

SHREWSBURY. Great Queen, my worried heart, concerned for your fame,

Compelled me to the Tower today, where

Mary's scribes Curle and Nau are held.<sup>78</sup> The Guard

Refused me entry. Only threats brought me in.

God! What a sight! Curle lay, his hair wild, his eyes

Crazed. Hardly has he seen me, he grasps my knees,

Demands to know his Queen's fate. Rumor had reached him.

When I confirmed his witness had condemned her,

He fell on Nau, to throttle him, then turned his

2550 Rage on himself, beat his breast, cursed them both. His

Witness was false, he said. The letters he'd sworn

Were true—they were false. He'd written words he

Never heard spoken. Nau had led him to it.

He rushed to the sill, cried into the street,

So that a great crowd gathered: He was the Queen's

Scribe, had accused her falsely, was a villain.

ELIZABETH. You said he'd lost his mind. All this proves nothing.

SHREWSBURY. It proves the more. Oh, Queen, use caution. Order  
A new inquiry into everything.

2560 ELIZABETH. I shall. Because you wish it, not because  
I doubt the peers who tried her. To assure you  
We renew inquiry. Good that there's still time.

## Scene Fourteen

*Davison to join the others*

ELIZABETH. The warrant, sir, that I put into your hand—  
Where is it?

DAVISON (*utterly astonished*). Warrant?

ELIZABETH. That I gave you to  
Keep yesterday—

DAVISON. Gave me to keep?

ELIZABETH. The people  
Clamored for me to sign. I did its will.

I did so under duress and placed the sheet

In your hand—to gain time. You know what I said.

SHREWSBURY. Return it, sir. The matter has changed. Inquiry  
2570 Must be reopened.

DAVISON. Reopened? Merciful God!

ELIZABETH. Don't take so long. Where is the sheet?

DAVISON (*despairing*). I am lost!  
As good as dead!

ELIZABETH (*breaking in*). Let me not think, sir—

DAVISON. I'm lost!  
I do not have it anymore.

ELIZABETH. What's this?

SHREWSBURY. God!

DAVISON. Burghley has it. Since yesterday.

ELIZABETH. You wretch!  
Is that how you obey me? Did I not

Command you strictly to keep it?

DAVISON. You did not,

My Queen.

ELIZABETH. You call me a liar, do you, you rogue?

When did I tell you to give Burghley the sheet?

DAVISON. Not in clear words, but—

ELIZABETH. Good-for-Nothing! You dare

2580 *Interpret* my words? Woe betide you if this

Ends in disaster. You shall pay with your life.

Earl Shrewsbury, you see how my name is misused!

SHREWSBURY. I see—oh, God!

ELIZABETH. What is it you're saying?

SHREWSBURY. If

The squire has acted without your knowledge, he must

Be called before a court of peers. He has

Exposed your name to the contempt of all time.

## Last Scene

*As above. Burghley. Then Kent.*

BURGHLEY (*drops to one knee before the Queen*).

Long live my royal Mistress, Queen of England!

May all foes of this Isle end like this Stuart!

*(Shrewsbury covers his face. Davison wrings his hands.)*

ELIZABETH. Tell me, my Lord. Did you have warrant from me?

2590 BURGHLEY. No, Mistress. I had it from Davison here.

ELIZABETH. Davison gave it to you in my name?

BURGHLEY. No! He did not—

ELIZABETH. You executed it

Not knowing my will? It was just, the world

Cannot blame us. But you had no right to

Encroach upon my royal kindness. You are

Banned from our presence. (*To Davison*) Worse awaits you, who

Exceeded your brief and betrayed a trust.

To the Tower! He'll be tried for his life.

My noble Talbot, you alone I find just





