

FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

MARY STUART

Friedrich Schiller

Mary Stuart

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Friedrich Schiller

Mary Stuart: A Tragedy

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ELIZABETH, Queen of England.
MARY STUART, Queen of Scots, a Prisoner in England.
ROBERT DUDLEY, Earl of Leicester.
GEORGE TALBOT, Earl of Shrewsbury.
WILLIAM CECIL, Lord Burleigh, Lord High Treasurer.
EARL OF KENT.
SIR WILLIAM DAVISON, Secretary of State.
SIR AMIAS PAULET, Keeper of MARY.
SIR EDWARD MORTIMER, his Nephew.
COUNT L'AUBESPINE, the French Ambassador.
O'KELLY, Mortimer's Friend.
COUNT BELLIEVRE, Envoy Extraordinary from France.
SIR DRUE DRURY, another Keeper of MARY.
SIR ANDREW MELVIL, her House Steward.
BURGOYNE, her Physician.
HANNAH KENNEDY, her Nurse.
MARGARET CURL, her Attendant.
Sheriff of the County.
Officer of the Guard.
French and English Lords.
Soldiers.
Servants of State belonging to ELIZABETH.
Servants and Female Attendants of the Queen of Scots.

ACT I

SCENE I

A common apartment in the Castle of Fotheringay.

HANNAH KENNEDY, contending violently with PAULET, who is about to break open a closet; DRURY with an iron crown.

KENNEDY

How now, sir? what fresh outrage have we here?
Back from that cabinet!

PAULET

Whence came the jewel?
I know 'twas from an upper chamber thrown;
And you would bribe the gardener with your trinkets.
A curse on woman's wiles! In spite of all
My strict precaution and my active search,
Still treasures here, still costly gems concealed!
And doubtless there are more where this lay hid.

[Advancing towards the cabinet.

KENNEDY

Intruder, back! here lie my lady's secrets.

PAULET

Exactly what I seek.

[Drawing forth papers.

KENNEDY

Mere trifling papers;
The amusements only of an idle pen,
To cheat the dreary tedium of a dungeon.

PAULET

In idle hours the evil mind is busy.

KENNEDY

Those writings are in French.

PAULET

So much the worse!
That tongue betokens England's enemy.

KENNEDY

Sketches of letters to the Queen of England.

PAULET

I'll be their bearer. Ha! what glitters here?

[He touches a secret spring, and draws out jewels from a private drawer.

A royal diadem enriched with stones,
And studded with the fleur-de-lis of France.

[He hands it to his assistant.

Here, take it, Drury; lay it with the rest.

[Exit DRURY.

[And ye have found the means to hide from us Such costly things, and screen them, until now,
From our inquiring eyes?]

KENNEDY

Oh, insolent
And tyrant power, to which we must submit.

PAULET

She can work ill as long as she hath treasures;
For all things turn to weapons in her hands.

KENNEDY (supplicating)

Oh, sir! be merciful; deprive us not
Of the last jewel that adorns our life!
'Tis my poor lady's only joy to view
This symbol of her former majesty;
Your hands long since have robbed us of the rest.

PAULET

'Tis in safe custody; in proper time
'Twill be restored to you with scrupulous care.

KENNEDY

Who that beholds these naked walls could say
That majesty dwelt here? Where is the throne?
Where the imperial canopy of state?
Must she not set her tender foot, still used
To softest treading, on the rugged ground?
With common pewter, which the lowliest dame
Would scorn, they furnish forth her homely table.

PAULET

Thus did she treat her spouse at Stirling once;
And pledged, the while, her paramour in gold.

KENNEDY

Even the mirror's trifling aid withheld.

PAULET

The contemplation of her own vain image
Incites to hope, and prompts to daring deeds.

KENNEDY

Books are denied her to divert her mind.

PAULET

The Bible still is left to mend her heart.

KENNEDY

Even of her very lute she is deprived!

PAULET

Because she tuned it to her wanton airs.

KENNEDY

Is this a fate for her, the gentle born,
Who in her very cradle was a queen?
Who, reared in Catherine's luxurious court,

Enjoyed the fulness of each earthly pleasure?
Was't not enough to rob her of her power,
Must ye then envy her its paltry tinsel?
A noble heart in time resigns itself
To great calamities with fortitude;
But yet it cuts one to the soul to part
At once with all life's little outward trappings!

PAULET

These are the things that turn the human heart
To vanity, which should collect itself
In penitence; for a lewd, vicious life,
Want and abasement are the only penance.

KENNEDY

If youthful blood has led her into error,
With her own heart and God she must account:
There is no judge in England over her.

PAULET

She shall have judgment where she hath transgressed.

KENNEDY

Her narrow bonds restrain her from transgression.

PAULET

And yet she found the means to stretch her arm
Into the world, from out these narrow bonds,
And, with the torch of civil war, inflame
This realm against our queen (whom God preserve).
And arm assassin bands. Did she not rouse
From out these walls the malefactor Parry,
And Babington, to the detested crime

Of regicide? And did this iron grate
Prevent her from decoying to her toils
The virtuous heart of Norfolk? Saw we not
The first, best head in all this island fall
A sacrifice for her upon the block?
[The noble house of Howard fell with him.]
And did this sad example terrify
These mad adventurers, whose rival zeal
Plunges for her into this deep abyss?
The bloody scaffold bends beneath the weight
Of her new daily victims; and we ne'er
Shall see an end till she herself, of all
The guiltiest, be offered up upon it.
Oh! curses on the day when England took
This Helen to its hospitable arms.

KENNEDY

Did England then receive her hospitably?
Oh, hapless queen! who, since that fatal day
When first she set her foot within this realm,
And, as a suppliant – a fugitive —
Came to implore protection from her sister,
Has been condemned, despite the law of nations,
And royal privilege, to weep away
The fairest years of youth in prison walls.
And now, when she hath suffered everything
Which in imprisonment is hard and bitter,
Is like a felon summoned to the bar,
Fouly accused, and though herself a queen,
Constrained to plead for honor and for life.

PAULET

She came amongst us as a murderess,
Chased by her very subjects from a throne
Which she had oft by vilest deeds disgraced.
Sworn against England's welfare came she hither,
To call the times of bloody Mary back,
Betray our church to Romish tyranny,
And sell our dear-bought liberties to France.
Say, why disdained she to subscribe the treaty
Of Edinborough – to resign her claim
To England's crown – and with one single word,
Traced by her pen, throw wide her prison gates?

No: – she had rather live in vile confinement,
And see herself ill-treated, than renounce
The empty honors of her barren title.
Why acts she thus? Because she trusts to wiles,
And treacherous arts of base conspiracy;
And, hourly plotting schemes of mischief, hopes
To conquer, from her prison, all this isle.

KENNEDY

You mock us, sir, and edge your cruelty
With words of bitter scorn: – that she should form
Such projects; she, who's here immured alive,
To whom no sound of comfort, not a voice
Of friendship comes from her beloved home;
Who hath so long no human face beheld,
Save her stern gaoler's unrelenting brows;
Till now, of late, in your uncourteous cousin
She sees a second keeper, and beholds
Fresh bolts and bars against her multiplied.

PAULET

No iron-grate is proof against her wiles.
How do I know these bars are not filed through?
How that this floor, these walls, that seem so strong
Without, may not be hollow from within,
And let in felon treachery when I sleep?
Accursed office, that's intrusted to me,
To guard this cunning mother of all ill!
Fear scares me from my sleep; and in the night
I, like a troubled spirit, roam and try
The strength of every bolt, and put to proof
Each guard's fidelity: – I see, with fear,
The dawning of each morn, which may confirm
My apprehensions: – yet, thank God, there's hope
That all my fears will soon be at an end;
For rather would I at the gates of hell
Stand sentinel, and guard the devilish host
Of damned souls, than this deceitful queen.

KENNEDY

Here comes the queen.

PAULET

Christ's image in her hand.
Pride, and all worldly lusts within her heart.

SCENE II

The same. Enter MARY, veiled, a crucifix in her hand.

KENNEDY (hastening toward her)

O gracious queen! they tread us under foot;
No end of tyranny and base oppression;
Each coming day heaps fresh indignities,
New sufferings on thy royal head.

MARY

Be calm —
Say, what has happened?

KENNEDY

See! thy cabinet
Is forced – thy papers – and thy only treasure,
Which with such pains we had secured, the last
Poor remnant of thy bridal ornaments
From France, is in his hands – naught now remains
Of royal state – thou art indeed bereft!

MARY

Compose yourself, my Hannah! and believe me,
'Tis not these baubles that can make a queen —
Basely indeed they may behave to us,
But they cannot debase us. I have learned
To use myself to many a change in England;
I can support this too. Sir, you have taken
By force what I this very day designed
To have delivered to you. There's a letter
Amongst these papers for my royal sister
Of England. Pledge me, sir, your word of honor,
To give it to her majesty's own hands,
And not to the deceitful care of Burleigh.

PAULET

I shall consider what is best to do.

MARY

Sir, you shall know its import. In this letter
I beg a favor, a great favor of her, —
That she herself will give me audience, — she
Whom I have never seen. I have been summoned
Before a court of men, whom I can ne'er
Acknowledge as my peers — of men to whom
My heart denies its confidence. The queen
Is of my family, my rank, my sex;
To her alone — a sister, queen, and woman —
Can I unfold my heart.

PAULET

Too oft, my lady,
Have you intrusted both your fate and honor
To men less worthy your esteem than these.

MARY

I, in the letter, beg another favor,
And surely naught but inhumanity
Can here reject my prayer. These many years
Have I, in prison, missed the church's comfort,
The blessings of the sacraments — and she
Who robs me of my freedom and my crown,
Who seeks my very life, can never wish
To shut the gates of heaven upon my soul.

PAULET

Whene'er you wish, the dean shall wait upon you.

MARY (interrupting him sharply)

Talk to me not of deans. I ask the aid
Of one of my own church – a Catholic priest.

PAULET

[That is against the published laws of England.]

MARY

The laws of England are no rule for me.
I am not England's subject; I have ne'er
Consented to its laws, and will not bow
Before their cruel and despotic sway.
If 'tis your will, to the unheard-of rigor
Which I have borne, to add this new oppression,
I must submit to what your power ordains;
Yet will I raise my voice in loud complaints.]
I also wish a public notary,
And secretaries, to prepare my will —
My sorrows and my prison's wretchedness
Prey on my life – my days, I fear, are numbered —
I feel that I am near the gates of death.

PAULET

These serious contemplations well become you.

MARY

And know I then that some too ready hand
May not abridge this tedious work of sorrow?
I would indite my will and make disposal
Of what belongs to me.

PAULET

This liberty
May be allowed to you, for England's queen
Will not enrich herself by plundering you.

MARY

I have been parted from my faithful women,
And from my servants; tell me, where are they?
What is their fate? I can indeed dispense
At present with their service, but my heart
Will feel rejoiced to know these faithful ones
Are not exposed to suffering and to want!

PAULET

Your servants have been cared for; [and again
You shall behold whate'er is taken from you
And all shall be restored in proper season.]

[Going.]

MARY

And will you leave my presence thus again,
And not relieve my fearful, anxious heart
From the fell torments of uncertainty?
Thanks to the vigilance of your hateful spies,
I am divided from the world; no voice
Can reach me through these prison-walls; my fate
Lies in the hands of those who wish my ruin.
A month of dread suspense is passed already
Since when the forty high commissioners
Surprised me in this castle, and erected,
With most unseemly haste, their dread tribunal;
They forced me, stunned, amazed, and unprepared,
Without an advocate, from memory,
Before their unexampled court, to answer
Their weighty charges, artfully arranged.
They came like ghosts, – like ghosts they disappeared,

And since that day all mouths are closed to me.
In vain I seek to construe from your looks
Which hath prevailed – my cause's innocence
And my friends' zeal – or my foes' cursed counsel.
Oh, break this silence! let me know the worst;
What have I still to fear, and what to hope.

PAULET

Close your accounts with heaven.

MARY

From heaven I hope
For mercy, sir; and from my earthly judges
I hope, and still expect, the strictest justice.

PAULET

Justice, depend upon it, will be done you.

MARY

Is the suit ended, sir?

PAULET

I cannot tell.

MARY

Am I condemned?

PAULET

I cannot answer, lady.

MARY

[Sir, a good work fears not the light of day.

PAULET

The day will shine upon it, doubt it not.]

MARY

Despatch is here the fashion. Is it meant
The murderer shall surprise me, like the judges?

PAULET

Still entertain that thought and he will find you
Better prepared to meet your fate than they did.

MARY (after a pause)

Sir, nothing can surprise me which a court
Inspired by Burleigh's hate and Hatton's zeal,
Howe'er unjust, may venture to pronounce:
But I have yet to learn how far the queen
Will dare in execution of the sentence.

PAULET

The sovereigns of England have no fear
But for their conscience and their parliament.
What justice hath decreed her fearless hand

Will execute before the assembled world.

SCENE III

The same. MORTIMER enters, and without paying attention to the QUEEN, addresses PAULET.

MORTIMER

Uncle, you're sought for.

[He retires in the same manner. The QUEEN remarks it, and turns towards PAULET, who is about to follow him.

MARY

Sir, one favor more
If you have aught to say to me – from you
I can bear much – I reverence your gray hairs;
But cannot bear that young man's insolence;
Spare me in future his unmannered rudeness.

PAULET

I prize him most for that which makes you hate him
He is not, truly, one of those poor fools
Who melt before a woman's treacherous tears.
He has seen much – has been to Rheims and Paris,
And brings us back his true old English heart.
Lady, your cunning arts are lost on him.

[Exit.

SCENE IV

MARY, KENNEDY.

KENNEDY

And dare the ruffian venture to your face
Such language! Oh, 'tis hard – 'tis past endurance.

MARY (lost in reflection)

In the fair moments of our former splendor
We lent to flatterers a too willing ear; —
It is but just, good Hannah, we should now
Be forced to hear the bitter voice of censure.

KENNEDY

So downcast, so depressed, my dearest lady!
You, who before so gay, so full of hope,
Were used to comfort me in my distress;
More gracious were the task to check your mirth
Than chide your heavy sadness.

MARY

Well I know him —
It is the bleeding Darnley's royal shade,
Rising in anger from his darksome grave
And never will he make his peace with me
Until the measures of my woes be full.

KENNEDY

What thoughts are these —

MARY

Thou may'st forget it, Hannah;
But I've a faithful memory – 'tis this day
Another wretched anniversary
Of that regretted, that unhappy deed —
Which I must celebrate with fast and penance.

KENNEDY

Dismiss at length in peace this evil spirit.
The penitence of many a heavy year,
Of many a suffering, has atoned the deed;
The church, which holds the key of absolution,
Pardons the crime, and heaven itself's appeased.

MARY

This long-atoned crime arises fresh
And bleeding from its lightly-covered grave;
My husband's restless spirit seeks revenge;
No sacred bell can exorcise, no host
In priestly hands dismiss it to his tomb.

KENNEDY

You did not murder him; 'twas done by others.

MARY

But it was known to me; I suffered it,
And lured him with my smiles to death's embrace.

KENNEDY

Your youth extenuates your guilt. You were
Of tender years.

MARY

So tender, yet I drew
This heavy guilt upon my youthful head.

KENNEDY

You were provoked by direst injuries,
And by the rude presumption of the man,
Whom out of darkness, like the hand of heaven,
Your love drew forth, and raised above all others.
Whom through your bridal chamber you conducted
Up to your throne, and with your lovely self,
And your hereditary crown, distinguished
[Your work was his existence, and your grace
Bedewed him like the gentle rains of heaven.]
Could he forget that his so splendid lot
Was the creation of your generous love?
Yet did he, worthless as he was, forget it.
With base suspicions, and with brutal manners,
He wearied your affections, and became
An object to you of deserved disgust:
The illusion, which till now had overcast
Your judgment, vanished; angrily you fled
His foul embrace, and gave him up to scorn.
And did he seek again to win your love?
Your favor? Did he e'er implore your pardon?
Or fall in deep repentance at your feet?
No; the base wretch defied you; he, who was
Your bounty's creature, wished to play your king,
[And strove, through fear, to force your inclination.]
Before your eyes he had your favorite singer,
Poor Rizzio, murdered; you did but avenge
With blood the bloody deed —

MARY

And bloodily,
I fear, too soon 'twill be avenged on me:

You seek to comfort me, and you condemn me.

KENNEDY

You were, when you consented to this deed,
No more yourself; belonged not to yourself;
The madness of a frantic love possessed you,
And bound you to a terrible seducer,
The wretched Bothwell. That despotic man
Ruled you with shameful, overbearing will,
And with his philters and his hellish arts
Inflamed your passions.

MARY

All the arts he used
Were man's superior strength and woman's weakness.

KENNEDY

No, no, I say. The most pernicious spirits
Of hell he must have summoned to his aid,
To cast this mist before your waking senses.
Your ear no more was open to the voice
Of friendly warning, and your eyes were shut
To decency; soft female bashfulness
Deserted you; those cheeks, which were before
The seat of virtuous, blushing modesty,
Glowed with the flames of unrestrained desire.
You cast away the veil of secrecy,
And the flagitious daring of the man
O'ercame your natural coyness: you exposed
Your shame, unblushingly, to public gaze:
You let the murderer, whom the people followed
With curses, through the streets of Edinburgh,
Before you bear the royal sword of Scotland
In triumph. You begirt your parliament
With armed bands; and by this shameless farce,
There, in the very temple of great justice,
You forced the judges of the land to clear
The murderer of his guilt. You went still further —
O God!

MARY

Conclude – nay, pause not – say for this
I gave my hand in marriage at the altar.

KENNEDY

O let an everlasting silence veil
That dreadful deed: the heart revolts at it.
A crime to stain the darkest criminal!
Yet you are no such lost one, that I know.
I nursed your youth myself – your heart is framed
For tender softness: 'tis alive to shame,
And all your fault is thoughtless levity.
Yes, I repeat it, there are evil spirits,
Who sudden fix in man's unguarded breast
Their fatal residence, and there delight
To act their dev'lish deeds; then hurry back
Unto their native hell, and leave behind
Remorse and horror in the poisoned bosom.
Since this misdeed, which blackens thus your life,
You have done nothing ill; your conduct has
Been pure; myself can witness your amendment.
Take courage, then; with your own heart make peace.
Whatever cause you have for penitence,
You are not guilty here. Nor England's queen,
Nor England's parliament can be your judge.
Here might oppresses you: you may present
Yourself before this self-created court
With all the fortitude of innocence.

MARY

I hear a step.

KENNEDY

It is the nephew – In.

SCENE V

The same. Enter MORTIMER, approaching cautiously.

MORTIMER (to KENNEDY)

Step to the door, and keep a careful watch,
I have important business with the queen.

MARY (with dignity)

I charge thee, Hannah, go not hence – remain.

MORTIMER

Fear not, my gracious lady – learn to know me.
[He gives her a card.]

MARY (She examines it, and starts back astonished)

Heavens! What is this?

MORTIMER (to KENNEDY)

Retire, good Kennedy;
See that my uncle comes not unawares.

MARY (to KENNEDY, who hesitates, and looks at the QUEEN inquiringly)

Go in; do as he bids you.

[KENNEDY retires with signs of wonder.]

SCENE VI

MARY, MORTIMER.

MARY

From my uncle
In France – the worthy Cardinal of Lorrain?

[She reads.

"Confide in Mortimer, who brings you this;
You have no truer, firmer friend in England."

[Looking at him with astonishment.

Can I believe it? Is there no delusion
To cheat my senses? Do I find a friend
So near, when I conceived myself abandoned
By the whole world? And find that friend in you,
The nephew of my gaoler, whom I thought
My most inveterate enemy?

MORTIMER (kneeling)

Oh, pardon,
My gracious liege, for the detested mask,
Which it has cost me pain enough to wear;
Yet through such means alone have I the power
To see you, and to bring you help and rescue.

MARY

Arise, sir; you astonish me; I cannot
So suddenly emerge from the abyss
Of wretchedness to hope: let me conceive
This happiness, that I may credit it.

MORTIMER

Our time is brief: each moment I expect
My uncle, whom a hated man attends;
Hear, then, before his terrible commission
Surprises you, how heaven prepares your rescue.

MARY

You come in token of its wondrous power.

MORTIMER

Allow me of myself to speak.

MARY

Say on.

MORTIMER

I scarce, my liege, had numbered twenty years,
Trained in the path of strictest discipline
And nursed in deadliest hate to papacy,
When led by irresistible desire
For foreign travel, I resolved to leave
My country and its puritanic faith
Far, far behind me: soon with rapid speed
I flew through France, and bent my eager course
On to the plains of far-famed Italy.
'Twas then the time of the great jubilee:
And crowds of palmers filled the public roads;
Each image was adorned with garlands; 'twas
As if all human-kind were wandering forth
In pilgrimage towards the heavenly kingdom.
The tide of the believing multitude
Bore me too onward, with resistless force,
Into the streets of Rome. What was my wonder,

As the magnificence of stately columns
Rushed on my sight! the vast triumphal arches,
The Colosseum's grandeur, with amazement
Struck my admiring senses; the sublime
Creative spirit held my soul a prisoner
In the fair world of wonders it had framed.
I ne'er had felt the power of art till now.
The church that reared me hates the charms of sense;
It tolerates no image, it adores
But the unseen, the incorporeal word.
What were my feelings, then, as I approached
The threshold of the churches, and within,
Heard heavenly music floating in the air:
While from the walls and high-wrought roofs there streamed
Crowds of celestial forms in endless train —
When the Most High, Most Glorious pervaded
My captivated sense in real presence!
And when I saw the great and godlike visions,
The Salutation, the Nativity,
The Holy Mother, and the Trinity's
Descent, the luminous transfiguration
And last the holy pontiff, clad in all
The glory of his office, bless the people!
Oh! what is all the pomp of gold and jewels
With which the kings of earth adorn themselves!
He is alone surrounded by the Godhead;
His mansion is in truth an heavenly kingdom,
For not of earthly moulding are these forms!

MARY

O spare me, sir! No further. Spread no more
Life's verdant carpet out before my eyes,
Remember I am wretched, and a prisoner.

MORTIMER

I was a prisoner, too, my queen; but swift
My prison-gates flew open, when at once
My spirit felt its liberty, and hailed
The smiling dawn of life. I learned to burst
Each narrow prejudice of education,
To crown my brow with never-fading wreaths,
And mix my joy with the rejoicing crowd.
Full many noble Scots, who saw my zeal,

Encouraged me, and with the gallant French
They kindly led me to your princely uncle,
The Cardinal of Guise. Oh, what a man!
How firm, how clear, how manly, and how great!
Born to control the human mind at will!
The very model of a royal priest;
A ruler of the church without an equal!

MARY

You've seen him then, – the much loved, honored man,
Who was the guardian of my tender years!
Oh, speak of him! Does he remember me?
Does fortune favor him? And prospers still
His life? And does he still majestic stand,
A very rock and pillar of the church?

MORTIMER

The holy man descended from his height,
And deigned to teach me the important creed
Of the true church, and dissipate my doubts.
He showed me how the glimmering light of reason
Serves but to lead us to eternal error:
That what the heart is called on to believe
The eye must see: that he who rules the church
Must needs be visible; and that the spirit
Of truth inspired the councils of the fathers.
How vanished then the fond imaginings
And weak conceptions of my childish soul
Before his conquering judgment, and the soft
Persuasion of his tongue! So I returned
Back to the bosom of the holy church,
And at his feet abjured my heresies.

MARY

Then of those happy thousands you are one,
Whom he, with his celestial eloquence,
Like the immortal preacher of the mount,
Has turned and led to everlasting joy!

MORTIMER

The duties of his office called him soon
To France, and I was sent by him to Rheims,
Where, by the Jesuits' anxious labor, priests
Are trained to preach our holy faith in England.
There, 'mongst the Scots, I found the noble Morgan,
And your true Lesley, Ross's learned bishop,
Who pass in France their joyless days of exile.
I joined with heartfelt zeal these worthy men,
And fortified my faith. As I one day
Roamed through the bishop's dwelling, I was struck
With a fair female portrait; it was full
Of touching wond'rous charms; with magic might
It moved my inmost soul, and there I stood
Speechless, and overmastered by my feelings.
"Well," cried the bishop, "may you linger thus
In deep emotion near this lovely face!
For the most beautiful of womankind,
Is also matchless in calamity.
She is a prisoner for our holy faith,
And in your native land, alas! she suffers."

[MARY is in great agitation. He pauses.

MARY

Excellent man! All is not lost, indeed,
While such a friend remains in my misfortunes!

MORTIMER

Then he began, with moving eloquence,
To paint the sufferings of your martyrdom;
He showed me then your lofty pedigree,
And your descent from Tudor's royal house.
He proved to me that you alone have right
To reign in England, not this upstart queen,
The base-born fruit of an adult'rous bed,
Whom Henry's self rejected as a bastard.

[He from my eyes removed delusion's mist,

And taught me to lament you as a victim,
To honor you as my true queen, whom I,
Deceived, like thousands of my noble fellows,
Had ever hated as my country's foe.]
I would not trust his evidence alone;
I questioned learned doctors; I consulted
The most authentic books of heraldry;
And every man of knowledge whom I asked
Confirmed to me your claim's validity.
And now I know that your undoubted right
To England's throne has been your only wrong,
This realm is justly yours by heritage,
In which you innocently pine as prisoner.

MARY

Oh, this unhappy right! – 'tis this alone
Which is the source of all my sufferings.

MORTIMER

Just at this time the tidings reached my ears
Of your removal from old Talbot's charge,
And your committal to my uncle's care.
It seemed to me that this disposal marked
The wond'rous, outstretched hand of favoring heaven;
It seemed to be a loud decree of fate,
That it had chosen me to rescue you.
My friends concur with me; the cardinal
Bestows on me his counsel and his blessing,
And tutors me in the hard task of feigning.
The plan in haste digested, I commenced
My journey homewards, and ten days ago
On England's shores I landed. Oh, my queen.

[He pauses.

I saw then, not your picture, but yourself —
Oh, what a treasure do these walls enclose!
No prison this, but the abode of gods,
More splendid far than England's royal court.
Happy, thrice happy he, whose envied lot
Permits to breathe the selfsame air with you!
It is a prudent policy in her
To bury you so deep! All England's youth

Would rise at once in general mutiny,
And not a sword lie quiet in its sheath:
Rebellion would uprear its giant head,
Through all this peaceful isle, if Britons once
Beheld their captive queen.

MARY

'Twere well with her,
If every Briton saw her with your eyes!

MORTIMER

Were each, like me, a witness of your wrongs,
Your meekness, and the noble fortitude
With which you suffer these indignities —
Would you not then emerge from all these trials
Like a true queen? Your prison's infamy,
Hath it despoiled your beauty of its charms?
You are deprived of all that graces life,
Yet round you life and light eternal beam.
Ne'er on this threshold can I set my foot,
That my poor heart with anguish is not torn,
Nor ravished with delight at gazing on you.
Yet fearfully the fatal time draws near,
And danger hourly growing presses on.
I can delay no longer – can no more
Conceal the dreadful news.

MARY

My sentence then!
It is pronounced? Speak freely – I can bear it.

MORTIMER

It is pronounced! The two-and-forty judges
Have given the verdict, "guilty"; and the Houses
Of Lords and Commons, with the citizens
Of London, eagerly and urgently

Demand the execution of the sentence: —
The queen alone still craftily delays,
That she may be constrained to yield, but not
From feelings of humanity or mercy.

MARY (collected)

Sir, I am not surprised, nor terrified.
I have been long prepared for such a message.
Too well I know my judges. After all
Their cruel treatment I can well conceive
They dare not now restore my liberty.
I know their aim: they mean to keep me here
In everlasting bondage, and to bury,
In the sepulchral darkness of my prison,
My vengeance with me, and my rightful claims.

MORTIMER

Oh, no, my gracious queen; – they stop not there:
Oppression will not be content to do
Its work by halves: – as long as e'en you live,
Distrust and fear will haunt the English queen.
No dungeon can inter you deep enough;
Your death alone can make her throne secure.

MARY

Will she then dare, regardless of the shame,
Lay my crowned head upon the fatal block?

MORTIMER

She will most surely dare it, doubt it not.

MARY

And can she thus roll in the very dust

Her own, and every monarch's majesty?

MORTIMER

She thinks on nothing now but present danger,
Nor looks to that which is so far removed.

MARY

And fears she not the dread revenge of France?

MORTIMER

With France she makes an everlasting peace;
And gives to Anjou's duke her throne and hand.

MARY

Will not the King of Spain rise up in arms?

MORTIMER

She fears not a collected world in arms?
If with her people she remains at peace.

MARY

Were this a spectacle for British eyes?

MORTIMER

This land, my queen, has, in these latter days,
Seen many a royal woman from the throne

Descend and mount the scaffold: – her own mother
And Catherine Howard trod this fatal path;
And was not Lady Grey a crowned head?

MARY (after a pause)

No, Mortimer, vain fears have blinded you;
'Tis but the honest care of your true heart,
Which conjures up these empty apprehensions.
It is not, sir, the scaffold that I fear:
There are so many still and secret means
By which her majesty of England may
Set all my claims to rest. Oh, trust me, ere
An executioner is found for me,
Assassins will be hired to do their work.
'Tis that which makes me tremble, Mortimer:
I never lift the goblet to my lips
Without an inward shuddering, lest the draught
May have been mingled by my sister's love.

MORTIMER

No: – neither open or disguised murder
Shall e'er prevail against you: – fear no more;
All is prepared; – twelve nobles of the land
Are my confederates, and have pledged to-day,
Upon the sacrament, their faith to free you,
With dauntless arm, from this captivity.
Count Aubespine, the French ambassador,
Knows of our plot, and offers his assistance:
'Tis in his palace that we hold our meetings.

MARY

You make me tremble, sir, but not for joy!
An evil boding penetrates my heart.
Know you, then, what you risk? Are you not scared
By Babington and Tichburn's bloody heads,
Set up as warnings upon London's bridge?
Nor by the ruin of those many victims
Who have, in such attempts, found certain death,
And only made my chains the heavier?

Fly hence, deluded, most unhappy youth!
Fly, if there yet be time for you, before
That crafty spy, Lord Burleigh, track your schemes,
And mix his traitors in your secret plots.
Fly hence: – as yet, success hath never smiled
On Mary Stuart's champions.

MORTIMER

I am not scared
By Babington and Tichburn's bloody heads
Set up as warnings upon London's bridge;
Nor by the ruin of those many victims
Who have, in such attempts, found certain death:
They also found therein immortal honor,
And death, in rescuing you, is dearest bliss.

MARY

It is in vain: nor force nor guile can save me: —
My enemies are watchful, and the power
Is in their hands. It is not Paulet only
And his dependent host; all England guards
My prison gates: Elizabeth's free will
Alone can open them.

MORTIMER

Expect not that.

MARY

One man alone on earth can open them.

MORTIMER

Oh, let me know his name!

MARY

Lord Leicester.

MORTIMER

He!

[Starts back in wonder.

The Earl of Leicester! Your most bloody foe,
The favorite of Elizabeth! through him —

MARY

If I am to be saved at all, 'twill be
Through him, and him alone. Go to him, sir;
Freely confide in him: and, as a proof
You come from me, present this paper to him.

[She takes a paper from her bosom; MORTIMER draws back,

and hesitates to take it.
It doth contain my portrait: – take it, sir;
I've borne it long about me; but your uncle's
Close watchfulness has cut me off from all
Communication with him; – you were sent
By my good angel.

[He takes it.

MORTIMER

Oh, my queen! Explain
This mystery.

MARY

Lord Leicester will resolve it.

Confide in him, and he'll confide in you.
Who comes?

KENNEDY (entering hastily)

'Tis Paulet; and he brings with him
A nobleman from court.

MORTIMER

It is Lord Burleigh.
Collect yourself, my queen, and strive to hear
The news he brings with equanimity.

[He retires through a side door, and KENNEDY follows him.]

SCENE VII

Enter LORD BURLEIGH, and PAULET.

PAULET (to MARY)

You wished to-day assurance of your fate;
My Lord of Burleigh brings it to you now;
Hear it with resignation, as beseems you.

MARY

I hope with dignity, as it becomes
My innocence, and my exalted station.

BURLEIGH

I come deputed from the court of justice.

MARY

Lord Burleigh lends that court his willing tongue,
Which was already guided by his spirit.

PAULET

You speak as if no stranger to the sentence.

MARY

Lord Burleigh brings it; therefore do I know it.

PAULET

[It would become you better, Lady Stuart,

To listen less to hatred.

MARY

I but name
My enemy: I said not that I hate him.]
But to the matter, sir.

BURLEIGH

You have acknowledged
The jurisdiction of the two-and-forty.

MARY

My lord, excuse me, if I am obliged
So soon to interrupt you. I acknowledged,
Say you, the competence of the commission?
I never have acknowledged it, my lord;
How could I so? I could not give away
My own prerogative, the intrusted rights
Of my own people, the inheritance
Of my own son, and every monarch's honor

[The very laws of England say I could not.]

It is enacted by the English laws
That every one who stands arraigned of crime
Shall plead before a jury of his equals:
Who is my equal in this high commission?
Kings only are my peers.

BURLEIGH

But yet you heard

The points of accusation, answered them
Before the court —

MARY

'Tis true, I was deceived
By Hatton's crafty counsel: – he advised me,
For my own honor, and in confidence
In my good cause, and my most strong defence,
To listen to the points of accusation,
And prove their falsehoods. This, my lord, I did
From personal respect for the lords' names,
Not their usurped charge, which I disclaim.

BURLEIGH

Acknowledge you the court, or not, that is
Only a point of mere formality,
Which cannot here arrest the course of justice.
You breathe the air of England; you enjoy
The law's protection, and its benefits;
You therefore are its subject.

MARY

Sir, I breathe
The air within an English prison walls:
Is that to live in England; to enjoy
Protection from its laws? I scarcely know
And never have I pledged my faith to keep them.
I am no member of this realm; I am
An independent, and a foreign queen.

BURLEIGH

And do you think that the mere name of queen
Can serve you as a charter to foment
In other countries, with impunity,
This bloody discord? Where would be the state's
Security, if the stern sword of justice

Could not as freely smite the guilty brow
Of the imperial stranger as the beggar's?

MARY

I do not wish to be exempt from judgment,
It is the judges only I disclaim.

BURLEIGH

The judges? How now, madam? Are they then
Base wretches, snatched at hazard from the crowd?
Vile wranglers that make sale of truth and justice;
Oppression's willing hirelings, and its tools?
Are they not all the foremost of this land,
Too independent to be else than honest,
And too exalted not to soar above
The fear of kings, or base servility?
Are they not those who rule a generous people
In liberty and justice; men, whose names
I need but mention to dispel each doubt,
Each mean suspicion which is raised against them?
Stands not the reverend primate at their head,
The pious shepherd of his faithful people,
The learned Talbot, keeper of the seals,
And Howard, who commands our conquering fleets?
Say, then, could England's sovereign do more
Than, out of all the monarchy, elect
The very noblest, and appoint them judges
In this great suit? And were it probable
That party hatred could corrupt one heart;
Can forty chosen men unite to speak
A sentence just as passion gives command?

MARY (after a short pause)

I am struck dumb by that tongue's eloquence,
Which ever was so ominous to me.
And how shall I, a weak, untutored woman,
Cope with so subtle, learned an orator?
Yes truly; were these lords as you describe them,
I must be mute; my cause were lost indeed,

Beyond all hope, if they pronounce me guilty.
But, sir, these names, which you are pleased to praise,
These very men, whose weight you think will crush me,
I see performing in the history
Of these dominions very different parts:
I see this high nobility of England,
This grave majestic senate of the realm,
Like to an eastern monarch's vilest slaves,
Flatter my uncle Henry's sultan fancies:
I see this noble, reverend House of Lords,
Venal alike with the corrupted Commons,
Make statutes and annul them, ratify
A marriage and dissolve it, as the voice
Of power commands: to-day it disinherits,
And brands the royal daughters of the realm
With the vile name of bastards, and to-morrow
Crowns them as queens, and leads them to the throne.
I see them in four reigns, with pliant conscience,
Four times abjure their faith; renounce the pope
With Henry, yet retain the old belief;
Reform themselves with Edward; hear the mass
Again with Mary; with Elizabeth,
Who governs now, reform themselves again.

BURLEIGH

You say you are not versed in England's laws,
You seem well read, methinks, in her disasters.

MARY

And these men are my judges?

[As LORD BURLEIGH seems to wish to speak.

My lord treasurer,
Towards you I will be just, be you but just
To me. 'Tis said that you consult with zeal
The good of England, and of England's queen;
Are honest, watchful, indefatigable;
I will believe it. Not your private ends,
Your sovereign and your country's weal alone,
Inspire your counsels and direct your deeds.
Therefore, my noble lord, you should the more
Distrust your heart; should see that you mistake not

The welfare of the government for justice.
I do not doubt, besides yourself, there are
Among my judges many upright men:
But they are Protestants, are eager all
For England's quiet, and they sit in judgment
On me, the Queen of Scotland, and the papist.
It is an ancient saying, that the Scots
And England to each other are unjust;
And hence the rightful custom that a Scot
Against an Englishman, or Englishman
Against a Scot, cannot be heard in judgment.
Necessity prescribed this cautious law;
Deep policy oft lies in ancient customs:
My lord, we must respect them. Nature cast
Into the ocean these two fiery nations
Upon this plank, and she divided it
Unequally, and bade them fight for it.
The narrow bed of Tweed alone divides
These daring spirits; often hath the blood
Of the contending parties dyed its waves.
Threatening, and sword in hand, these thousand years,
From both its banks they watch their rival's motions,
Most vigilant and true confederates,
With every enemy of the neighbor state.
No foe oppresses England, but the Scot
Becomes his firm ally; no civil war
Inflames the towns of Scotland, but the English
Add fuel to the fire: this raging hate
Will never be extinguished till, at last,
One parliament in concord shall unite them,
One common sceptre rule throughout the isle.

BURLEIGH

And from a Stuart, then, should England hope
This happiness?

MARY

Oh! why should I deny it?
Yes, I confess, I cherished the fond hope;
I thought myself the happy instrument
To join in freedom, 'neath the olive's shade,
Two generous realms in lasting happiness!
I little thought I should become the victim

Of their old hate, their long-lived jealousy;
And the sad flames of that unhappy strife,
I hoped at last to smother, and forever:
And, as my ancestor, great Richmond, joined
The rival roses after bloody contest,
To join in peace the Scotch and English crowns.

BURLEIGH

An evil way you took to this good end,
To set the realm on fire, and through the flames
Of civil war to strive to mount the throne.

MARY

I wished not that: – I wished it not, by Heaven!
When did I strive at that? Where are your proofs?

BURLEIGH

I came not hither to dispute; your cause
Is no more subject to a war of words.
The great majority of forty voices
Hath found that you have contravened the law
Last year enacted, and have now incurred
Its penalty.
[Producing the verdict.]

MARY

Upon this statute, then,
My lord, is built the verdict of my judges?

BURLEIGH (reading)

Last year it was enacted, "If a plot
Henceforth should rise in England, in the name
Or for the benefit of any claimant

To England's crown, that justice should be done
On such pretender, and the guilty party
Be prosecuted unto death." Now, since
It has been proved —

MARY

Lord Burleigh, I can well
Imagine that a law expressly aimed
At me, and framed to compass my destruction
May to my prejudice be used. Oh! Woe
To the unhappy victim, when the tongue
That frames the law shall execute the sentence.
Can you deny it, sir, that this same statute
Was made for my destruction, and naught else?

BURLEIGH

It should have acted as a warning to you:
By your imprudence it became a snare.
You saw the precipice which yawned before you;
Yet, truly warned, you plunged into the deep.
With Babington, the traitor, and his bands
Of murderous companions, were you leagued.
You knew of all, and from your prison led
Their treasonous plottings with a deep-laid plan.

MARY

When did I that, my lord? Let them produce
The documents.

BURLEIGH

You have already seen them
They were before the court, presented to you.

MARY

Mere copies written by another hand;
Show me the proof that they were dictated
By me, that they proceeded from my lips,
And in those very terms in which you read them.

BURLEIGH

Before his execution, Babington
Confessed they were the same which he received.

MARY

Why was he in his lifetime not produced
Before my face? Why was he then despatched
So quickly that he could not be confronted
With her whom he accused?

BURLEIGH

Besides, my lady,
Your secretaries, Curl and Nau, declare
On oath, they are the very selfsame letters
Which from your lips they faithfully transcribed.

MARY

And on my menials' testimony, then,
I am condemned; upon the word of those
Who have betrayed me, me, their rightful queen!
Who in that very moment, when they came
As witnesses against me, broke their faith!

BURLEIGH

You said yourself, you held your countryman
To be an upright, conscientious man.

MARY

I thought him such; but 'tis the hour of danger
Alone, which tries the virtue of a man.

[He ever was an honest man, but weak

In understanding; and his subtle comrade,
Whose faith, observe, I never answered for,
Might easily seduce him to write down
More than he should;] the rack may have compelled him
To say and to confess more than he knew.
He hoped to save himself by this false witness,
And thought it could not injure me – a queen.

BURLEIGH

The oath he swore was free and unconstrained.

MARY

But not before my face! How now, my lord?
The witnesses you name are still alive;
Let them appear against me face to face,
And there repeat what they have testified.
Why am I then denied that privilege,
That right which e'en the murderer enjoys?
I know from Talbot's mouth, my former keeper,
That in this reign a statute has been passed
Which orders that the plaintiff be confronted
With the defendant; is it so, good Paulet?
I e'er have known you as an honest man;
Now prove it to me; tell me, on your conscience,
If such a law exist or not in England?

PAULET

Madam, there does: that is the law in England.
I must declare the truth.

MARY

Well, then, my lord,
If I am treated by the law of England
So hardly, when that law oppresses me,
Say, why avoid this selfsame country's law,
When 'tis for my advantage? Answer me;
Why was not Babington confronted with me?
Why not my servants, who are both alive?

BURLEIGH

Be not so hasty, lady; 'tis not only
Your plot with Babington —

MARY

'Tis that alone
Which arms the law against me; that alone
From which I'm called upon to clear myself.
Stick to the point, my lord; evade it not.

BURLEIGH

It has been proved that you have corresponded
With the ambassador of Spain, Mendoza —

MARY

Stick to the point, my lord.

BURLEIGH

That you have formed
Conspiracies to overturn the fixed
Religion of the realm; that you have called
Into this kingdom foreign powers, and roused
All kings in Europe to a war with England.

MARY

And were it so, my lord – though I deny it —
But e'en suppose it were so: I am kept
Imprisoned here against all laws of nations.
I came not into England sword in hand;
I came a suppliant; and at the hands
Of my imperial kinswoman I claimed
The sacred rights of hospitality,
When power seized upon me, and prepared
To rivet fetters where I hoped protection.
Say, is my conscience bound, then, to this realm?
What are the duties that I owe to England?
I should but exercise a sacred right,
Derived from sad necessity, if I
Warred with these bonds, encountered might with might,
Roused and incited every state in Europe
For my protection to unite in arms.
Whatever in a rightful war is just
And loyal, 'tis my right to exercise:
Murder alone, the secret, bloody deed,
My conscience and my pride alike forbid.
Murder would stain me, would dishonor me:
Dishonor me, my lord, but not condemn me,
Nor subject me to England's courts of law:
For 'tis not justice, but mere violence,
Which is the question 'tween myself and England.

BURLEIGH (significantly)

Talk not, my lady, of the dreadful right
Of power: 'tis seldom on the prisoner's side.

MARY

I am the weak, she is the mighty one:
'Tis well, my lord; let her, then, use her power;
Let her destroy me; let me bleed, that she
May live secure; but let her, then, confess
That she hath exercised her power alone,
And not contaminate the name of justice.
Let her not borrow from the laws the sword
To rid her of her hated enemy;
Let her not clothe in this religious garb
The bloody daring of licentious might;
Let not these juggling tricks deceive the world.

[Returning the sentence.

Though she may murder me, she cannot judge me:
Let her no longer strive to join the fruits
Of vice with virtue's fair and angel show;
But let her dare to seem the thing she is.

[Exit.

SCENE VIII

BURLEIGH, PAULET.

BURLEIGH

She scorns us, she defies us! will defy us,
Even at the scaffold's foot. This haughty heart
Is not to be subdued. Say, did the sentence
Surprise her? Did you see her shed one tear,
Or even change her color? She disdains
To make appeal to our compassion. Well
She knows the wavering mind of England's queen.
Our apprehensions make her bold.

PAULET

My lord,
Take the pretext away which buoys it up,
And you shall see this proud defiance fail
That very moment. I must say, my lord,
Irregularities have been allowed
In these proceedings; Babington and Ballard
Should have been brought, with her two secretaries,
Before her, face to face.

BURLEIGH

No, Paulet, no.
That was not to be risked; her influence
Upon the human heart is too supreme;
Too strong the female empire of her tears.
Her secretary, Curl, if brought before her,
And called upon to speak the weighty word
On which her life depends, would straight shrink back
And fearfully revoke his own confession.

PAULET

Then England's enemies will fill the world
With evil rumors; and the formal pomp
Of these proceedings to the minds of all
Will only signalize an act of outrage.

BURLEIGH

That is the greatest torment of our queen,
[That she can never 'scape the blame. Oh God!]
Had but this lovely mischief died before
She set her faithless foot on English ground.

PAULET

Amen, say I!

BURLEIGH

Had sickness but consumed her!

PAULET

England had been secured from such misfortune.

BURLEIGH

And yet, if she had died in nature's course,
The world would still have called us murderers.

PAULET

'Tis true, the world will think, despite of us,
Whate'er it list.

BURLEIGH

Yet could it not be proved?
And it would make less noise.

PAULET

Why, let it make
What noise it may. It is not clamorous blame,
'Tis righteous censure only which can wound.

BURLEIGH

We know that holy justice cannot 'scape
The voice of censure; and the public cry
Is ever on the side of the unhappy:
Envy pursues the laurelled conqueror;
The sword of justice, which adorns the man,
Is hateful in a woman's hand; the world
Will give no credit to a woman's justice
If woman be the victim. Vain that we,
The judges, spoke what conscience dictated;
She has the royal privilege of mercy;
She must exert it: 'twere not to be borne,
Should she let justice take its full career.

PAULET

And therefore —

BURLEIGH

Therefore should she live? Oh, no,
She must not live; it must not be. 'Tis this,
Even this, my friend, which so disturbs the queen,
And scares all slumber from her couch; I read
Her soul's distracting contest in her eyes:
She fears to speak her wishes, yet her looks,

Her silent looks, significantly ask,
"Is there not one amongst my many servants
To save me from this sad alternative?
Either to tremble in eternal fear
Upon my throne, or else to sacrifice
A queen of my own kindred on the block?"

PAULET

'Tis even so; nor can it be avoided —

BURLEIGH

Well might it be avoided, thinks the queen,
If she had only more attentive servants.

PAULET

How more attentive?

BURLEIGH

Such as could interpret
A silent mandate.

PAULET

What? A silent mandate!

BURLEIGH

Who, when a poisonous adder is delivered
Into their hands, would keep the treacherous charge
As if it were a sacred, precious jewel?

PAULET

A precious jewel is the queen's good name
And spotless reputation: good my lord,
One cannot guard it with sufficient care.

BURLEIGH

When out of Shrewsbury's hands the Queen of Scots
Was trusted to Sir Amias Paulet's care,
The meaning was —

PAULET

I hope to God, my lord,
The meaning was to give the weightiest charge
Into the purest hands; my lord, my lord!
By heaven I had disdained this bailiff's office
Had I not thought the service claimed the care
Of the best man that England's realm can boast.
Let me not think I am indebted for it
To anything but my unblemished name.

BURLEIGH

Spread the report she wastes; grows sicker still
And sicker; and expires at last in peace;
Thus will she perish in the world's remembrance,
And your good name is pure.

PAULET

But not my conscience.

BURLEIGH

Though you refuse us, sir, your own assistance,
You will not sure prevent another's hand.

PAULET

No murderer's foot shall e'er approach her threshold
Whilst she's protected by my household gods.
Her life's a sacred trust; to me the head
Of Queen Elizabeth is not more sacred.
Ye are the judges; judge, and break the staff;
And when 'tis time then let the carpenter
With axe and saw appear to build the scaffold.
My castle's portals shall be open to him,
The sheriff and the executioners:
Till then she is intrusted to my care;
And be assured I will fulfil my trust,
She shall nor do nor suffer what's unjust.

[Exeunt

ACT II

SCENE I

London, a Hall in the Palace of Westminster. The EARL OF KENT and SIR WILLIAM DAVISON meeting.

DAVISON

Is that my Lord of Kent? So soon returned?
Is then the tourney, the carousal over?

KENT

How now? Were you not present at the tilt?

DAVISON

My office kept me here.

KENT

Believe me, sir,
You've lost the fairest show which ever state
Devised, or graceful dignity performed:
For beauty's virgin fortress was presented
As by desire invested; the Earl-Marshal,
The Lord-High Admiral, and ten other knights

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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