

**DUMAS**  
**ALEXANDRE**

MARY STUART

Александр Дюма

**Mary Stuart**

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**Дюма А.**

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# Alexandre Dumas

## Mary Stuart / Celebrated Crimes

### CHAPTER I

Some royal names are predestined to misfortune: in France, there is the name “Henry”. Henry I was poisoned, Henry II was killed in a tournament, Henry III and Henry IV were assassinated. As to Henry V, for whom the past is so fatal already, God alone knows what the future has in store for him.

In Scotland, the unlucky name is “Stuart”. Robert I, founder of the race, died at twenty-eight of a lingering illness. Robert II, the most fortunate of the family, was obliged to pass a part of his life, not merely in retirement, but also in the dark, on account of inflammation of the eyes, which made them blood-red. Robert III succumbed to grief, the death of one son and the captivity of other. James I was stabbed by Graham in the abbey of the Black Monks of Perth. James II was killed at the siege of Roxburgh, by a splinter from a burst cannon. James III was assassinated by an unknown hand in a mill, where he had taken refuge during the battle of Sauchie. James IV, wounded by two arrows and a blow from a halberd, fell amidst his nobles on the battlefield of Flodden. James V died of grief at the loss of his two sons, and of remorse for the execution of Hamilton. James VI, destined to unite on his head the two crowns of Scotland and England, son of a father who had been assassinated, led a melancholy and timorous existence, between the scaffold of his mother, Mary Stuart, and that of his son, Charles I. Charles II spent a portion of his life in exile. James II died in it. The Chevalier Saint-George, after having been proclaimed King of Scotland as James VIII, and of England and Ireland as James III, was forced to flee, without having been able to give his arms even the lustre of a defeat. His son, Charles Edward, after the skirmish at Derby and the battle of Culloden, hunted from mountain to mountain, pursued from rock to rock, swimming from shore to shore, picked up half naked by a French vessel, betook himself to Florence to die there, without the European courts having ever consented to recognise him as a sovereign. Finally, his brother, Henry Benedict, the last heir of the Stuarts, having lived on a pension of three thousand pounds sterling, granted him by George III, died completely forgotten, bequeathing to the House of Hanover all the crown jewels which James II had carried off when he passed over to the Continent in 1688 – a tardy but complete recognition of the legitimacy of the family which had succeeded his.

In the midst of this unlucky race, Mary Stuart was the favourite of misfortune. As Brantome has said of her, “Whoever desires to write about this illustrious queen of Scotland has, in her, two very, large subjects, the one her life, the other her death,” Brantome had known her on one of the most mournful occasions of her life – at the moment when she was quitting France for Scotland.

It was on the 9th of August, 1561, after having lost her mother and her husband in the same year, that Mary Stuart, Dowager of France and Queen of Scotland at nineteen, escorted by her uncles, Cardinals Guise and Lorraine, by the Duke and Duchess of Guise, by the Duc d’Aumale and M. de Nemours, arrived at Calais, where two galleys were waiting to take her to Scotland, one commanded by M. de Mevillon and the other by Captain Albize. She remained six days in the town. At last, on the 15th of the month, after the saddest adieus to her family, accompanied by Messieurs d’Aumale, d’Elboeuf, and Damville, with many nobles, among whom were Brantome and Chatelard, she embarked in M. Mevillon’s galley, which was immediately ordered to put out to sea, which it did with the aid of oars, there not being sufficient wind to make use of the sails.

Mary Stuart was then in the full bloom of her beauty, beauty even more brilliant in its mourning garb – a beauty so wonderful that it shed around her a charm which no one whom she wished to please could escape, and which was fatal to almost everyone. About this time, too, someone made her the

subject of a song, which, as even her rivals confessed, contained no more than the truth. It was, so it was said, by M. de Maison-Fleur, a cavalier equally accomplished in arms and letters: Here it is: —

“In robes of whiteness, lo, Full sad and mournfully, Went pacing to and fro Beauty’s divinity; A shaft in hand she bore From Cupid’s cruel store, And he, who fluttered round, Bore, o’er his blindfold eyes And o’er his head uncrowned, A veil of mournful guise, Whereon the words were wrought: ‘You perish or are caught.’”

Yes, at this moment, Mary Stuart, in her deep mourning of white, was more lovely than ever; for great tears were trickling down her cheeks, as, weaving a handkerchief, standing on the quarterdeck, she who was so grieved to set out, bowed farewell to those who were so grieved to remain.

At last, in half an hour’s time, the harbour was left behind; the vessel was out at sea. Suddenly, Mary heard loud cries behind her: a boat coming in under press of sail, through her pilot’s ignorance had struck upon a rock in such a manner that it was split open, and after having trembled and groaned for a moment like someone wounded, began to be swallowed up, amid the terrified screams of all the crew. Mary, horror-stricken, pale, dumb, and motionless, watched her gradually sink, while her unfortunate crew, as the keel disappeared, climbed into the yards and shrouds, to delay their death-agony a few minutes; finally, keel, yards, masts, all were engulfed in the ocean’s gaping jaws. For a moment there remained some black specks, which in turn disappeared one after another; then wave followed upon wave, and the spectators of this horrible tragedy, seeing the sea calm and solitary as if nothing had happened, asked themselves if it was not a vision that had appeared to them and vanished.

“Alas!” cried Mary, falling on a seat and leaning both arms on the vessel’s stern, “what a sad omen for such a sad voyage!” Then, once more fixing on the receding harbour her eyes, dried for a moment by terror, and beginning to moisten anew, “Adieu, France!” she murmured, “adieu, France!” and for five hours she remained thus, weeping and murmuring, “Adieu, France! adieu, France!”

Darkness fell while she was still lamenting; and then, as the view was blotted out and she was summoned to supper, “It is indeed now, dear France,” said she, rising, “that I really lose you, since jealous night heaps mourning upon mourning, casting a black veil before my sight. Adieu then, one last time, dear France; for never shall I see you more.”

With these words, she went below, saying that she was the very opposite of Dido, who, after the departure of Aeneas, had done nothing but look at the waves, while she, Mary, could not take her eyes off the land. Then everyone gathered round her to try to divert and console her. But she, growing sadder, and not being able to respond, so overcome was she with tears, could hardly eat; and, having had a bed got ready on the stern deck, she sent for the steersman, and ordered him if he still saw land at daybreak, to come and wake her immediately. On this point Mary was favoured; for the wind having dropped, when daybreak came the vessel was still within sight of France.

It was a great joy when, awakened by the steersman, who had not forgotten the order he had received, Mary raised herself on her couch, and through the window that she had had opened, saw once more the beloved shore. But at five o’clock in the morning, the wind having freshened, the vessel rapidly drew farther away, so that soon the land completely disappeared. Then Mary fell back upon her bed, pale as death, murmuring yet once again — “Adieu, France! I shall see thee no more.”

Indeed, the happiest years of her life had just passed away in this France that she so much regretted. Born amid the first religious troubles, near the bedside of her dying father, the cradle mourning was to stretch for her to the grave, and her stay in France had been a ray of sunshine in her night. Slandered from her birth, the report was so generally spread abroad that she was malformed, and that she could not live to grow up, that one day her mother, Mary of Guise, tired of these false rumours, undressed her and showed her naked to the English ambassador, who had come, on the part of Henry VIII, to ask her in marriage for the Prince of Wales, himself only five years old. Crowned at nine months by Cardinal Beaton, archbishop of St. Andrews, she was immediately hidden by her mother, who was afraid of treacherous dealing in the King of England, in Stirling Castle. Two years later, not finding even this fortress safe enough, she removed her to an island in the middle of the Lake

of Menteith, where a priory, the only building in the place, provided an asylum for the royal child and for four young girls born in the same year as herself, having like her the sweet name which is an anagram of the word “aimer,” and who, quitting her neither in her good nor in her evil fortune, were called the “Queen’s Marys”. They were Mary Livingston, Mary Fleming, Mary Seyton, and Mary Beaton. Mary stayed in this priory till Parliament, having approved her marriage with the French dauphin, son of Henry II, she was taken to Dumbarton Castle, to await the moment of departure. There she was entrusted to M. de Breze, sent by Henry II to fetch her. Having set out in the French galleys anchored at the mouth of the Clyde, Mary, after having been hotly pursued by the English fleet, entered Brest harbour, 15th August, 1548, one year after the death of Francis! Besides the queen’s four Marys, the vessels also brought to France three of her natural brothers, among whom was the Prior of St. Andrews, James Stuart, who was later to abjure the Catholic faith, and with the title of Regent, and under the name of the Earl of Murray, to become so fatal to poor Mary. From Brest, Mary went to St. Germain-en-Laye, where Henry II, who had just ascended the throne, overwhelmed her with caresses, and then sent her to a convent where the heiresses of the noblest French houses were brought up. There Mary’s happy qualities developed. Born with a woman’s heart and a man’s head, Mary not only acquired all the accomplishments which constituted the education of a future queen, but also that real knowledge which is the object of the truly learned.

Thus, at fourteen, in the Louvre, before Henry II, Catherine de Medici, and the whole court, she delivered a discourse in Latin of her own composition, in which she maintained that it becomes women to cultivate letters, and that it is unjust and tyrannical to deprive flowery of their perfumes, by banishing young girls from all but domestic cares. One can imagine in what manner a future queen, sustaining such a thesis, was likely to be welcomed in the most lettered and pedantic court in Europe. Between the literature of Rabelais and Marot verging on their decline, and that of Ronsard and Montaigne reaching their zenith, Mary became a queen of poetry, only too happy never to have to wear another crown than that which Ronsard, Dubellay, Maison-Fleur, and Brantome placed daily on her head. But she was predestined. In the midst of those fetes which a waning chivalry was trying to revive came the fatal joust of Tournelles: Henry II, struck by a splinter of a lance for want of a visor, slept before his time with his ancestors, and Mary Stuart ascended the throne of France, where, from mourning for Henry, she passed to that for her mother, and from mourning for her mother to that for her husband. Mary felt this last loss both as woman and as poet; her heart burst forth into bitter tears and plaintive harmonies. Here are some lines that she composed at this time:

“Into my song of woe,  
Sung to a low sad air,  
My cruel grief I throw,  
For loss beyond compare;  
In bitter sighs and tears  
Go by my fairest years.

Was ever grief like mine  
Imposed by destiny?  
Did ever lady pine,  
In high estate, like me,  
Of whom both heart and eye  
Within the coffin lie?

Who, in the tender spring  
And blossom of my youth,  
Taste all the sorrowing

Of life's extremest ruth,  
And take delight in nought  
Save in regretful thought.

All that was sweet and gay  
Is now a pain to see;  
The sunniness of day  
Is black as night to me;  
All that was my delight  
Is hidden from my sight.

My heart and eye, indeed,  
One face, one image know,  
The which this mournful weed  
On my sad face doth show,  
Dyed with the violet's tone  
That is the lover's own.

Tormented by my ill,  
I go from place to place,  
But wander as I will  
My woes can nought efface;  
My most of bad and good  
I find in solitude.

But wheresoe'er I stay,  
In meadow or in copse,  
Whether at break of day  
Or when the twilight drops,  
My heart goes sighing on,  
Desiring one that's gone.

If sometimes to the skies  
My weary gaze I lift,  
His gently shining eyes  
Look from the cloudy drift,  
Or stooping o'er the wave  
I see him in the grave.

Or when my bed I seek,  
And sleep begins to steal,  
Again I hear him speak,  
Again his touch I feel;  
In work or leisure,  
he is ever near to me.

No other thing I see,  
However fair displayed,  
By which my heart will be



A tributary made,  
Not having the perfection  
Of that, my lost affection.

Here make an end, my verse,  
Of this thy sad lament,  
Whose burden shall rehearse  
Pure love of true intent,  
Which separation's stress  
Will never render less."

"It was then," says Brantome, "that it was delightful to see her; for the whiteness of her countenance and of her veil contended together; but finally the artificial white yielded, and the snow-like pallor of her face vanquished the other. For it was thus," he adds, "that from the moment she became a widow, I always saw her with her pale hue, as long as I had the honour of seeing her in France, and Scotland, where she had to go in eighteen months' time, to her very great regret, after her widowhood, to pacify her kingdom, greatly divided by religious troubles. Alas! she had neither the wish nor the will for it, and I have often heard her say so, with a fear of this journey like death; for she preferred a hundred times to dwell in France as a dowager queen, and to content herself with Touraine and Poitou for her jointure, than to go and reign over there in her wild country; but her uncles, at least some of them, not all, advised her, and even urged her to it, and deeply repented their error."

Mary was obedient, as we have seen, and she began her journey under such auspices that when she lost sight of land she was like to die. Then it was that the poetry of her soul found expression in these famous lines:

"Farewell, delightful land of France,  
My motherland,  
The best beloved!  
Foster-nurse of my young years!  
Farewell, France, and farewell my happy days!  
The ship that separates our loves  
Has borne away but half of me;  
One part is left thee and is throe,  
And I confide it to thy tenderness,  
That thou may'st hold in mind the other part."

*[Translator's note. – It has not been found possible to make a rhymed version of these lines without sacrificing the simplicity which is their chief charm.]*

This part of herself that Mary left in France was the body of the young king, who had taken with him all poor Mary's happiness into his tomb.

Mary had but one hope remaining, that the sight of the English fleet would compel her little squadron to turn back; but she had to fulfil her destiny. This same day, a fog, a very unusual occurrence in summer-time, extended all over the Channel, and caused her to escape the fleet; for it was such a dense fog that one could not see from stern to mast. It lasted the whole of Sunday, the day after the departure, and did not lift till the following day, Monday, at eight o'clock in the morning. The little flotilla, which all this time had been sailing haphazard, had got among so many reefs that if the fog had lasted some minutes longer the galley would certainly have grounded on some rock, and would have perished like the vessel that had been seen engulfed on leaving port. But, thanks to the fog's clearing, the pilot recognised the Scottish coast, and, steering his four boats with great skill through

all the dangers, on the 20th August he put in at Leith, where no preparation had been made for the queen's reception. Nevertheless, scarcely had she arrived there than the chief persons of the town met together and came to felicitate her. Meanwhile, they hastily collected some wretched nags, with harness all falling in pieces, to conduct the queen to Edinburgh.

At sight of this, Mary could not help weeping again; for she thought of the splendid palfreys and hackneys of her French knights and ladies, and at this first view Scotland appeared to her in all its poverty. Next day it was to appear to her in all its wildness.

After having passed one night at Holyrood Palace, "during which," says Brantome, "five to six hundred rascals from the town, instead of letting her sleep, came to give her a wild morning greeting on wretched fiddles and little rebecks," she expressed a wish to hear mass. Unfortunately, the people of Edinburgh belonged almost entirely to the Reformed religion; so that, furious at the queen's giving such a proof of papistry at her first appearance, they entered the church by force, armed with knives, sticks and stones, with the intention of putting to death the poor priest, her chaplain. He left the altar, and took refuge near the queen, while Mary's brother, the Prior of St. Andrews, who was more inclined from this time forward to be a soldier than an ecclesiastic, seized a sword, and, placing himself between the people and the queen, declared that he would kill with his own hand the first man who should take another step. This firmness, combined with the queen's imposing and dignified air, checked the zeal of the Reformers.

As we have said, Mary had arrived in the midst of all the heat of the first religious wars. A zealous Catholic, like all her family on the maternal side, she inspired the Huguenots with the gravest fears: besides, a rumour had got about that Mary, instead of landing at Leith, as she had been obliged by the fog, was to land at Aberdeen. There, it was said, she would have found the Earl of Huntly, one of the peers who had remained loyal to the Catholic faith, and who, next to the family of Hamilton, was, the nearest and most powerful ally of the royal house. Seconded by him and by twenty thousand soldiers from the north, she would then have marched upon Edinburgh, and have re-established the Catholic faith throughout Scotland. Events were not slow to prove that this accusation was false.

As we have stated, Mary was much attached to the Prior of St. Andrews, a son of James V and of a noble descendant of the Earls of Mar, who had been very handsome in her youth, and who, in spite of the well-known love for her of James V, and the child who had resulted, had none the less wedded Lord Douglas of Lochleven, by whom she had had two other sons, the elder named William and the younger George, who were thus half-brothers of the regent. Now, scarcely had she reascended the throne than Mary had restored to the Prior of St. Andrews the title of Earl of Mar, that of his maternal ancestors, and as that of the Earl of Murray had lapsed since the death of the famous Thomas Randolph, Mary, in her sisterly friendship for James Stuart, hastened to add, this title to those which she had already bestowed upon him.

But here difficulties and complications arose; for the new Earl of Murray, with his character, was not a man to content himself with a barren title, while the estates which were crown property since the extinction of the male branch of the old earls, had been gradually encroached upon by powerful neighbours, among whom was the famous Earl of Huntly, whom we have already mentioned: the result was that, as the queen judged that in this quarter her orders would probably encounter opposition, under pretext of visiting her possessions in the north, she placed herself at the head of a small army, commanded by her brother, the Earl of Mar and Murray.

The Earl of Huntly was the less duped by the apparent pretext of this expedition, in that his son, John Cordon, for some abuse of his powers, had just been condemned to a temporary imprisonment. He, notwithstanding, made every possible submission to the queen, sending messengers in advance to invite her to rest in his castle; and following up the messengers in person, to renew his invitation *viva voce*. Unfortunately, at the very moment when he was about to join the queen, the governor of Inverness, who was entirely devoted to him, was refusing to allow Mary to enter this castle, which was

a royal one. It is true that Murray, aware that it does not do to hesitate in the face of such rebellions, had already had him executed for high treason.

This new act of firmness showed Huntly that the young queen was not disposed to allow the Scottish lords a resumption of the almost sovereign power humbled by her father; so that, in spite of the extremely kind reception she accorded him, as he learned while in camp that his son, having escaped from prison, had just put himself at the head of his vassals, he was afraid that he should be thought, as doubtless he was, a party to the rising, and he set out the same night to assume command of his troops, his mind made up, as Mary only had with her seven to eight thousand men, to risk a battle, giving out, however, as Buccleuch had done in his attempt to snatch James V from the hands of the Douglasses, that it was not at the queen he was aiming, but solely at the regent, who kept her under his tutelage and perverted her good intentions.

Murray, who knew that often the entire peace of a reign depends on the firmness one displays at its beginning, immediately summoned all the northern barons whose estates bordered on his, to march against Huntly. All obeyed, for the house of Cordon was already so powerful that each feared it might become still more so; but, however, it was clear that if there was hatred for the subject there was no great affection for the queen, and that the greater number came without fixed intentions and with the idea of being led by circumstances.

The two armies encountered near Aberdeen. Murray at once posted the troops he had brought from Edinburgh, and of which he was sure, on the top of rising ground, and drew up in tiers on the hill slope all his northern allies. Huntly advanced resolutely upon them, and attacked his neighbours the Highlanders, who after a short resistance retired in disorder. His men immediately threw away their lances, and, drawing their swords, crying, "Cordon, Cordon!" pursued the fugitives, and believed they had already gained the battle, when they suddenly ran right against the main body of Murray's army, which remained motionless as a rampart of iron, and which, with its long lances, had the advantage of its adversaries, who were armed only with their claymores. It was then the turn of the Cordons to draw back, seeing which, the northern clans rallied and returned to the fight, each soldier having a sprig of heather in his cap that his comrades might recognise him. This unexpected movement determined the day: the Highlanders ran down the hillside like a torrent, dragging along with them everyone who could have wished to oppose their passage. Then Murray seeing that the moment had come for changing the defeat into a rout, charged with his entire cavalry: Huntly, who was very stout and very heavily armed, fell and was crushed beneath the horses' feet; John Cordon, taken prisoner in his flight, was executed at Aberdeen three days afterwards; finally, his brother, too young to undergo the same fate at this time, was shut up in a dungeon and executed later, the day he reached the age of sixteen.

Mary had been present at the battle, and the calm and courage she displayed had made a lively impression on her wild defenders, who all along the road had heard her say that she would have liked to be a man, to pass her days on horseback, her nights under a tent, to wear a coat of mail, a helmet, a buckler, and at her side a broadsword.

Mary made her entry into Edinburgh amid general enthusiasm; for this expedition against the Earl of Huntly, who was a Catholic, had been very popular among the inhabitants, who had no very clear idea of the real motives which had caused her to undertake it: They were of the Reformed faith, the earl was a papist, there was an enemy the less; that is all they thought about. Now, therefore; the Scotch, amid their acclamations, whether viva voce or by written demands, expressed the wish that their queen, who was without issue by Francis II, should re-marry: Mary agreed to this, and, yielding to the prudent advice of those about her, she decided to consult upon this marriage Elizabeth, whose heir she was, in her title of granddaughter of Henry VII, in the event of the Queen of England's dying without posterity. Unfortunately, she had not always acted with like circumspection; for at the death of Mary Tudor, known as Bloody Mary, she had laid claim to the throne of Henry VIII, and, relying on the illegitimacy of Elizabeth's birth, had with the dauphin assumed sovereignty over Scotland,

England, and Ireland, and had had coins struck with this new title, and plate engraved with these new armorial bearings.

Elizabeth was nine years older than Mary—that is to say, that at this time she had not yet attained her thirtieth year; she was not merely her rival as queen, then, but as woman. As regards education, she could sustain comparison with advantage; for if she had less charm of mind, she had more solidity of judgment: versed in politics, philosophy, history; rhetoric, poetry and music, besides English, her maternal tongue, she spoke and wrote to perfection Greek, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish; but while Elizabeth excelled Mary on this point, in her turn Mary was more beautiful, and above all more attractive, than her rival. Elizabeth had, it is true, a majestic and agreeable appearance, bright quick eyes, a dazzlingly white complexion; but she had red hair, a large foot, — [Elizabeth bestowed a pair of her shoes on the University of Oxford; their size would point to their being those of a man of average stature.] — and a powerful hand, while Mary, on the contrary, with her beautiful ashy-fair hair, — [Several historians assert that Mary Stuart had black hair; but Brantome, who had seen it, since, as we have said, he accompanied her to Scotland, affirms that it was fair. And, so saying, he (the executioner) took off her headdress, in a contemptuous manner, to display her hair already white, that while alive, however, she feared not to show, nor yet to twist and frizz as in the days when it was so beautiful and so fair.] — her noble open forehead, eyebrows which could be only blamed for being so regularly arched that they looked as if drawn by a pencil, eyes continually beaming with the witchery of fire, a nose of perfect Grecian outline, a mouth so ruby red and gracious that it seemed that, as a flower opens but to let its perfume escape, so it could not open but to give passage to gentle words, with a neck white and graceful as a swan's, hands of alabaster, with a form like a goddess's and a foot like a child's, Mary was a harmony in which the most ardent enthusiast for sculptured form could have found nothing to reproach.

This was indeed Mary's great and real crime: one single imperfection in face or figure, and she would not have died upon the scaffold. Besides, to Elizabeth, who had never seen her, and who consequently could only judge by hearsay, this beauty was a great cause of uneasiness and of jealousy, which she could not even disguise, and which showed itself unceasingly in eager questions. One day when she was chatting with James Melville about his mission to her court, Mary's offer to be guided by Elizabeth in her choice of a husband, — a choice which the queen of England had seemed at first to wish to see fixed on the Earl of Leicester, — she led the Scotch ambassador into a cabinet, where she showed him several portraits with labels in her own handwriting: the first was one of the Earl of Leicester. As this nobleman was precisely the suitor chosen by Elizabeth, Melville asked the queen to give it him to show to his mistress; but Elizabeth refused, saying that it was the only one she had. Melville then replied, smiling, that being in possession of the original she might well part with the copy; but Elizabeth would on no account consent. This little discussion ended, she showed him the portrait of Mary Stuart, which she kissed very tenderly, expressing to Melville a great wish to see his mistress. "That is very easy, madam," he replied: "keep your room, on the pretext that you are indisposed, and set out incognito for Scotland, as King James V set out for France when he wanted to see Madeleine de Valois, whom he afterwards married."

"Alas!" replied Elizabeth, "I would like to do so, but it is not so easy as you think. Nevertheless, tell your queen that I love her tenderly, and that I wish we could live more in friendship than we have done up to the present". Then passing to a subject which she seemed to have wanted to broach for a long time, "Melville," she continued, "tell me frankly, is my sister as beautiful as they say?"

"She has that reputation," replied Melville; "but I cannot give your Majesty any idea of her beauty, having no point of comparison."

"I will give you one," the queen said. "Is she more beautiful than I?"

"Madam," replied Melville, "you are the most beautiful woman in England, and Mary Stuart is the most beautiful woman in Scotland."

“Then which of the two is the taller?” asked Elizabeth, who was not entirely satisfied by this answer, clever as it was.

“My mistress, madam,” responded Melville; “I am obliged to confess it.”

“Then she is too tall,” Elizabeth said sharply, “for I am tall enough. And what are her favourite amusements?” she continued.

“Madam,” Melville replied, “hunting, riding, performing on the lute and the harpsichord.”

“Is she skilled upon the latter?” Elizabeth inquired. “Oh yes, madam,” answered Melville; “skilled enough for a queen.”

There the conversation stopped; but as Elizabeth was herself an excellent musician, she commanded Lord Hunsdon to bring Melville to her at a time when she was at her harpsichord, so that he could hear her without her seeming to have the air of playing for him. In fact, the same day, Hunsdon, agreeably to her instructions, led the ambassador into a gallery separated from the queen’s apartment merely by tapestry, so that his guide having raised it, Melville at his leisure could hear Elizabeth, who did not turn round until she had finished the piece, which, however, she was playing with much skill. When she saw Melville, she pretended to fly into a passion, and even wanted to strike him; but her anger calmed down by little and little at the ambassador’s compliments, and ceased altogether when he admitted that Mary Stuart was not her equal. But this was not all: proud of her triumph, Elizabeth desired also that Melville should see her dance. Accordingly, she kept back her despatches for two days that he might be present at a ball that she was giving. These despatches, as we have said, contained the wish that Mary Stuart should espouse Leicester; but this proposal could not be taken seriously. Leicester, whose personal worth was besides sufficiently mediocre, was of birth too inferior to aspire to the hand of the daughter of so many kings; thus Mary replied that such an alliance would not become her. Meanwhile, something strange and tragic came to pass.

## CHAPTER II

Among the lords who had followed Mary Stuart to Scotland was, as we have mentioned, a young nobleman named Chatelard, a true type of the nobility of that time, a nephew of Bayard on his mother's side, a poet and a knight, talented and courageous, and attached to Marshal Damville, of whose household he formed one. Thanks to this high position, Chatelard, throughout her stay in France, paid court to Mary Stuart, who, in the homage he rendered her in verse, saw nothing more than those poetical declarations of gallantry customary in that age, and with which she especially was daily overwhelmed. But it happened that about the time when Chatelard was most in love with the queen she was obliged to leave France, as we have said. Then Marshal Damville, who knew nothing of Chatelard's passion, and who himself, encouraged by Mary's kindness, was among the candidates to succeed Francis II as husband, set out for Scotland with the poor exile, taking Chatelard with him, and, not imagining he would find a rival in him, he made a confidant of him, and left him with Mary when he was obliged to leave her, charging the young poet to support with her the interests of his suit. This post as confidant brought Mary and Chatelard more together; and, as in her capacity as poet, the queen treated him like a brother, he made bold in his passion to risk all to obtain another title. Accordingly, one evening he got into Mary Stuart's room, and hid himself under the bed; but at the moment when the queen was beginning to undress, a little dog she had began to yelp so loudly that her women came running at his barking, and, led by this indication, perceived Chatelard. A woman easily pardons a crime for which too great love is the excuse: Mary Stuart was woman before being queen – she pardoned.

But this kindness only increased Chatelard's confidence: he put down the reprimand he had received to the presence of the queen's women, and supposed that if she had been alone she would have forgiven him still more completely; so that, three weeks after, this same scene was repeated. But this time, Chatelard, discovered in a cupboard, when the queen was already in bed, was placed under arrest.

The moment was badly chosen: such a scandal, just when the queen was about to re-marry, was fatal to Mary, let alone to Chatelard. Murray took the affair in hand, and, thinking that a public trial could alone save his sister's reputation, he urged the prosecution with such vigour, that Chatelard, convicted of the crime of lese-majeste, was condemned to death. Mary entreated her brother that Chatelard might be sent back to France; but Murray made her see what terrible consequences such a use of her right of pardon might have, so that Mary was obliged to let justice take its course: Chatelard was led to execution. Arrived on the scaffold, which was set up before the queen's palace, Chatelard, who had declined the services of a priest, had Ronsard's Ode on Death read; and when the reading, which he followed with evident pleasure, was ended, he turned – towards the queen's windows, and, having cried out for the last time, "Adieu, loveliest and most cruel of princesses!" he stretched out his neck to the executioner, without displaying any repentance or uttering any complaint. This death made all the more impression upon Mary, that she did not dare to show her sympathy openly.

Meanwhile there was a rumour that the queen of Scotland was consenting to a new marriage, and several suitors came forward, sprung from the principal reigning families of Europe: first, the Archduke Charles, third son of the Emperor of Germany; then the Duke of Anjou, who afterwards became Henry III. But to wed a foreign prince was to give up her claims to the English crown. So Mary refused, and, making a merit of this to Elizabeth, she cast her eyes on a relation of the latter's, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, son of the Earl of Lennox. Elizabeth, who had nothing plausible to urge against this marriage, since the Queen of Scotland not only chose an Englishman for husband, but was marrying into her own family, allowed the Earl of Lennox and his son to go to the Scotch court, reserving it to herself, if matters appeared to take a serious turn, to recall them both – a command which they would be constrained to obey, since all their property was in England.

Darnley was eighteen years of age: he was handsome, well-made, elegant; he talked in that attractive manner of the young nobles of the French and English courts that Mary no longer heard since her exile in Scotland; she let herself be deceived by these appearances, and did not see that under this brilliant exterior Darnley hid utter insignificance, dubious courage, and a fickle and churlish character. It is true that he came to her under the auspices of a man whose influence was as striking as the risen fortune which gave him the opportunity to exert it. We refer to David Rizzio.

David Rizzio, who played such a great part in the life of Mary Stuart, whose strange favour for him has given her enemies, probably without any cause, such cruel weapons against her, was the son of a Turin musician burdened with a numerous family, who, recognising in him a pronounced musical taste, had him instructed in the first principles of the art. At the age of fifteen he had left his father's house and had gone on foot to Nice, where the Duke of Savoy held his court; there he entered the service of the Duke of Moreto, and this lord having been appointed, some years afterwards, to the Scottish embassy, Rizzio followed him to Scotland. As this young man had a very fine voice, and accompanied on the viol and fiddle songs of which both the airs and the words were of his own composition, the ambassador spoke of him to Mary, who wished to see him. Rizzio, full of confidence in himself, and seeing in the queen's desire a road to success, hastened to obey her command, sang before her, and pleased her. She begged him then of Moreto, making no more of it than if she had asked of him a thoroughbred dog or a well-trained falcon. Moreto presented him to her, delighted at finding such an opportunity to pay his court; but scarcely was Rizzio in her service than Mary discovered that music was the least of his gifts, that he possessed, besides that, education if not profound at least varied, a supple mind, a lively imagination, gentle ways, and at the same time much boldness and presumption. He reminded her of those Italian artists whom she had seen at the French court, and spoke to her the tongue of Marot and Ronsard, whose most beautiful poems he knew by heart: this was more than enough to please Mary Stuart. In a short time he became her favourite, and meanwhile the place of secretary for the French despatches falling vacant, Rizzio was provided for with it.

Darnley, who wished to succeed at all costs, enlisted Rizzio in his interests, unconscious that he had no need of this support; and as, on her side, Mary, who had fallen in love with him at first sight, fearing some new intrigue of Elizabeth's, hastened on this union so far as the proprieties permitted, the affair moved forward with wonderful rapidity; and in the midst of public rejoicing, with the approbation of the nobility, except for a small minority, with Murray at its head, the marriage was solemnised under the happiest auspices, 29th July 1565. Two days before, Darnley and his father, the Earl of Lennox, had received a command to return to London, and as they had not obeyed it, a week after the celebration of the marriage they learned that the Countess of Lennox, the only one of the family remaining in Elizabeth's power, had been arrested and taken to the Tower. Thus Elizabeth, in spite of her dissimulation, yielding to that first impulse of violence that she always had such trouble to overcome, publicly displayed her resentment.

However, Elizabeth was not the woman to be satisfied with useless vengeance: she soon released the countess, and turned her eyes towards Murray, the most discontented of the nobles in opposition, who by this marriage was losing all his personal influence. It was thus easy for Elizabeth to put arms in his hand. In fact, when he had failed in his first attempt to seize Darnley, he called to his aid the Duke of Chatellerault, Glencairn, Argyll, and Rothes, and collecting what partisans they could, they openly rebelled against the queen. This was the first ostensible act of that hatred which was afterwards so fatal to Mary.

The queen, on her side, appealed to her nobles, who in response hastened to rally to her, so that in a month's time she found herself at the head of the finest army that ever a king of Scotland had raised. Darnley assumed the command of this magnificent assembly, mounted on a superb horse, arrayed in gilded armour; and accompanied by the queen, who, in a riding habit, with pistols at her saddle-bow, wished to make the campaign with him, that she might not quit his side for a moment.

Both were young, both were handsome, and they left Edinburgh amidst the cheers of the people and the army.

Murray and his accomplices did not even try to stand against them, and the campaign consisted of such rapid and complex marches and counter-marches, that this rebellion is called the Run-about Raid-that is to say, the run in every sense of the word. Murray and the rebels withdrew into England, where Elizabeth, while seeming to condemn their unlucky attempt, afforded them all the assistance they needed.

Mary returned to Edinburgh delighted at the success of her two first campaigns, not suspecting that this new good fortune was the last she would have, and that there her short-lived prosperity would cease. Indeed, she soon saw that in Darnley she had given herself not a devoted and very attentive husband, as she had believed, but an imperious and brutal master, who, no longer having any motive for concealment, showed himself to her just as he was, a man of disgraceful vices, of which drunkenness and debauchery was the least. Accordingly, serious differences were not long in springing up in this royal household.

Darnley in wedding Mary had not become king, but merely the queen's husband. To confer on him authority nearly equalling a regent's, it was necessary that Mary should grant him what was termed the crown matrimonial – a crown Francis II had worn during his short royalty, and that Mary, after Darnley's conduct to herself, had not the slightest intention of bestowing on him. Thus, to whatever entreaties he made, in whatever form they were wrapped, Mary merely replied with an unvaried and obstinate refusal. Darnley, amazed at this force of will in a young queen who had loved him enough to raise him to her, and not believing that she could find it in herself, sought in her entourage for some secret and influential adviser who might have inspired her with it. His suspicions fell on Rizzio.

In reality, to whatever cause Rizzio owed his power (and to even the most clear-sighted historians this point has always remained obscure), be it that he ruled as lover, be it that he advised as minister, his counsels as long as he lived were always given for the greater glory of the queen. Sprung from so low, he at least wished to show himself worthy, of having risen so high, and owing everything to Mary, he tried to repay her with devotion. Thus Darnley was not mistaken, and it was indeed Rizzio who, in despair at having helped to bring about a union which he foresaw must become so unfortunate, gave Mary the advice not to give up any of her power to one who already possessed much more than he deserved, in possessing her person.

Darnley, like all persons of both weak and violent character, disbelieved in the persistence of will in others, unless this will was sustained by an outside influence. He thought that in ridding himself of Rizzio he could not fail to gain the day, since, as he believed, he alone was opposing the grant of this great desire of his, the crown matrimonial. Consequently, as Rizzio was disliked by the nobles in proportion as his merits had raised him above them, it was easy for Darnley to organise a conspiracy, and James Douglas of Morton, chancellor of the kingdom, consented to act as chief.

This is the second time since the beginning of our narrative that we inscribe this name Douglas, so often pronounced, in Scottish history, and which at this time, extinct in the elder branch, known as the Black Douglasses, was perpetuated in the younger branch, known as the Red Douglasses. It was an ancient, noble, and powerful family, which, when the descent in the male line from Robert Bruce had lapsed, disputed the royal title with the first Stuart, and which since then had constantly kept alongside the throne, sometimes its support, sometimes its enemy, envying every great house, for greatness made it uneasy, but above all envious of the house of Hamilton, which, if not its equal, was at any rate after itself the next most powerful.

During the whole reign of James V, thanks to the hatred which the king bore them, the Douglasses had not only lost all their influence, but had also been exiled to England. This hatred was on account of their having seized the guardianship of the young prince and kept him prisoner till he was fifteen. Then, with the help of one of his pages, James V had escaped from Falkland, and had



reached Stirling, whose governor was in his interests. Scarcely was he safe in the castle than he made proclamation that any Douglas who should approach within a dozen miles of it would be prosecuted for high treason. This was not all: he obtained a decree from Parliament, declaring them guilty of felony, and condemning them to exile; they remained proscribed, then, during the king's lifetime, and returned to Scotland only upon his death. The result was that, although they had been recalled about the throne, and though, thanks to the past influence of Murray, who, one remembers, was a Douglas on the mother's side, they filled the most important posts there, they had not forgiven to the daughter the enmity borne them by the father.

This was why James Douglas, chancellor as he was, and consequently entrusted with the execution of the laws, put himself at the head of a conspiracy which had for its aim the violation of all laws; human and divine.

Douglas's first idea had been to treat Rizzio as the favourites of James III had been treated at the Bridge of Lauder – that is to say, to make a show of having a trial and to hang him afterwards. But such a death did not suffice for Darnley's vengeance; as above everything he wished to punish the queen in Rizzio's person, he exacted that the murder should take place in her presence.

Douglas associated with himself Lord Ruthven, an idle and dissolute sybarite, who under the circumstances promised to push his devotion so far as to wear a cuirass; then, sure of this important accomplice, he busied himself with finding other agents.

However, the plot was not woven with such secrecy but that something of it transpired; and Rizzio received several warnings that he despised. Sir James Melville, among others, tried every means to make him understand the perils a stranger ran who enjoyed such absolute confidence in a wild, jealous court like that of Scotland. Rizzio received these hints as if resolved not to apply them to himself; and Sir James Melville, satisfied that he had done enough to ease his conscience, did not insist further. Then a French priest, who had a reputation as a clever astrologer, got himself admitted to Rizzio, and warned him that the stars predicted that he was in deadly peril, and that he should beware of a certain bastard above all. Rizzio replied that from the day when he had been honoured with his sovereign's confidence, he had sacrificed in advance his life to his position; that since that time, however, he had had occasion to notice that in general the Scotch were ready to threaten but slow to act; that, as to the bastard referred to, who was doubtless the Earl of Murray, he would take care that he should never enter Scotland far enough for his sword to reach him, were it as long as from Dumfries to Edinburgh; which in other words was as much as to say that Murray should remain exiled in England for life, since Dumfries was one of the principal frontier towns.

Meanwhile the conspiracy proceeded, and Douglas and Ruthven, having collected their accomplices and taken their measures, came to Darnley to finish the compact. As the price of the bloody service they rendered the king, they exacted from him a promise to obtain the pardon of Murray and the nobles compromised with him in the affair of the "run in every sense". Darnley granted all they asked of him, and a messenger was sent to Murray to inform him of the expedition in preparation, and to invite him to hold himself in readiness to reenter Scotland at the first notice he should receive. Then, this point settled, they made Darnley sign a paper in which he acknowledged himself the author and chief of the enterprise. The other assassins were the Earl of Morton, the Earl of Ruthven, George Douglas the bastard of Angus, Lindley, and Andrew Carew. The remainder were soldiers, simple murderers' tools, who did not even know what was afoot. Darnley reserved it for himself to appoint the time.

Two days after these conditions were agreed upon, Darnley having been notified that the queen was alone with Rizzio, wished to make himself sure of the degree of her favour enjoyed by the minister. He accordingly went to her apartment by a little door of which he always kept the key upon him; but though the key turned in the lock, the door did not open. Then Darnley knocked, announcing himself; but such was the contempt into which he had fallen with the queen, that Mary left him outside, although, supposing she had been alone with Rizzio, she would have had time to send

him away. Darnley, driven to extremities by this, summoned Morton, Ruthven, Lennox, Lindley, and Douglas's bastard, and fixed the assassination of Rizzio for two days later.

They had just completed all the details, and had, distributed the parts that each must play in this bloody tragedy, when suddenly, and at the moment when they least expected it, the door opened and, Mary Stuart appeared on the threshold.

"My lords," said she, "your holding these secret counsels is useless. I am informed of your plots, and with God's help I shall soon apply a remedy".

With these words, and before the conspirators had time to collect themselves, she shut the door again, and vanished like a passing but threatening vision. All remained thunderstruck. Morton was the first to find his tongue.

"My lords," said he, "this is a game of life and death, and the winner will not be the cleverest or the strongest, but the readiest. If we do not destroy this man, we are lost. We must strike him down, this very evening, not the day after to-morrow."

Everyone applauded, even Ruthven, who, still pale and feverish from riotous living, promised not to be behindhand. The only point changed, on Morton's suggestion, was that the murder should take place next day; for, in the opinion of all, not less than a day's interval was needed to collect the minor conspirators, who numbered not less than five hundred.

The next day, which was Saturday, March 9th, 1566, Mary Stuart, who had inherited from her father, James V, a dislike of ceremony and the need of liberty, had invited to supper with her six persons, Rizzio among the number. Darnley, informed of this in the morning, immediately gave notice of it to the conspirators, telling them that he himself would let them into the palace between six and seven o'clock in the evening. The conspirators replied that they would be in readiness.

The morning had been dark and stormy, as nearly all the first days of spring are in Scotland, and towards evening the snow and wind redoubled in depth and violence. So Mary had remained shut up with Rizzio, and Darnley, who had gone to the secret door several times, could hear the sound of instruments and the voice of the favourite, who was singing those sweet melodies which have come down to our time, and which Edinburgh people still attribute to him. These songs were for Mary a reminder of her stay in France, where the artists in the train of the Medicis had already brought echoes from Italy; but for Darnley they were an insult, and each time he had withdrawn strengthened in his design.

At the appointed time, the conspirators, who had been given the password during the day, knocked at the palace gate, and were received there so much the more easily that Darnley himself, wrapped in a great cloak, awaited them at the postern by which they were admitted. The five hundred soldiers immediately stole into an inner courtyard, where they placed themselves under some sheds, as much to keep themselves from the cold as that they might not be seen on the snow-covered ground. A brightly lighted window looked into this courtyard; it was that of the queen's study: at the first signal given them from this window, the soldiers were to break in the door and go to the help of the chief conspirators.

These instructions given, Darnley led Morton, Ruthven, Lennox, Lindley, Andrew Carew, and Douglas's bastard into the room adjoining the study, and only separated from it by a tapestry hanging before the door. From there one could overhear all that was being said, and at a single bound fall upon the guests.

Darnley left them in this room, enjoining silence; then, giving them as a signal to enter the moment when they should hear him cry, "To me, Douglas!" he went round by the secret passage, so that seeing him come in by his usual door the queen's suspicions might not be roused by his unlooked-for visit.

Mary was at supper with six persons, having, say de Thou and Melville, Rizzio seated on her right; while, on the contrary, Carapden assures us that he was eating standing at a sideboard. The talk was gay and intimate; for all were giving themselves up to the ease one feels at being safe and

warm, at a hospitable board, while the snow is beating against the windows and the wind roaring in the chimneys. Suddenly Mary, surprised that the most profound silence had succeeded to the lively and animated flow of words among her guests since the beginning of supper, and suspecting, from their glances, that the cause of their uneasiness was behind her, turned round and saw Darnley leaning on the back of her chair. The queen shuddered; for although her husband was smiling when looking at Rizzio, this smile had assumed such a strange expression that it was clear that something terrible was about to happen. At the same moment, Mary heard in the next room a heavy, dragging step draw near the cabinet, then the tapestry was raised, and Lord Ruthven, in armour of which he could barely support the weight, pale as a ghost, appeared on the threshold, and, drawing his sword in silence, leaned upon it.

The queen thought he was delirious.

“What do you want, my lord?” she said to him; “and why do you come to the palace like this?”

“Ask the king, madam,” replied Ruthven in an indistinct voice. “It is for him to answer.”

“Explain, my lord,” Mary demanded, turning again towards Darnley; “what does such a neglect of ordinary propriety mean?”

“It means, madam,” returned Darnley, pointing to Rizzio, “that that man must leave here this very minute.”

“That man is mine, my lord,” Mary said, rising proudly, “and consequently takes orders only from me.”

“To me, Douglas!” cried Darnley.

At these words, the conspirators, who for some moments had drawn nearer Ruthven, fearing, so changeable was Darnley’s character, lest he had brought them in vain and would not dare to utter the signal – at these words, the conspirators rushed into the room with such haste that they overturned the table. Then David Rizzio, seeing that it was he alone they wanted, threw himself on his knees behind the queen, seizing the hem of her robe and crying in Italian, “Giustizia! giustizia!” Indeed, the queen, true to her character, not allowing herself to be intimidated by this terrible irruption, placed herself in front of Rizzio and sheltered him behind her Majesty. But she counted too much on the respect of a nobility accustomed to struggle hand to hand with its kings for five centuries. Andrew Carew held a dagger to her breast and threatened to kill her if she insisted on defending any longer him whose death was resolved upon. Then Darnley, without consideration for the queen’s pregnancy, seized her round the waist and bore her away from Rizzio, who remained on his knees pale and trembling, while Douglas’s bastard, confirming the prediction of the astrologer who had warned Rizzio to beware of a certain bastard, drawing the king’s own dagger, plunged it into the breast of the minister, who fell wounded, but not dead. Morton immediately took him by the feet and dragged him from the cabinet into the larger room, leaving on the floor that long track of blood which is still shown there; then, arrived there, each rushed upon him as upon a quarry, and set upon the corpse, which they stabbed in fifty-six places. Meanwhile Darnley held the queen, who, thinking that all was not over, did not cease crying for mercy. But Ruthven came back, paler than at first, and at Darnley’s inquiry if Rizzio were dead, he nodded in the affirmative; then, as he could not bear further fatigue in his convalescent state, he sat down, although the queen, whom Darnley had at last released, remained standing on the same spot. At this Mary could not contain herself.

“My lord,” cried she, “who has given you permission to sit down in my presence, and whence comes such insolence?”

“Madam,” Ruthven answered, “I act thus not from insolence, but from weakness; for, to serve your husband, I have just taken more exercise than my doctors allow”. Then turning round to a servant, “Give me a glass of wine,” said he, showing Darnley his bloody dagger before putting it back in its sheath, “for here is the proof that I have well earned it”. The servant obeyed, and Ruthven drained his glass with as much calmness as if he had just performed the most innocent act.

“My lord,” the queen then said, taking a step towards him, “it may be that as I am a woman, in spite of my desire and my will, I never find an opportunity to repay you what you are doing to me; but,” she added, energetically striking her womb with her hand, “he whom I bear there, and whose life you should have respected, since you respect my Majesty so little, will one day revenge me for all these insults”. Then, with a gesture at once superb and threatening, she withdrew by Darnley’s door, which she closed behind her.

At that moment a great noise was heard in the queen’s room. Huntly, Athol, and Bothwell, who, we are soon about to see, play such an important part in the sequel of this history, were supping together in another hall of the palace, when suddenly they had heard outcries and the clash of arms, so that they had run with all speed. When Athol, who came first, without knowing whose it was, struck against the dead body of Rizzio, which was stretched at the top of the staircase, they believed, seeing someone assassinated, that the lives of the king and queen were threatened, and they had drawn their swords to force the door that Morton was guarding. But directly Darnley understood what was going on, he darted from the cabinet, followed by Ruthven, and showing himself to the newcomers —

“My lords,” he said, “the persons of the queen and myself are safe, and nothing has occurred here but by our orders. Withdraw, then; you will know more about it in time. As to him,” he added, holding up Rizzio’s head by the hair, whilst the bastard of Douglas lit up the face with a torch so that it could be recognised, “you see who it is, and whether it is worth your while to get into trouble for him”.

And in fact, as soon as Huntly, Athol, and Bothwell had recognised the musician-minister, they sheathed their swords, and, having saluted the king, went away.

Mary had gone away with a single thought in her heart, vengeance. But she understood that she could not revenge herself at one and the same time on her husband and his companions: she set to work, then, with all the charms of her wit and beauty to detach the King from his accomplices. It was not a difficult task: when that brutal rage which often carried Darnley beyond all bounds was spent, he was frightened himself at the crime he had committed, and while the assassins, assembled by Murray, were resolving that he should have that greatly desired crown matrimonial, Darnley, as fickle as he was violent, and as cowardly as he was cruel, in Mary’s very room, before the scarcely dried blood, made another compact, in which he engaged to deliver up his accomplices. Indeed, three days after the event that we have just related, the murderers learned a strange piece of news — that Darnley and Mary, accompanied by Lord Seyton, had escaped together from Holyrood Palace. Three days later still, a proclamation appeared, signed by Mary and dated from Dunbar, which summoned round the queen, in her own name and the king’s, all the Scottish lords and barons, including those who had been compromised in the affair of the “run in every sense,” to whom she not only granted full and complete pardon, but also restored her entire confidence. In this way she separated Murray’s cause from that of Morton and the other assassins, who, in their turn, seeing that there was no longer any safety for them in Scotland, fled to England, where all the queen’s enemies were always certain to find a warm welcome, in spite of the good relations which reigned in appearance between Mary and Elizabeth. As to Bothwell, who had wanted to oppose the assassination, he was appointed Warden of all the Marches of the Kingdom.

Unfortunately for her honour, Mary, always more the woman than the queen, while, on the contrary, Elizabeth was always more the queen than the woman, had no sooner regained her power than her first royal act was to exhume Rizzio, who had been quietly buried on the threshold of the chapel nearest Holyrood Palace, and to have him removed to the burial-place of the Scottish kings, compromising herself still more by the honours she paid him dead than by the favour she had granted him living.

Such an imprudent demonstration naturally led to fresh quarrels between Mary and Darnley: these quarrels were the more bitter that, as one can well understand, the reconciliation between the husband and wife, at least on the latter’s side, had never been anything but a pretence; so that, feeling herself in a stronger position still on account of her pregnancy, she restrained herself no longer, and,

leaving Darnley, she went from Dunbar to Edinburgh Castle, where on June 19th, 1566, three months after the assassination of Rizzio, she gave birth to a son who afterwards became James VI.

## CHAPTER III

Directly she was delivered, Mary sent for James Melville, her usual envoy to Elizabeth, and charged him to convey this news to the Queen of England, and to beg her to be godmother to the royal child at the same time. On arriving in London, Melville immediately presented himself at the palace; but as there was a court ball, he could not see the queen, and contented himself with making known the reason for his journey to the minister Cecil, and with begging him to ask his mistress for an audience next day. Elizabeth was dancing in a quadrille at the moment when Cecil, approaching her, said in a low voice, "Queen Mary of Scotland has just given birth to a son". At these words she grew frightfully pale, and, looking about her with a bewildered air, and as if she were about to faint, she leaned against an arm-chair; then, soon, not being able to stand upright, she sat down, threw back her head, and plunged into a mournful reverie. Then one of the ladies of her court, breaking through the circle which had formed round the queen, approached her, ill at ease, and asked her of what she was thinking so sadly. "Ah! madam," Elizabeth replied impatiently, "do you not know that Mary Stuart has given birth to a son, while I am but a barren stock, who will die without offspring?"

Yet Elizabeth was too good a politician, in spite of her liability to be carried away by a first impulse, to compromise herself by a longer display of her grief. The ball was not discontinued on that account, and the interrupted quadrille was resumed and finished.

The next day, Melville had his audience. Elizabeth received him to perfection, assuring him of all the pleasure that the news he brought had caused her, and which, she said, had cured her of a complaint from which she had suffered for a fortnight. Melville replied that his mistress had hastened to acquaint her with her joy, knowing that she had no better friend; but he added that this joy had nearly cost Mary her life, so grievous had been her confinement. As he was returning to this point for the third time, with the object of still further increasing the queen of England's dislike to marriage —

"Be easy, Melville," Elizabeth answered him; "you need not insist upon it. I shall never marry; my kingdom takes the place of a husband for me, and my subjects are my children. When I am dead, I wish graven on my tombstone: 'Here lies Elizabeth, who reigned so many years, and who died a virgin.'"

Melville availed himself of this opportunity to remind Elizabeth of the desire she had shown to see Mary, three or four years before; but Elizabeth said, besides her country's affairs, which necessitated her presence in the heart of her possessions, she did not care, after all she had heard said of her rival's beauty, to expose herself to a comparison disadvantageous to her pride. She contented herself, then, with choosing as her proxy the Earl of Bedford, who set out with several other noblemen for Stirling Castle, where the young prince was christened with great pomp, and received the name of Charles James.

It was remarked that Darnley did not appear at this ceremony, and that his absence seemed to scandalise greatly the queen of England's envoy. On the contrary, James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, had the most important place there.

This was because, since the evening when Bothwell, at Mary's cries, had run to oppose the murder of Rizzio, he had made great way in the queen's favour; to her party he himself appeared to be really attached, to the exclusion of the two others, the king's and the Earl of Murray's. Bothwell was already thirty-five years old, head of the powerful family of Hepburn, which had great influence in East Lothian and the county of Berwick; for the rest, violent, rough, given to every kind of debauchery, and capable of anything to satisfy an ambition that he did not even give himself the trouble to hide. In his youth he had been reputed courageous, but for long he had had no serious opportunity to draw the sword.

If the king's authority had been shaken by Rizzio's influence, it was entirely upset by Bothwell's. The great nobles, following the favourite's example, no longer rose in the presence of Darnley, and

ceased little by little to treat him as their equal: his retinue was cut down, his silver plate taken from him, and some officers who remained about him made him buy their services with the most bitter vexations. As for the queen, she no longer even took the trouble to conceal her dislike for him, avoiding him without consideration, to such a degree that one day when she had gone with Bothwell to Alway, she left there again immediately, because Darnley came to join her. The king, however, still had patience; but a fresh imprudence of Mary's at last led to the terrible catastrophe that, since the queen's liaison with Bothwell, some had already foreseen.

Towards the end of the month of October, 1566, while the queen was holding a court of justice at Jedburgh, it was announced to her that Bothwell, in trying to seize a malefactor called John Elliot of Park, had been badly wounded in the hand; the queen, who was about to attend the council, immediately postponed the sitting till next day, and, having ordered a horse to be saddled, she set out for Hermitage Castle, where Bothwell was living, and covered the distance at a stretch, although it was twenty miles, and she had to go across woods, marshes, and rivers; then, having remained some hours *tete-a-tete* with him, she set out again with the same speed for Jedburgh, to which she returned in the night.

Although this proceeding had made a great deal of talk, which was inflamed still more by the queen's enemies, who chiefly belonged to the Reformed religion, Darnley did not hear of it till nearly two months afterwards – that is to say, when Bothwell, completely recovered, returned with the queen to Edinburgh.

Then Darnley thought that he ought not to put up any longer with such humiliations. But as, since his treason to his accomplices, he had not found in all Scotland a noble who would have drawn the sword for him, he resolved to go and seek the Earl of Lennox, his father, hoping that through his influence he could rally the malcontents, of whom there were a great number since Bothwell had been in favour. Unfortunately, Darnley, indiscreet and imprudent as usual, confided this plan to some of his officers, who warned Bothwell of their master's intention. Bothwell did not seem to oppose the journey in any way; but Darnley was scarcely a mile from Edinburgh when he felt violent pains none the less, he continued his road, and arrived very ill at Glasgow. He immediately sent for a celebrated doctor, called James Abrenets, who found his body covered with pimples, and declared without any hesitation that he had been poisoned. However, others, among them Walter Scott, state that this illness was nothing else than smallpox.

Whatever it may have been, the queen, in the presence of the danger her husband ran, appeared to forget her resentment, and at the risk of what might prove troublesome to herself, she went to Darnley, after sending her doctor in advance. It is true that if one is to believe in the following letters, dated from Glasgow, which Mary is accused of having written to Bothwell, she knew the illness with which he was attacked too well to fear infection. As these letters are little known, and seem to us very singular we transcribe them here; later we shall tell how they fell into the power of the Confederate lords, and from their hands passed into Elizabeth's, who, quite delighted, cried on receiving them, "God's death, then I hold her life and honour in my hands!"

#### FIRST LETTER

"When I set out from the place where I had left my heart, judge in what a condition I was, poor body without a soul: besides, during the whole of dinner I have not spoken to anyone, and no one has dared to approach me, for it was easy to see that there was something amiss. When I arrived within a league of the town, the Earl of Lennox sent me one of his gentlemen to make me his compliments, and to excuse himself for not having come in person; he has caused me to be informed, moreover, that he did not dare to present himself before me after the reprimand that I gave Cunningham. This gentleman begged me, as if of his own accord, to examine his master's conduct, to ascertain if my suspicions were well founded. I have replied to him that fear was an incurable disease, that the Earl of Lennox would not be so agitated if his conscience reproached him with nothing, and that if some hasty words had escaped me, they were but just reprisals for the letter he had written me.

“None of the inhabitants visited me, which makes me think they are all in his interests; besides, they speak of him very favourably, as well as of his son. The king sent for Joachim yesterday, and asked him why I did not lodge with him, adding that my presence would soon cure him, and asked me also with what object I had come: if it were to be reconciled with him; if you were here; if I had taken Paris and Gilbert as secretaries, and if I were still resolved to dismiss Joseph? I do not know who has given him such accurate information. There is nothing, down to the marriage of Sebastian, with which he has not made himself acquainted. I have asked him the meaning of one of his letters, in which he complains of the cruelty of certain people. He replied that he was – stricken, but that my presence caused him so much joy that he thought he should die of it. He reproached me several times for being dreamy; I left him to go to supper; he begged me to return: I went back. Then he told me the story of his illness, and that he wished to make a will leaving me everything, adding that I was a little the cause of his trouble, and that he attributed it to my coldness. ‘You ask me,’ added he, ‘who are the people of whom I complain: it is of you, cruel one, of you, whom I have never been able to appease by my tears and my repentance. I know that I have offended you, but not on the matter that you reproach me with: I have also offended some of your subjects, but that you have forgiven me. I am young, and you say that I always relapse into my faults; but cannot a young man like me, destitute of experience, gain it also, break his promises, repent directly, and in time improve? If you will forgive me yet once more, I will promise to offend you never again. All the favour I ask of you is that we should live together like husband and wife, to have but one bed and one board: if you are inflexible, I shall never rise again from here. I entreat you, tell me your decision: God alone knows what I suffer, and that because I occupy myself with you only, because I love and adore only you. If I have offended you sometimes, you must bear the reproach; for when someone offends me, if it were granted me to complain to you, I should not confide my griefs to others; but when we are on bad terms, I am obliged to keep them to myself, and that maddens me.’

“He then urged me strongly to stay with him and lodge in his house; but I excused myself, and replied that he ought to be purged, and that he could not be, conveniently, at Glasgow; then he told me that he knew I had brought a letter for him, but that he would have preferred to make the journey with me. He believed, I think, that I meant to send him to some prison: I replied that I should take him to Craigmiller, that he would find doctors there, that I should remain near him, and that we should be within reach of seeing my son. He has answered that he will go where I wish to take him, provided that I grant him what he has asked. He does not, however, wish to be seen by anyone.

“He has told me more than a hundred pretty things that I cannot repeat to you, and at which you yourself would be surprised: he did not want to let me go; he wanted to make me sit up with him all night. As for me, I pretended to believe everything, and I seemed to interest myself really in him. Besides, I have never seen him so small and humble; and if I had not known how easily his heart overflows, and how mine is impervious to every other arrow than those with which you have wounded it, I believe that I should have allowed myself to soften; but lest that should alarm you, I would die rather than give up what I have promised you. As for you, be sure to act in the same way towards those traitors who will do all they can to separate you from me. I believe that all those people have been cast in the same mould: this one always has a tear in his eye; he bows down before everyone, from the greatest to the smallest; he wishes to interest them in his favour, and make himself pitied. His father threw up blood to-day through the nose and mouth; think what these symptoms mean. I have not seen him yet, for he keeps to the house. The king wants me to feed him myself; he won’t eat unless I do. But, whatever I may do, you will be deceived by it no more than I shall be deceiving myself. We are united, you and I, to two kinds of very detestable people [Mary means Miss Huntly, Bothwell’s wife, whom he repudiated, at the king’s death, to marry the queen.]: that hell may sever these knots then, and that heaven may form better ones, that nothing can break, that it may make of us the most tender and faithful couple that ever was; there is the profession of faith in which I would die.



“Excuse my scrawl: you must guess more than the half of it, but I know no help for this. I am obliged to write to you hastily while everyone is asleep here: but be easy, I take infinite pleasure in my watch; for I cannot sleep like the others, not being able to sleep as I would like – that is to say, in your arms.

“I am going to get into bed; I shall finish my letter tomorrow: I have too many things to tell to you, the night is too far advanced: imagine my despair. It is to you I am writing, it is of myself that I converse with you, and I am obliged to make an end.

“I cannot prevent myself, however, from filling up hastily the rest of my paper. Cursed be the crazy creature who torments me so much! Were it not for him, I could talk to you of more agreeable things: he is not greatly changed; and yet he has taken a great deal of it. But he has nearly killed me with the fetid smell of his breath; for now his is still worse than your cousin’s: you guess that this is a fresh reason for my not approaching him; on the contrary, I go away as far as I can, and sit on a chair at the foot of his bed.

“Let us see if I forget anything:

“His father’s messenger on the road;  
The question about Joachim;  
The-state of my house;  
The people of my suite;  
Subject of my arrival;  
Joseph;  
Conversation between him and me;  
His desire to please me and his repentance;  
The explanation of his letter;  
Mr. Livingston.

“Ah! I was forgetting that. Yesterday Livingston during supper told de Rere in a low voice to drink to the health of one I knew well, and to beg me to do him the honour. After supper, as I was leaning on his shoulder near the fire, he said to me, ‘Is it not true that there are visits very agreeable for those who pay them and those who receive them? But, however satisfied they seem with your arrival, I challenge their delight to equal the grief of one whom you have left alone to-day, and who will never be content till he sees you again.’ I asked him of whom he wished to speak to me. He then answered me by pressing my arm: ‘Of one of those who have not followed you; and among those it is easy for you to guess of whom I want to speak.’

“I have worked till two o’clock at the bracelet; I have enclosed a little key which is attached by two strings: it is not as well worked as I should like, but I have not had time to make it better; I will make you a finer one on the first occasion. Take care that it is not seen on you; for I have worked at it before everyone, and it would be recognised to a certainty.

“I always return, in spite of myself, to the frightful attempt that you advise. You compel me to concealments, and above all to treacheries that make me shudder; I would rather die, believe me, than do such things; for it makes my heart bleed. He does not want to follow me unless I promise him to have the selfsame bed and board with him as before, and not to abandon him so often. If I consent to it, he says he will do all I wish, and will follow me everywhere; but he has begged me to put off my departure for two days. I have pretended to agree to all he wishes; but I have told him not to speak of our reconciliation to anyone, for fear it should make some lords uneasy. At last I shall take him everywhere I wish... Alas! I have never deceived anyone; but what would I not do to please you? Command, and whatever happens, I shall obey. But see yourself if one could not contrive some secret means in the shape of a remedy. He must purge himself at Craigmiller and take baths there; he will be some days without going out. So far as I can see, he is very uneasy; but he has great trust in what I tell him: however, his confidence does not go so far as to allow him to open his mind to me. If you like,

I will tell him every thing: I can have no pleasure in deceiving someone who is trusting. However, it will be just as you wish: do not esteem me the less for that. It is you advised it; never would vengeance have taken me so far. Sometimes he attacks me in a very sensitive place, and he touches me to the quick when he tells me that his crimes are known, but that every day greater ones are committed that one uselessly attempts to hide, since all crimes, whatsoever they be, great or small, come to men's knowledge and form the common subject of their discourse. He adds sometimes, in speaking to me of Madame de Rere, 'I wish her services may do you honour.' He has assured me that many people thought, and that he thought himself, that I was not my own mistress; this is doubtless because I had rejected the conditions he offered me. Finally, it is certain that he is very uneasy about you know what, and that he even suspects that his life is aimed at. He is in despair whenever the conversation turns on you, Livingston, and my brother. However, he says neither good nor ill of absent people; but, on the contrary, he always avoids speaking of them. His father keeps to the house: I have not seen him yet. A number of the Hamiltons are here, and accompany me everywhere; all the friends of the other one follow me each time I go to see him. He has begged me to be at his rising to-morrow. My messenger will tell you the rest.

"Burn my letter: there would be danger in keeping it. Besides, it is hardly worth the trouble, being filled only with dark thoughts.

"As for you, do not be offended if I am sad and uneasy to-day, that to please you I rise above honour, remorse, and dangers. Do not take in bad part what I tell you, and do not listen to the malicious explanations of your wife's brother; he is a knave whom you ought not to hear to the prejudice of the most tender and most faithful mistress that ever was. Above all, do not allow yourself to be moved by that woman: her sham tears are nothing in comparison with the real tears that I shed, and with what love and constancy make me suffer at succeeding her; it is for that alone that in spite of myself I betray all those who could cross my love. God have mercy on me, and send you all the prosperity that a humble and tender friend who awaits from you soon another reward wishes you. It is very late; but it is always with regret that I lay down my pen when I write to you; however, I shall not end my letter until I shall have kissed your hands. Forgive me that it is so ill-written: perhaps I do so expressly that you may be obliged to re-read it several times: I have transcribed hastily what I had written down on my tablets, and my paper has given out. Remember a tender friend, and write to her often: love me as tenderly as I love you, and remember:

"Madame de Rere's words;  
The English;  
His mother;  
The Earl of Argyll;  
The Earl of Bothwell;  
The Edinburgh dwelling."

## SECOND LETTER

"It seems that you have forgotten me during your absence, so much the more that you had promised me, at setting out, to let me know in detail everything fresh that should happen. The hope of receiving your news was giving me almost as much delight as your return could have brought me: you have put it off longer than you promised me. As for me, although you do not write, I play my part always. I shall take him to Craigmiller on Monday, and he will spend the whole of Wednesday there. On that day I shall go to Edinburgh to be bled there, unless you arrange otherwise at least. He is more cheerful than usual, and he is better than ever.

"He says everything he can to persuade me that he loves me; he has a thousand attentions for me, and he anticipates me in everything: all that is so pleasant for me, that I never go to him but the pain in my side comes on again, his company weighs on me so much. If Paris brought me what I asked him, I should be soon cured. If you have not yet returned when I go you know where, write

to me, I beg you, and tell me what you wish me to do; for if you do not manage things prudently, I foresee that the whole burden will fall on me: look into everything and weigh the affair maturely. I send you my letter by Beaton, who will set out the day which has been assigned to Balfour. It only remains for me to beg you to inform me of your journey.

“Glasgow, this Saturday morning.”

#### THIRD LETTER

“I stayed you know where longer than I should have done, if it had not been to get from him something that the bearer of these presents will tell you it was a good opportunity for covering up our designs: I have promised him to bring the person you know to-morrow. Look after the rest, if you think fit. Alas! I have failed in our agreement, for you have forbidden me to write to you, or to despatch a messenger to you. However, I do not intend to offend you: if you knew with what fears I am agitated, you would not have yourself so many doubts and suspicions. But I take them in good part, persuaded as I am that they have no other cause than love – love that I esteem more than anything on earth.

“My feelings and my favours are to me sure warrants for that love, and answer to me for your heart; my trust is entire on this head: but explain yourself, I entreat you, and open your soul to me; otherwise, I shall fear lest, by the fatality of my star, and by the too fortunate influence of the stars on women less tender and less faithful than I, I may be supplanted in your heart as Medea was in Jason’s; not that I wish to compare you to a lover as unfortunate as Jason, and to parallel myself with a monster like Medea, although you have enough influence over me to force me to resemble her each time our love exacts it, and that it concerns me to keep your heart, which belongs to me, and which belongs to me only. For I name as belonging to me what I have purchased with the tender and constant love with which I have burned for you, a love more alive to-day than ever, and which will end only with my life; a love, in short, which makes me despise both the dangers and the remorse which will be perhaps its sad sequel. As the price of this sacrifice, I ask you but one favour, it is to remember a spot not far from here: I do not exact that you should keep your promise to-morrow; but I want to see you to disperse your suspicions. I ask of God only one thing: it is that He should make you read my heart, which is less mine than yours, and that He should guard you from every ill, at least during my life: this life is dear to me only in so far as it pleases you, and as I please you myself. I am going to bed: adieu; give me your news to-morrow morning; for I shall be uneasy till I have it. Like a bird escaped from its cage, or the turtle-dove which has lost her mate, I shall be alone, weeping your absence, short as it may be. This letter, happier than I, will go this evening where I cannot go, provided that the messenger does not find you asleep, as I fear. I have not dared to write it in the presence of Joseph, of Sebastian, and of Joachim, who had only just left me when I began it.”

Thus, as one sees, and always supposing these letters to be genuine, Mary had conceived for Bothwell one of those mad passions, so much the stronger in the women who are a prey to them, that one the less understands what could have inspired them. Bothwell was no longer young, Bothwell was not handsome, and yet Mary sacrificed for him a young husband, who was considered one of the handsomest men of his century. It was like a kind of enchantment. Darnley, the sole obstacle to the union, had been already condemned for a long time, if not by Mary, at least by Bothwell; then, as his strong constitution had conquered the poison, another kind of death was sought for.

The queen, as she announces in her letter to Bothwell, had refused to bring back Darnley with her, and had returned alone to Edinburgh. Arrived there, she gave orders for the king to be moved, in his turn, in a litter; but instead of taking him to Stirling or Holyrood, she decided to lodge him in the abbey of the Kirk of Field. The king made some objections when he knew of this arrangement; however, as he had no power to oppose it, he contented himself with complaining of the solitude of the dwelling assigned him; but the queen made answer that she could not receive him at that moment, either at Holyrood or at Stirling, for fear, if his illness were infectious, lest he might give it to his son: Darnley was then obliged to make the best of the abode allotted him.

It was an isolated abbey, and little calculated by its position to dissipate the fears that the king entertained; for it was situated between two ruined churches and two cemeteries: the only house, which was distant about a shot from a cross-bow, belonged to the Hamiltons, and as they were Darnley's mortal enemies the neighbourhood was none the more reassuring: further, towards the north, rose some wretched huts, called the "Thieves' cross-roads". In going round his new residence, Darnley noticed that three holes, each large enough for a man to get through, had been made in the walls; he asked that these holes, through which ill-meaning persons could get in, should be stopped up: it was promised that masons should be sent; but nothing was done, and the holes remained open.

The day after his arrival at Kirk of Field, the king saw a light in that house near his which he believed deserted; next day he asked Alexander Durham whence it came, and he heard that the Archbishop of St. Andrew's had left his palace in Edinburgh and had housed there since the preceding evening, one didn't know why: this news still further increased the king's uneasiness; the Archbishop of St. Andrew's was one of his most declared enemies.

The king, little by little abandoned by all his servants lived on the first floor of an isolated pavilion, having about him only this same Alexander Durham, whom we have mentioned already, and who was his valet. Darnley, who had quite a special friendship for him, and who besides, as we have said, feared some attack on his life at every moment, had made him move his bed into his own apartment, so that both were sleeping in the same room.

On the night of the 8th February, Darnley awoke Durham: he thought he heard footsteps in the apartment beneath him. Durham rose, took a sword in one hand, a taper in the other, and went down to the ground floor; but although Darnley was quite certain he had not been deceived, Durham came up again a moment after, saying he had seen no one.

The morning of the next day passed without bringing anything fresh. The queen was marrying one of her servants named Sebastian: he was an Auvergnat whom she had brought with her from France, and whom she liked very much. However, as the king sent word that he had not seen her for two days, she left the wedding towards six o'clock in the evening, and came to pay him a visit, accompanied by the Countess of Argyll and the Countess of Huntly. While she was there, Durham, in preparing his bed, set fire to his palliasses, which was burned as well as a part of the mattress; so that, having thrown them out of the window all in flames, for fear lest the fire should reach the rest of the furniture, he found himself without a bed, and asked permission to return to the town to sleep; but Darnley, who remembered his terror the night before, and who was surprised at the promptness that had made Durham throw all his bedding out of the window, begged him not to go away, offering him one of his mattresses, or even to take him into his own bed. However, in spite of this offer, Durham insisted, saying that he felt unwell, and that he should like to see a doctor the same evening. So the queen interceded for Durham, and promised Darnley to send him another valet to spend the night with him: Darnley was then obliged to yield, and, making Mary repeat that she would send him someone, he gave Durham leave for that evening. At that moment Paris; of whom the queen speaks in her letters, came in: he was a young Frenchman who had been in Scotland for some years, and who, after having served with Bothwell and Seyton, was at present with the queen. Seeing him, she got up, and as Darnley still wished to keep her —

"Indeed, my lord, it is impossible," said she, "to come and see you. I have left this poor Sebastian's wedding, and I must return to it; for I promised to come masked to his ball."

The king dared not insist; he only reminded her of the promise that she had made to send him a servant: Mary renewed it yet once again, and went away with her attendants. As for Durham, he had set out the moment he received permission.

It was nine o'clock in the evening. Darnley, left alone, carefully shut the doors within, and retired to rest, though in readiness to rise to let in the servant who should come to spend the night with him. Scarcely was he in bed than the same noise that he had heard the night before recommenced; this time Darnley listened with all the attention fear gives, and soon he had no longer any doubt but

that several men were walking about beneath him. It was useless to call, it was dangerous to go out; to wait was the only course that remained to the king. He made sure again that the doors were well fastened, put his sword under his pillow, extinguished his lamp for fear the light might betray him, and awaited in silence for his servant's arrival; but the hours passed away, and the servant did not come. At one o'clock in the morning, Bothwell, after having talked some while with the queen, in the presence of the captain of the guard, returned home to change his dress; after some minutes, he came out wrapped up in the large cloak of a German hussar, went through the guard-house, and had the castle gate opened. Once outside, he took his way with all speed to Kirk of Field, which he entered by the opening in the wall: scarcely had he made a step in the garden than he met James Balfour, governor of the castle.

"Well," he said to him, "how far have we got?"

"Everything is ready," replied Balfour, "and we were waiting for you to set fire to the fuse". "That is well," Bothwell answered – "but first I want to make sure that he is in his room."

At these words, Bothwell opened the pavilion door with a false key, and, having groped his way up the stairs; he went to listen at Darnley's door. Darnley, hearing no further noise, had ended by going to sleep; but he slept with a jerky breathing which pointed to his agitation. Little mattered it to Bothwell what kind of sleep it was, provided that he was really in his room. He went down again in silence, then, as he had come up, and taking a lantern from one of the conspirators, he went himself into the lower room to see if everything was in order: this room was full of barrels of powder, and a fuse ready prepared wanted but a spark to set the whole on fire. Bothwell withdrew, then, to the end of the garden with Balfour, David, Chambers, and three or four others, leaving one man to ignite the fuse. In a moment this man rejoined them.

There ensued some minutes of anxiety, during which the five men looked at one another in silence and as if afraid of themselves; then, seeing that nothing exploded, Bothwell impatiently turned round to the engineer, reproaching him for having, no doubt through fear, done his work badly. He assured his master that he was certain everything was all right, and as Bothwell, impatient, wanted to return to the house himself, to make sure, he offered to go back and see how things stood. In fact, he went back to the pavilion, and, putting his head through a kind of air-hole, he saw the fuse, which was still burning. Some seconds afterwards, Bothwell saw him come running back, making a sign that all was going well; at the same moment a frightful report was heard, the pavilion was blown to pieces, the town and the firth were lit up with a clearness exceeding the brightest daylight; then everything fell back into night, and the silence was broken only by the fall of stones and joists, which came down as fast as hail in a hurricane.

Next day the body of the king was found in a garden in the neighbourhood: it had been saved from the action of the fire by the mattresses on which he was lying, and as, doubtless, in his terror he had merely thrown himself on his bed wrapped in his dressing-gown and in his slippers, and as he was found thus, without his slippers, which were flung some paces away, it was believed that he had been first strangled, then carried there; but the most probable version was that the murderers simply relied upon powder – an auxiliary sufficiently powerful in itself for them to have no fear it would fail them.

Was the queen an accomplice or not? No one has ever known save herself, Bothwell, and God; but, yes or no, her conduct, imprudent this time as always, gave the charge her enemies brought against her, if not substance, at least an appearance of truth. Scarcely had she heard the news than she gave orders that the body should be brought to her, and, having had it stretched out upon a bench, she looked at it with more curiosity than sadness; then the corpse, embalmed, was placed the same evening, without pomp, by the side of Rizzio's.

Scottish ceremonial prescribes for the widows of kings retirement for forty days in a room entirely closed to the light of day: on the twelfth day Mary had the windows opened, and on the fifteenth set out with Bothwell for Seaton, a country house situated five miles from the capital, where the French ambassador, Ducroc, went in search of her, and made her remonstrances which decided

her to return to Edinburgh; but instead of the cheers which usually greeted her coming, she was received by an icy silence, and a solitary woman in the crowd called out, “God treat her as she deserves!”

The names of the murderers were no secret to the people. Bothwell having brought a splendid coat which was too large for him to a tailor, asking him to remake it to his measure, the man recognised it as having belonged to the king. “That’s right,” said he; “it is the custom for the executioner to inherit from the condemned”. Meanwhile, the Earl of Lennox, supported by the people’s murmurs, loudly demanded justice for his son’s death, and came forward as the accuser of his murderers. The queen was then obliged, to appease paternal clamour and public resentment, to command the Earl of Argyll, the Lord Chief Justice of the kingdom, to make investigations; the same day that this order was given, a proclamation was posted up in the streets of Edinburgh, in which the queen promised two thousand pounds sterling to whoever would make known the king’s murderers. Next day, wherever this letter had been affixed, another placard was found, worded thus:

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