

MARY STUART

By Friedrich Schiller

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

ELIZABETH, Queen of England. KRISTA APPLE
MARY STUART, Queen of Scots, a Prisoner in England. CHARLOTTE NORTHEAST
ROBERT DUDLEY, Earl of Leicester. ROSS BESCHLER
GEORGE TALBOT, Earl of Shrewsbury. BRIAN MCCANN
WILLIAM CECIL, Lord Burleigh, Lord High Treasurer. NATHAN FOLEY
SIR WILLIAM DAVISON, Secretary of State. ADAM ALTMAN
SIR AMIAS PAULET, Keeper of MARY. JOHN LOPES
SIR EDWARD MORTIMER, his Nephew. JOSHUA KACHNYCZ
COUNT L'AUBESPINE, the French Ambassador. BRENDAN MOSER
SIR ANDREW MELVIL, her House Steward. REUBEN WADE
HANNAH KENNEDY, her Nurse. KATE MACLENIGAN ALTMAN
MARGARET CURL, her Attendant. JESSICA JOHNSON

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 chest; MORTIMER attending.

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 devil finds employment.

KENNEDY.

Sketches of letters to the Queen of England.

PAULET.

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

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

[He hands it to MORTIMER.]

Here, take it, nephew. Lay it with the rest.

[Exit MORTIMER.]

KENNEDY (supplicating).

Oh, sir, be merciful. Deprive us not
Of the last jewel that adorns our life.
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?
Is this a fate for her, the gentle born,
Who in her very cradle was a queen?
Was't not enough to rob her of her power,
Must ye then envy her its paltry tinsel?

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 came amongst us as a murderess.
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.
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.

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,
Who hath so long no human face beheld,
Save her stern gaoler's unrelenting brows.

PAULET.

Accursed office, that's intrusted to me.
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.

Enter MARY.

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,
And more dishonor on your 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 yet 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 can support this too. Sir, you have seized
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— But yet, the queen
Is of my family, my rank, my sex;
To her alone—a sister, queen, and woman—
Can I unfold my heart. 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.
I have been parted from my faithful women,
And from my servants; tell me, where are they?

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?
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.
They came like ghosts,—like ghosts they disappeared,
And since that day all mouths are closed to me.
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.

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.

*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.

[Exit.

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.

What thoughts are these—

Enter MORTIMER, approaching cautiously.

MORTIMER (to KENNEDY).

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

MARY.

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

MORTIMER.

Fear not, my gracious lady—learn to know me.

[He gives her a card.]

MARY.

Heavens - what is this?

MORTIMER.

Retire, good Kennedy;

See that my uncle comes not unawares.

MARY.

Go in; do as he bids you.

[KENNEDY retires.]

MARY.

From my uncle

In France—the worthy Cardinal of Lorraine?

[She reads.]

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

Can I believe it? Is this no deception
To cheat my senses?

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. Say on.

MORTIMER.

I say, my liege, 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.
It is a prudent policy in her
To bury you so deep. All England's youth
Would rise at once in general mutiny,
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.

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'.

MARY.

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.
This land, my queen, has, in these latter days,
Seen many a royal woman from the throne
Descend and mount the scaffold.

MARY.

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.
*[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.
Lord Aubespine, Ambassador to France
Takes up our part and backs our strong intent.
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.
There is one man for whom these gates may open.
MORTIMER.

Oh, let me know his name.
MARY.

Lord Leicester.

MORTIMER.

He?

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.
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.

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

Enter LORD BURLEIGH, and PAULET.

PAULET.

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.

BURLEIGH.

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 never have acknowledged it, my lord.

How could I so?

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.

 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.
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?
Are they not all the foremost of this land?
Stands not the reverend thinker at their head,
The learned Talbot, keeper of the seals?
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 men, 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 noble, reverend House of Lords,
Make statutes and annul them, ratify

A marriage and dissolve it, as the voice
Of power commands. Today 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.
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.
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.
Nature cast
Into the ocean these two fiery nations
Upon this plank, and she divided it
Unequally, and bade them fight for it.
This raging hate
Will never be extinguished till, at last,
One parliament in concord shall unite them,
One common scepter rule throughout the isle.

BURLEIGH.

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

MARY.

Yes, I confess, I cherished the fond hope.

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.

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.
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,
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.

Show me the proof that they were dictated
By me, that they proceeded from my lips.

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 dispatched
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.

The oaths they swore were 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?

PAULET.

Madam, there does: that is the law in England.

I must declare the truth.

MARY.

Well, then, my lord,

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.

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.

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.

Whatever in a rightful war is just

And loyal, 'tis my right to exercise.

BURLEIGH.

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

MARY.

'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.
Though she may murder me, she cannot judge me:
But let her dare to seem the thing she is.

[Exit.

BURLEIGH.

She scorns us. She defies us, will defy us,
Even at the scaffold's foot. This haughty heart
Is not to be subdued.

PAULET.

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.
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.
Oh, God.
Had but this lovely mischief died before
She set her faithless foot on English ground.

PAULET.

Amen, say I.

BURLEIGH.

And yet, if she had died in nature's course,
The world would still have called us murderers.
We know that holy justice cannot 'scape
The voice of censure; and the public cry
Is ever on the side of the unhappy.

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.
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.

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.
You 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.
Till then she is intrusted to my care.

[Exeunt.

SCENE

London, a Hall in the Palace of Westminster

*Enter ELIZABETH, led in by LEICESTER, COUNT AUBESPINE,
LORDS SHREWSBURY and BURLEIGH, and secretary DAVISON*

ELIZABETH (to AUBESPINE).

Count, I am sorry for these noblemen
Whose gallant zeal hath brought them over sea
To visit these our shores, that they, with us,
Must miss the splendor of St. Germain's court.
Such sumptuous festivals of godlike state
I cannot furnish as the royal court
Of France. A sober and contented people,
Which crowd around me with a thousand blessings
Whene'er in public I present myself:
This is the spectacle which I can show,
And not without some pride, to foreign eyes.
The splendor of the noble dames who bloom
In Catherine's beauteous garden would, I know,
Eclipse myself, and my more modest merits.

AUBESPINE.

The court of England has one lady only
To show the wondering foreigner; but all
That charms our hearts in the accomplished sex
Is seen united in her single person.
Great majesty of England, suffer us
To take our leave, and to our royal master,
The Duke of Anjou, bring the happy news.
The hot impatience of his heart would not
Permit him to remain at Paris, he
At Amiens awaits the joyful tidings;
The sweet consent which, still we humbly hope,
Your royal lips will graciously pronounce.

ELIZABETH.

Press me no further now, Aubespine.
It is not now a time, I must repeat,
To kindle here the joyful marriage torch.
The heavens lower black and heavy o'er this land;
And weeds of mourning would become me better
Than the magnificence of bridal robes.

AUBESPINE.

We only ask your majesty to promise
Your royal hand when brighter days shall come.

ELIZABETH.

Monarchs are but the slaves of their condition,
They dare not hear the dictates of their hearts.
My wish was ever to remain unmarried,
And I had placed my greatest pride in this,
That men hereafter on my tomb might read,
"Here rests the virgin queen." But my good subjects
Are not content that this should be: by this
I see that I am nothing but a woman
In their regard; and yet methought that I
Had governed like a man, and like a king.

AUBESPINE.

Great queen, you have upon your throne done honor
To every virtue.
'Tis true, the man exists not who deserves
That you to him should sacrifice your freedom;
Yet if a hero's soul, descent, and rank,
And manly beauty can make mortal man
Deserving of this honor——

ELIZABETH.

Without doubt,
My lord ambassador, a marriage union
With France's royal son would do me honor;
Yes, I acknowledge it without disguise,
If I must yield unto my people's prayers,
I do not know in Europe any prince
To whom with less reluctance I would yield
My greatest treasure, my dear liberty.
Let this confession satisfy your master.

AUBESPINE.

It gives the fairest hope, and yet it gives
Nothing but hope; my master wishes more.

ELIZABETH.

What wishes he?

[She takes a ring from her finger, and thoughtfully examines it.]

In this a queen has not

One privilege above all other women.
This common token marks one common duty,
One common servitude; the ring denotes
Marriage, and 'tis of rings a chain is made.
Convey this present to his highness; 'tis
As yet no chain, it binds me not as yet,
But out of it may grow a link to bind me.

AUBESPINE (kneeling).

This present, in his name, upon my knees,
I do receive, great queen, and press the kiss
Of homage on the hand of her who is
Henceforth my princess.

ELIZABETH

Invest his highness with this ornament,
As I invest you with it, thus perish
All jealousy between our several realms,
And let the bond of confidence unite
Henceforth, the crowns of Britain and of France.

AUBESPINE.

Most sovereign queen, this is a day of joy.

ELIZABETH.

Hear further, count.

If France be truly anxious for my hand,
It must partake my interests, and renounce
Alliance with my foes.
Should France discharge her duties as a friend,
I will fulfill my own as England's queen.

[She bows to the French ambassador, who retires respectfully.]

BURLEIGH.

Illustrious sovereign, thou crown'st to-day
The fervent wishes of thy people.
Now, but one only care disturbs this land;
It is a sacrifice which every voice
Demands. Oh, grant but this and England's peace
Will be established now and evermore.

ELIZABETH.

What wish they still, my lord? Speak.

BURLEIGH.

They demand

The Stuart's head. If we are not to live
In endless terror for thy precious life
The enemy must fall; for well thou know'st
That all thy Britons are not true alike.
Romish idolatry has still its friends
In secret, in this island, who foment
The hatred of our enemies. Their hearts

All turn toward this Stuart.
By them this thoughtless woman was deluded,
Proudly to style herself the Queen of England;
No peace can be with her, and with her house.
Oh, now thou must resolve to strike, or suffer.
Her life is death to thee, her death thy life.

ELIZABETH.

My lord, you bear a melancholy office.
I know the purity which guides your zeal,
The solid wisdom which informs your speech;
And yet I hate this wisdom, when it calls
For blood, I hate it in my inmost soul.
Think of a milder counsel. Good my Lord
Of Shrewsbury, we crave your judgment here.

TALBOT.

Well did you praise the upright zeal which fires
Lord Burleigh's loyal breast. My bosom, too,
Beats with no weaker, no less faithful pulse.
Long may you live, my queen, to be the joy
Of your delighted people, to prolong
Peace and its envied blessings in this realm.
Oh, let us never buy our happiness
With our good name.

ELIZABETH.

Forbid it, heaven, that our good name be stained.

TALBOT.

Then must you find some other way than this
To save thy kingdom, for the sentence passed
Of death against the Stuart is unjust.
You cannot upon her pronounce a sentence
Who is not subject to you.

ELIZABETH.

Then, it seems,
My council and my parliament have erred;
Each bench of justice in the land is wrong,
Which did with one accord admit this right.

TALBOT.

The proof of justice lies not in the voice
Of numbers; as inclination changes,
Thus ever ebbs and flows the unstable tide
Of public judgment. Say not, then, that thou
Must act as stern necessity compels,
That thou must yield to the importunate
Petitions of thy people. Every hour
Thou canst experience that thy will is free.
Make trial, and declare thou hatest blood,

And that thou wilt protect thy sister's life;
Show those who wish to give thee other counsels,
That here thy royal anger is not feigned,
And thou shalt see how stern necessity
Can vanish, and what once was titled justice
Into injustice be converted. Thou
Thyself must pass the sentence, thou alone.
To show that mercy, not severity,
Is the best virtue to adorn a crown.

ELIZABETH.

Lord Shrewsbury is a fervent advocate
For mine and England's enemy. I must
Prefer those counselors who wish my welfare.

TALBOT.

All circumstances have conspired against her.
I do not take the part of her misdeeds;
They say 'twas she who planned her husband's murder:
'Tis true that she espoused his murderer.
A grievous crime, no doubt; but then it happened
In darksome days of trouble and dismay,
In the stern agony of civil war,
When she, a woman, helpless and hemmed in
By a rude crowd of rebel vassals,
God knows what arts were used to overcome her.
For woman is a weak and fragile thing.

ELIZABETH.

Woman's not weak. In my presence, sir,
I do forbid to speak of woman's weakness.
Collect yourself, my Lord of Shrewsbury;
Bethink you we are met in solemn council.
My Lord of Leicester, you alone
Are silent. Does the subject which has made
Him eloquent, deprive you of your speech?

LEICESTER.

Amazement ties my tongue, my queen
To think this lackland Queen of Scotland, she
Who could not save her own poor throne, this same
Should yet become thy terror when a prisoner.
What, in Heaven's name, can make her formidable?
That she lays claim to England? Can she now
With her objections, ever shake the right
Which birth hath given thee; which, with one consent,
The votes of parliament have ratified?
By Heavens, I hope thou wilt full many a year
Walk o'er the Stuart's grave, and ne'er become
Thyself the instrument of her sad end.

BURLEIGH.

Lord Leicester hath not always held this tone.

LEICESTER.

'Tis true, I in the court of justice gave
My verdict for her death; here, in the council,
I may consistently speak otherwise.
Here, right is not the question, but advantage.
Is this a time to fear her power, when France,
Her only succor, has abandoned her,
And thou preparest with thy hand to bless
The royal son of France?
Why hasten then her death? She's dead already.
Let her live on, but let her live beneath
The headsman's axe, and from the very hour
One arm is lifted for her, let it fall.

ELIZABETH.

My lords, I now have heard your several thoughts,
And give my ardent thanks for this your zeal.
With God's assistance, who the hearts of kings
Illumines, I will weigh your arguments,
And choose what best my judgment shall approve.

She dispatches DAVISON to bring in SIR AMIAS PAULET and MORTIMER.

ELIZABETH.

There's Sir Amias Paulet. Noble sir,
What tidings bring you?

PAULET.

Gracious sovereign,
My nephew, who but lately is returned
From foreign travel, kneels before thy feet.
Grant him thy royal grace, and let him grow
And flourish in the sunshine of thy favor.

ELIZABETH.

Arise, sir knight; and welcome here in England;
You've made, I hear, the tour, have been in France
And Rome, and tarried, too. I hope, young sir,
No inward stain of their dark envy holds.

MORTIMER.

I stole into their confidence in hopes
To learn some hint of their conspiracies.

PAULET.

Private dispatches they entrusted to him,
In ciphers, for the Queen of Scots, which he,
With loyal hand, hath given up to us.

ELIZABETH.

Your enemies have said that you frequented
The schools at Rheims, and have abjured your faith.

MORTIMER.

So I pretended, that I must confess;
Such was my anxious wish to serve my queen.

ELIZABETH (to PAULET, who presents papers to her).

What have you there?

PAULET.

'Tis from the Queen of Scots.

'Tis a petition, and to thee addressed.

BURLEIGH (hastily catching at it).

Give me the paper.

PAULET (giving it to the QUEEN).

By your leave, my lord

High-treasurer; the lady ordered me
To bring it to her majesty's own hands.

*[The QUEEN takes the letter: as she reads it MORTIMER
and LEICESTER speak some words in private.*

BURLEIGH (to PAULET).

What may the purport of the letter be?

Idle complaints, from which one ought to screen
The queen's too tender heart.

PAULET.

What it contains

She did not hide from me; she asks a boon.

She begs to be admitted to the grace

Of speaking with the queen.

BURLEIGH.

It cannot be.

TALBOT.

Why not? Her supplication's not unjust.

ELIZABETH (having read the letter, dries her tears).

Oh, what is man? How is her language altered –

Forgive me, lords, my heart is cleft in twain.

TALBOT.

Oh, queen, the God of mercy hath informed

Your heart. Oh, hearken to this heavenly guidance.

Stretch forth your hand to raise this abject queen.

BURLEIGH.

Be steadfast, mighty queen, let no emotion

Of seeming laudable humanity

Mislead thee. Take not from thyself the power

Of acting as necessity commands.

Thou canst not pardon her, thou canst not save her.

LEICESTER.

Let us, my lords, remain within our bounds;

The queen is wise, and doth not need our counsels

To lead her to the most becoming choice.

ELIZABETH.

Retire, my lords. We shall, perhaps, find means
To reconcile the tender claims of pity
With what necessity imposes on us.
And now retire.

[The LORDS retire; she calls SIR EDWARD MORTIMER back.]

Sir Edward Mortimer.

ELIZABETH (having measured him for some time with her eyes in silence).

You've shown a spirit of adventurous courage
And self-possession, far beyond your years.
He who has timely learnt to play so well
The difficult dissembler's needful task
Becomes a perfect man before his time.

MORTIMER.

Illustrious mistress, what I am, and all
I can accomplish, is devoted to you.

ELIZABETH.

You've made acquaintance with the foes of England.
Their hate against me is implacable.
As yet, indeed, Almighty Providence
Hath shielded me; but on my brows the crown
Forever trembles while she lives.

MORTIMER.

She lives no more, as soon as you command it.

ELIZABETH.

Oh, sir.

The sentence is pronounced—what gain I by it?
It must be executed, Mortimer,
And I must authorize the execution.
The blame will ever light on me, I must
Avow it, nor can save appearances.

MORTIMER.

But can appearances

Disturb your conscience where the cause is just?

ELIZABETH.

You are unpracticed in the world, sir knight.
What we appear, is subject to the judgment
Of all mankind, and what we are, of no man.
In deeds of such uncertain double visage
Safety lies only in obscurity.
You are in earnest, you examine deep,
Have quite a different spirit from your uncle.

MORTIMER.

Have you imparted then your wishes to him?

ELIZABETH.

I am sorry that I have.

MORTIMER.

Excuse his age,
The old man is grown scrupulous; and bold
Adventures ask the enterprising heart
Of youth——

ELIZABETH.

And may I venture then on you——

MORTIMER.

Depend on me.

ELIZABETH.

When shall my head lie calmly down to sleep?

MORTIMER.

The next new moon will terminate thy fears.

ELIZABETH.

And be the selfsame happy day the dawn
Of your preferment—so God speed you, sir.
And be not hurt, if, chance, my thankfulness
Should wear the mask of darkness. Closest bonds,
The dearest, are the works of secrecy.

[Exit.]

MORTIMER

Go, false, deceitful queen.
Look I then like a murderer? Hast thou read
Upon my brow such base dexterity?
Trust only to my arm, and keep thine own
Concealed—assume the pious outward show
Of mercy 'fore the world, while reckoning
In secret on my murderous aid; and thus
By gaining time we shall insure her rescue.
I must attend Lord Leicester, and deliver
Her letter to him—'tis a hateful charge—
I can effect her rescue, I alone;
Be danger, honor, and the prize my own.

[As he is going, PAULET meets him.]

PAULET.

What said the queen to you?

MORTIMER.

'Twas nothing, sir;

Nothing of consequence——

PAULET.

Hear, Mortimer.

It is a false and slippery ground on which
You tread.

MORTIMER.

Was it not yourself that brought me to the court?

PAULET.

Oh, would to God I had not done as much.
How high soever the queen may pledge herself
To raise you, trust not her alluring words.
She will deny you, if you listen to her;
And, to preserve her own good name, will punish
The bloody deed, which she herself enjoined.

MORTIMER.

The bloody deed?

PAULET.

I know the deed the queen proposed to you.
Have you then pledged your promise? Have you?

MORTIMER.

Uncle.

PAULET.

If you have done so, I abandon you,
And lay my curse upon you——

LEICESTER (entering).

Worthy sir.

I with your nephew wish a word. The queen
Is graciously inclined to him; she wills
That to his custody the Scottish queen
Be with full powers entrusted. She relies
On his fidelity.

PAULET.

Relies?—'tis well——

LEICESTER.

What say you, sir?

PAULET.

Her majesty relies
On him; and I, my noble lord, rely
Upon myself, and my two open eyes.

[Exit.]

LEICESTER.

What ailed the knight?

MORTIMER.

My lord, I cannot tell

What angers him. The confidence, perhaps,
The queen so suddenly confers on me.

LEICESTER.

Are you deserving then of confidence?

MORTIMER.

This would I ask of you, my Lord of Leicester.

LEICESTER.

You said you wished to speak with me in private.

MORTIMER.

Assure me first that I may safely venture.

LEICESTER.

Who gives me an assurance on your side?
I see you, sir, exhibit at this court
Two different aspects. One of them must be
A borrowed one, but which of them is real?

MORTIMER.

The selfsame doubts I have concerning you.

LEICESTER.

Which, then, shall pave the way to confidence?

MORTIMER (producing suddenly the letter).

Here is a letter from the Queen of Scotland.

LEICESTER (alarmed, catches hastily at the letter).

Speak softly, sir - what see I? Oh, it is
Her picture.

[Kisses and examines it with speechless joy—a pause.

MORTIMER (who has watched him closely the whole time).

Now, my lord, I can believe you.

LEICESTER (having hastily run through the letter).

You know the purport of this letter, sir.

MORTIMER.

Nothing hath she informed me of. She said

You would explain this riddle to me.

LEICESTER.

You seem surprised, sir, that my heart is turned

So suddenly towards the captive queen.

In truth, I never hated her; the times

Have forced me to be her enemy.

She was, as you well know, my destined bride.

Coldly I then refused the proffered boon.

Now in confinement, at the gates of death,

I claim her at the hazard of my life.

Ambition made me all insensible

To youth and beauty. Mary's hand I held

Too insignificant for me; I hoped

To be the husband of the Queen of England.

MORTIMER.

It is well known she gave you preference

Before all others.

LEICESTER.

So, indeed, it seemed.

Now, after ten lost years of tedious courtship –

Aye, I have sacrificed ten bitter years

To the proud idol of her vanity;

Submitted with a slave's humility

To every change of her despotic fancies

The plaything of each little wayward whim.

And now in recompense for all I lose
Her to young blooming husband,
And I must from the stage descend, where I
So long have played the most distinguished part.
Then Mary's image in me was renewed –
No more 'twas cold ambition; 'twas my heart
Which now compared, and with regret I felt
The value of the jewel I had lost.
With horror I beheld her in the depths.

I contrived
To send her, through a faithful hand, the news
Of my conversion to her interests,
And in this letter which you brought me, she
Assures me that she pardons me and offers
Herself as guerdon if I rescue her.

MORTIMER.

But you attempted nothing for her rescue.
You let her be condemned without a word:
You gave, yourself, your verdict for her death –

LEICESTER.

Each way to her was shut. I was obliged
Before the world to persecute her still.

MORTIMER.

Your generous confidence in me deserves
A like return. I will deliver her.

That is my object here; my dispositions
Are made already, and your powerful aid
Assures us of success in our attempt.

I'll open forcibly her prison-gates.
I have confederates, and all is ready.

LEICESTER.

You have confederates, accomplices?
Alas, In what rash enterprise would you
Engage me? And these friends, know they my secret?

MORTIMER.

Fear not; our plan was laid without your help,
Without your help it would have been accomplished.

LEICESTER.

And can you, then, with certainty assure me
That in your plot my name has not been mentioned?

MORTIMER.

You may depend upon it. How, my lord,
So scrupulous when help is offered you?
You wish to rescue Mary, and possess her;
You find confederates; sudden, unexpected,
The readiest means fall as it were from Heaven,

Yet you show more perplexity than joy.

LEICESTER.

Young man, you are too hasty
In such a thorny, dangerous attempt.
If we are ruined, she must fall with us.

MORTIMER.

If we risk nothing, she will ne'er be rescued.
And how, if I were miscreant enough
To murder her, as was proposed to me
This moment by Elizabeth, and which
She looks upon as certain?

LEICESTER.

Did the queen give you, then, this bloody order?

MORTIMER.

That she might not engage another's hand,
I offered mine.

LEICESTER.

Well done, sir, that was right.
This gives us leisure, for she rests secure
Upon your bloody service, and the sentence
Is unfulfilled the while, and we gain time.

MORTIMER.

No, we are losing time.

LEICESTER.

The queen depends
On you, and will the readier make a show
Of mercy; and I may prevail on her
To give an audience to her adversary.

MORTIMER.

And what is gained by this?
A daring deed must one day end the matter;
Why will you not with such a deed begin?

LEICESTER.

Follow my counsel—venture nothing rashly.
Some one approaches. Go.

MORTIMER.

And Mary hopes—
Shall I return to her with empty comfort?

LEICESTER.

Tell her I love her.

MORTIMER.

Tell her yourself. I offered my assistance
As her deliverer, not your messenger.

[Exit. Enter ELIZABETH

ELIZABETH.

Say, who was here? I heard the sound of voices.

LEICESTER (turning quickly and perplexed round on hearing the QUEEN).

It was young Mortimer——

ELIZABETH.

How now, my lord:

Why so confused?

LEICESTER (collecting himself).

Your presence is the cause.

Ne'er did I see thy beauty so resplendent,

My sight is dazzled by thy heavenly charms.

Oh.

ELIZABETH.

Whence this sigh?

LEICESTER.

Have I no reason, then,

To sigh? When I behold you in your glory,

I feel anew, with pain unspeakable,

The loss which threatens me.

ELIZABETH.

What loss, my lord?

LEICESTER.

Your heart. Your own inestimable self.

Soon will you feel yourself within the arms

Of your young ardent husband, highly blessed.

He will possess your heart without a rival.

He is of royal blood, that am not I.

Yet, spite of all the world can say, there lives not

One on this globe who with such fervent zeal

Adores you as the man who loses you.

But I love you, and were you born of all

The peasant maids the poorest, I the first

Of kings, I would descend to your condition,

And lay my crown and scepter at your feet.

ELIZABETH.

Oh, pity me, my Robert, do not blame me.

I cannot ask my heart. 'Tis not my fortune

To place upon the brows of him, the dearest

Of men to me, the royal crown of England.

The Queen of Scotland was allowed to make

Her hand the token of her inclination;

She hath had every freedom, and hath drunk,

Even to the very dregs, the cup of joy.

LEICESTER.

And now she drinks the bitter cup of sorrow.

ELIZABETH.

She never did respect the world's opinion;

Life was to her a sport. And in this life,

All she wanted was to be a woman.
And is it really true that she's so fair?
Pictures are flattering, and description lies;
I will trust nothing but my own conviction.
Why gaze you at me thus?

LEICESTER.

I placed in thought
You and Maria Stuart side by side.
Yes, I confess I oft have felt a wish,
If it could be but secretly contrived,
To see you placed beside the Scottish queen.
Then would you feel, and not till then, the full
Enjoyment of your triumph. She deserves
To be thus humbled; she deserves to see
Herself surpassed, to feel herself o'ermatched,
As much by thee in form and princely grace
As in each virtue that adorns the sex.

ELIZABETH.

I'm teased to grant this interview.

LEICESTER.

She asks it
As a favor; grant it as a punishment.
Thus can you murder her as she hath wished
To murder you. When she beholds your beauty,
Then is the hour of her destruction come.

ELIZABETH.

But would it then become me to behold
My kinswoman in infamy and want?

LEICESTER.

You need not cross her threshold. Hear my counsel;
The hunt you mean to honor with your presence
Is in the neighborhood of Fotheringay.
Permission may be given to Lady Stuart
To take the air; you meet her in the park,
As if by accident; it must not seem
To have been planned, and should you not incline,
You need not speak to her.

ELIZABETH.

If I am foolish,
Be yours the fault, not mine. I would not care
To-day to cross your wishes; for to-day
I've grieved you more than all my other subjects.

[Tenderly.]

Let it then be your fancy, Leicester.

[ELIZABETH kisses him.]

SCENE.

*In a park. In the foreground trees; in the background
a distant prospect.*

MARY advances, running from behind the trees.

HANNAH KENNEDY follows slowly.

KENNEDY.

I cannot follow you so swiftly; wait.

MARY.

Freedom returns! Oh let me enjoy it.

Let me, with joy and with eagerness burning,

Drink in the free, the celestial air.

KENNEDY.

Oh, my dear lady, but a very little

Is your sad jail extended; you behold not

The wall that shuts us in. These plaited tufts

Of trees hide from your sight the hated object.

MARY.

Thanks to these friendly trees, that hide from me

My prison walls, and flatter my illusion.

Happy I now may deem myself, and free;

Why wake me from my dream's so sweet confusion?

The extended vault of heaven around me lies,

Free and unfettered range my wandering eyes

O'er space's vast, immeasurable sea.

KENNEDY.

See you not from far

How we are followed by observing spies?

MARY.

No, gentle Hannah, trust me. Not in vain

My prison gates are opened. This small grace

Is harbinger of greater happiness.

I recognize in this the mighty arm

Of Leicester. They will by degrees expand

My prison; will accustom me, through small,

To greater liberty, until at last

I shall behold the face of him whose hand

Will dash my fetters off, and that forever.

Enter PAULET.

PAULET.

Well, have I acted right at last, my lady?

Do I for once, at least, deserve your thanks?

MARY.

Did you do this?

PAULET.

I visited the court,

And gave the queen your letter.

MARY.

Did you give it?
In very truth did you deliver it?
And is this freedom which I now enjoy
The happy consequence?

PAULET.

Nor that alone;
Prepare yourself to see a greater still.

MARY.

A greater still? What do you mean by that?

PAULET.

The queen is hunting in the neighborhood.

MARY.

What?

PAULET.

In a few moments she'll appear before you.

KENNEDY (to MARY, about to fall).

How fare you, dearest lady? You grow pale.

PAULET.

How? Is't not well? Was it not then your prayer?

'Tis granted now, before it was expected;

You who had ever such a ready speech,

Now summon all your powers of eloquence,

The important time to use them now is come.

MARY.

Oh, why was I not told of this before?

Now I am not prepared for it— Hannah,

Lead me into the house, till I collect

My spirits.

PAULET.

Stay. You must await her here.

Enter the EARL OF SHREWSBURY.

MARY.

Oh, worthy Shrewsbury, you come as though

You were an angel sent to me from heaven.

I cannot, will not see her.

SHREWSBURY.

Your majesty,

Command yourself, and summon all your courage,

'Tis the decisive moment of your fate.

MARY.

For years I've waited, and prepared myself.

For this I've studied, weighed, and written down

Each word within the tablet of my memory

That was to touch and move her to compassion.

Forgotten suddenly, erased is all,

And nothing lives within me at this moment

But the fierce, burning feeling of my wrongs.
My heart is turned to direst hate against her.
All gentle thoughts, all sweet forgiving words,
Are gone.

SHREWSBURY.

Command your wild, rebellious blood. No good
Ensues when hatred is opposed to hate.
You must submit to stern necessity,
The power is in her hand, be therefore humble.

MARY.

To her? I never can.

SHREWSBURY.

I say you must.

Speak with respect, with calmness.

MARY.

Oh, this can never, never come to good.
I have been hurt too grievously; she hath
Too grievously oppressed me. No atonement
Can make us friends.

SHREWSBURY.

Please listen, Queen.

I saw the tears in her eyes at your letter.
She is not heartless – you must have courage.

MARY.

Oh, Talbot, you have ever been my friend.

SHREWSBURY.

Let all be now forgot, and only think
How to receive her with submissiveness.

MARY.

Is Burleigh with her, too, my evil genius?

SHREWSBURY.

No one attends her but the Earl of Leicester.

MARY.

Lord Leicester?

SHREWSBURY.

Fear not him, it is not he

Who wishes your destruction. 'Twas his work
That here the queen hath granted you this meeting.

MARY.

Ah, well I knew it.

SHREWSBURY.

What?

PAULET.

The queen approaches.

[They all draw aside; MARY alone remains, leaning on KENNEDY. She presses KENNEDY aside and stands, waiting.]

INTERMISSION

[Lights rise to find all as before. Enter ELIZABETH, EARL OF LEICESTER.
ELIZABETH (to LEICESTER).

What seat is that, my lord?

LEICESTER.

'Tis Fotheringay.

ELIZABETH (to SHREWSBURY).

My lord, send back our retinue to London;

The people crowd too eager in the roads,

We'll seek a refuge in this quiet park.

*[TALBOT sends the train away. She looks steadfastly at MARY,
as she speaks further with PAULET.*

My honest people love me overmuch.

These signs of joy are quite idolatrous.

Thus should a God be honored, not a mortal.

What lady's that?

[A general, embarrassed silence.

LEICESTER.

You are at Fotheringay,

My liege.

ELIZABETH (as if surprised, casting an angry look at LEICESTER).

Who hath done this, my Lord of Leicester?

LEICESTER.

'Tis past, my queen. And now that heaven hath led

Your footsteps hither, be magnanimous,

And let sweet pity be triumphant now.

MARY.

The voice of heaven decides for you, my sister.

Your happy brows are now with triumph crowned,

I bless the Power Divine which thus hath raised you.

But in your turn be merciful, my sister;

[She kneels.

Let me not lie before you thus disgraced;

Stretch forth your hand, your royal hand, to raise

Your sister from the depths of her distress.

ELIZABETH

You are where it becomes you, Lady Stuart.

And thankfully I prize my God's protection,

Who hath not suffered me to kneel a suppliant

Thus at your feet, as you now kneel at mine.

MARY

Oh, there are gods who punish haughty pride.

Respect them, honor them, the dreadful ones

Who thus before thy feet have humbled me.

Before these strangers' eyes dishonor not
Yourself in me: profane not, nor disgrace
The royal blood of Tudor. In my veins
It flows as pure a stream as in your own.
My all, my life, my fortune now depends
Upon the influence of my words and tears.
That I may touch your heart, oh, set mine free.

ELIZABETH.

What would you say to me, my Lady Stuart?
You wished to speak with me, and I, forgetting
The queen, and all the wrongs I have sustained,
Fulfill the pious duty of the sister,
And grant the boon you wished for of my presence.

MARY.

Oh, how shall I begin? Oh, how shall I
So artfully arrange my cautious words
That they may touch, yet not offend your heart?
Strengthen my words, O Heaven, and take from them
Whate'er might wound. Alas, I cannot speak
In my own cause without impeaching you,
And that most heavily, I wish not so.
You have not as you ought behaved to me.
I am a queen, like you: yet you have held me
Confined in prison. As a suppliant
I came to you, yet you in me insulted
The pious use of hospitality;
Slighting in me the holy law of nations,
Immured me in a dungeon—tore from me
My friends and servants. To unseemly want
I was exposed, and hurried to the bar
Of a disgraceful, insolent tribunal.
No more of this. In everlasting silence
Be buried all the cruelties I suffered.
See—I will throw the blame of all on fate,
'Twere not your fault, no more than it was mine.

ELIZABETH.

Accuse not fate. Your own deceitful heart
It was, the wild ambition of your pride
To vest yourself with my imperial title,
And meet me in the lists in mortal strife.

MARY

Now stand we face to face. Now, sister, speak:
Name but my crime, I'll fully satisfy you.
Alas, had you vouchsafed to hear me then,
When I so earnest sought to meet your eye,
It never would have come to this, nor would,

Here in this mournful place, have happened now
This so distressful, this so mournful meeting.

ELIZABETH

What arms were not employed to storm my throne?
The curses of the priests, the people's sword,
The dreadful weapons of religious frenzy,
Even here in my own kingdom's peaceful haunts
Were fanned the flames of civil insurrection.
But God is with me. The blow was aimed
Full at my head, but yours it is which falls.

MARY.

I'm in the hand of heaven. You never will
Exert so cruelly the power it gives you.

ELIZABETH.

Who shall prevent me?
I only practice what your priests have taught.
Say then, what surety can be offered me,
Should I magnanimously loose your bonds?
Force is my only surety; no alliance
Can be concluded with a race of vipers.

MARY.

Oh, this is but your wretched, dark suspicion.
For you have constantly regarded me
But as a stranger, and an enemy.
O sister, rule your realm in peace.
I give up every claim to these domains.
Greatness entices me no more: your point
Is gained; I am but Mary's shadow now.
My noble spirit is at last broke down
By long captivity:—you've done your worst
On me; you have destroyed me in my bloom.
Now, end your work, my sister. Speak at length
The word, which to pronounce has brought you hither;
For I will ne'er believe that you are come,
To mock unfeelingly your hapless victim.
Pronounce this word. Say, "Mary, you are free."
Say this, and I will take my life, will take
My freedom, as a present from your hands.
One word makes all undone;—I wait for it;—
Oh, let it not be needlessly delayed.
Woe to you if you end not with this word.
For should you not, like some divinity,
Dispensing noble blessings, quit me now,
Then, sister, not for all this island's wealth,
For all the realms encircled by the deep,
Would I exchange my present lot for yours.

ELIZABETH.

And you confess at last that you are conquered:
Are all your schemes run out? No more assassins
Now on the road? Will no adventurer
Attempt again for you the sad achievement?
It is over. The world has other cares.
None is ambitious of the dangerous honor
Of being your next husband—you destroy
Your wooers like your husbands.

MARY.

Sister, sister!

Grant me forbearance, all ye powers of heaven.

ELIZABETH.

Those then, my Lord of Leicester, are the charms
Which no man with impunity can view,
Near which no woman dare to stand?
In sooth, this honor has been cheaply gained;
To be the darling of the world is easy
When one is in the arms of every man.

MARY.

This is too much.

ELIZABETH.

You show us now, indeed,
Your real face. Till now 'twas but the mask.

MARY.

My sins were human, and the faults of youth.
The worst of me is known, and I can say,
That I am better than the fame I bear.
What of you, when in time to come, the world
Shall pull the robe of honor from your deeds,
The robe of virgin honor which has veiled
The raging flames of lawless, secret lust.
Nor virtue, legitimacy nor grace
Could Anne Boleyn bequeath unto her child.
A bastard soils, profanes the English throne.
If right prevailed, you now would in the dust
Before me lie, for I'm your rightful monarch.

*[ELIZABETH hastily quits the stage; the lords follow her
in the greatest consternation.]*

KENNEDY.

What have you done? She has gone hence in wrath
All hope is over now.

MARY

Now I am happy, Hannah, and at last,
After whole years of sorrow and abasement,
One moment of victorious revenge

A weight falls off my heart, the weight of mountains.
I plunged the steel in my oppressor's breast.

KENNEDY.

Yes, you have wounded your inveterate foe;
'Tis she who wields the lightning, she is queen.

MARY.

I have abased her before Leicester's eyes.
He saw it, he was witness of my triumph.
How did I hurl her from her haughty height,
He saw it, and his presence strengthened me.

Enter MORTIMER.

KENNEDY.

Oh, Sir, What disaster.

MORTIMER.

I heard all—

*[Gives KENNEDY a sign to repair to her post,
and draws nearer; his whole appearance expresses
the utmost violence of passion.]*

Thou trod'st her to the dust.

Thou wast the queen, she was the malefactor.

I adore thee.

MARY.

You spoke with Leicester, gave my letter to him.

My present, too?—oh, speak, sir.

MORTIMER.

Who?—he?—he is a wretch, a very coward,
Hope naught from him; despise him, and forget him.

MARY.

Will he do nothing for me?

MORTIMER.

Speak not of him.

What can he do? What need have we of him?

I will release you; I alone.

MARY.

Alas,

What power have you?

MORTIMER.

Deceive yourself no more,
Think not your case is now as formerly.
The moment that the queen thus quitted you,
All hope was lost, each way of mercy shut.
Now deeds must speak, now boldness must decide.
You must be free before the morning break.

MARY.

What say you, sir—to-night?—impossible.

MORTIMER.

Hear what has been resolved. I led my friends
Into a private chapel, where a priest
Heard our confession, and, for every sin
We had committed, gave us absolution.
He gave us absolution too, beforehand,
For every crime we might commit in future.
He gave us too the final sacrament,
And we are ready for the final journey.

MARY.

Oh, what an awful, dreadful preparation.

MORTIMER.

We scale, this very night, the castle's walls;
The keys are in my power; the guards we murder,
Then from thy chamber bear thee forcibly.
Each living soul must die beneath our hands,
That none remain who might disclose the deed.

MARY.

And what of Paulet, my keeper? O, he
Would sooner spill his dearest drop of blood.

MORTIMER.

He falls the very first beneath my steel.

MARY.

What, sir? Your uncle? How? Your second father?

MORTIMER.

Must perish by my hand—I murder him.

MARY.

It must not be so.

MORTIMER.

We have been absolved
Beforehand; I may perpetrate the worst.

I can, I will do so.

And should I be obliged to kill the queen,
I've sworn upon the host, it must be done.

MARY.

No, Mortimer; ere so much blood for me——

MORTIMER.

What is the life of all compared to thee,
And to my love? Life's but a moment—death
Is but a moment too. To rest upon this bosom,
To press upon this passion-breathing mouth——

MARY.

Leave me, for God's sake, sir; let me go in——

MORTIMER.

He is a madman who neglects to clasp
His bliss in folds that never may be loosed,
When Heaven has kindly given it to his arms.

I will deliver you, and though it cost
A thousand lives, I do it; but I swear,
As God's in Heaven I will possess you too.

[He makes to kiss her, and she evades him.]

They would behead thee, they would wound this neck,
So dazzling white, with the disgraceful axe.
The crown is fallen from thy brows, thou hast
No more of earthly majesty.
Thy moving form alone remains, just this —
This bids me venture all, this arms my hand.
Service that's bold demands a bold reward.

[He presses her violently to his bosom.]

KENNEDY (entering suddenly).

They're coming—they approach—the park is filled
With men in arms.

MORTIMER.

I will defend you—I——

MARY.

O Hannah, save me, save me.

[She flies towards the house, KENNEDY follows her.]

*PAULET and BURLEIGH, rush in in the greatest
consternation.*

PAULET.

Shut all the portals—draw the bridges up.

MORTIMER.

What is the matter, uncle?

BURLEIGH.

Where is the murderess?

Down with her, down into the darkest dungeon.

MORTIMER.

What is the matter? What has passed?

PAULET.

The queen -

She was assaulted on the road to London.

[PAULET exits.]

MORTIMER.

The queen is murdered—

And Mary shall ascend the English throne.

BURLEIGH.

Is murdered? Who said that?

MORTIMER.

Yourself.

BURLEIGH.

She lives,

Thank God. The blow was badly aimed, her cloak
Received it. Shrewsbury disarmed the murderer.

Exit

MORTIMER.

She lives?

Alas, a fierce, destructive fate pursues thee,

Unhappy one. Yes—now thy death is fixed.

I will remain, and still attempt to save

My love; if not, my bed shall be upon her grave.

[Exit

SCENE —Antechamber.

Enter BURLEIGH, in conversation with DAVISON, LEICESTER and AUBESPINE following

BURLEIGH.

Sir; let the death-warrant

Be instantly made out, and pass the seal,

Then let it be presented to the queen.

Her majesty must sign it. Hasten, sir,

We have no time to lose.

DAVISON.

It shall be done.

[Exit.

AUBESPINE.

Praised be almighty Heaven, who hath averted
Assassination from our much-loved queen.

Please you, my lord, to bring me to the queen,

That I may lay the warm congratulations

Of my imperial master at her feet.

BURLEIGH.

There is no need of this.

AUBESPINE.

My Lord of Burleigh,

I know my duty.

BURLEIGH.

Sir, your duty is

To quit, and that without delay, this kingdom.

AUBESPINE.

What? How is this?

BURLEIGH.

The sacred character

Of an ambassador to-day protects you,

But not to-morrow.

AUBESPINE.

What is my crime?

BURLEIGH.

Should I

Once name it, there were then no pardon for it.

AUBESPINE.

I hope, my lord, my charge's privilege——

BURLEIGH.

Your passport was discovered
In the assassin's pocket.

AUBESPINE.

Sir, many passports are subscribed by me.
I cannot know the secret thoughts of men.

BURLEIGH.

He in your house confessed, and was absolved.
The furious populace has stormed your palace,
Where a whole arsenal of arms was found.

AUBESPINE.

My monarch in my person is insulted.
He will annul the marriage contract.

BURLEIGH.

That
My royal mistress has annulled already.
England will not unite herself with France.

AUBESPINE.

I go—I leave
This kingdom where they sport with public treaties
And trample on the laws of nations. Yet
My monarch, be assured, will vent his rage
In direst vengeance.

BURLEIGH.

Let him seek it here.

[Exeunt AUBESPINE.]

LEICESTER.

Now you are in your element, my lord.
A monstrous outrage has been just committed,
And darkness veils as yet its perpetrators:
Now will a court of inquisition rise;
Each word, each look be weighed; men's very thoughts
Be summoned to the bar. You are, my lord,
The mighty man, the Atlas of the state,
All England's weight lies upon your shoulders.

BURLEIGH.

In you, my lord, I recognize my master,
For such a victory as your eloquence
Has gained I cannot boast.

LEICESTER.

What means your lordship?

BURLEIGH.

You were the man who knew, behind my back,
To lure the queen to Fotheringay Castle.

LEICESTER.

Behind your back? When did I fear to act
Before your face?

BURLEIGH.

You led her majesty.

Oh, no—you led her not—it was the queen
Who was so gracious as to lead you thither.

LEICESTER.

What mean you, my lord, by that?

BURLEIGH.

The noble part

You forced the queen to play. The glorious triumph
Which you prepared for her.

The Stuart is for this so despicable,
So weak an enemy, that it would scarce
Be worth the pains to stain us with her blood.

A specious plan, and sharply pointed too;
'Tis only pity this sharp point is broken.

LEICESTER.

Unworthy wretch, this instant follow me,
And answer at the throne this insolence.

BURLEIGH.

You'll find me there, my lord. And look you well
That there your eloquence desert you not.

[Exit.]

LEICESTER.

I am detected. All my plot's disclosed –
Alas, if he has proofs, if she should learn
That I have held a secret correspondence
With her worst enemy; how criminal
Shall I appear to her? How false will then
My counsel seem, and all the fatal pains
I took to lure the queen to Fotheringay?
I've shamefully betrayed, and have exposed her
To her detested enemy's revilings.

Oh, never, never can she pardon that.

All will appear as if premeditated.

The bitter turn of this sad interview,

The triumph and the tauntings of her rival;

Yes, e'en the murderous hand which had prepared

A bloody, monstrous, unexpected fate;

All, all will be ascribed to my suggestions.

*[MORTIMER enters in the most violent uneasiness,
and looks with apprehension round him.]*

MORTIMER.

Lord Leicester - Is it you? Are we alone?

LEICESTER.

Audacious wretch, to dare to mix my name
In your detested outrage: go; defend
Your bloody deeds yourself.

MORTIMER.

But only hear me.

LEICESTER.

I disclaim you. Henceforth I know you not.

MORTIMER.

I came to warn you; you too are detected.

LEICESTER.

How? What?

MORTIMER.

Lord Burleigh went to Fotheringay
Just as the luckless deed had been attempted,
Searched with strict scrutiny the queen's apartments,
And found there——

LEICESTER.

What?

MORTIMER.

A letter which the queen
Had just addressed to you
In which she calls on you to keep your word,
Renews the promise of her hand, and mentions
The picture which she sent you.

LEICESTER.

Can this be?

MORTIMER.

Lord Burleigh has the letter.

LEICESTER.

I am lost.

MORTIMER.

Improve the moment. Be beforehand with him,
And save yourself—save her. An oath can clear
Your fame; contrive excuses to avert
The worst. I am helpless, can do no more;
My comrades are dispersed—to pieces fallen
Our whole confederacy.
'Tis now your turn, my lord; try what your weight,
What bold assurance can effect.

LEICESTER.

I will.

[Goes to the door, opens it, and calls.]

Who waits without? Guards, seize this wretched traitor,
And guard him closely. A most dreadful plot
Is brought to light—I'll to her majesty.

LEICESTER exits, and MORTIMER Draws a dagger as voices grow approaching the chamber.

MORTIMER.

Beloved queen, I could not set thee free;
Yet take a lesson from me how to die.
Mary, thou holy one, O, pray for me.
And take me to thy heavenly home on high.
[Stabs himself, and falls.]

SCENE.

The apartment of the Queen.

ELIZABETH, with a letter in her hand, BURLEIGH.

ELIZABETH.

To lure me thither? trifle with me thus,
The traitor. Thus to lead me, as in triumph,
Into the presence of his paramour.
Oh, Burleigh, ne'er was woman so deceived.

BURLEIGH.

I am unable to divine
By what black arts he blurred your judgement, Queen.

ELIZABETH.

Oh, I die

For shame. How must he laugh to scorn my weakness.
I thought to humble her, and was myself
The object of her bitter scorn.

BURLEIGH.

By this

You see how faithfully I counseled you.

ELIZABETH.

Oh, I am sorely punished, that I turned
My ear from your wise counsels; yet I thought
I might confide in him whom I have made
The greatest of the great, and ever set
The nearest to my heart, and in this court
Allowed to play the master and the king.

BURLEIGH.

Yet in that very moment he betrayed you.
Betrayed you to this wily Queen of Scots.

ELIZABETH.

Oh, she shall pay me for it with her life.
Is the death-warrant ready?

BURLEIGH.

'Tis prepared

As you commanded.

ELIZABETH.

She shall surely die—

He shall behold her fall, and fall himself.
I've driven him from my heart. No longer love,
Revenge alone is there: and high as once
He stood, so low and shameful be his fall.
Conduct him to the Tower, let a commission
Of peers be named to try him. He shall feel
In its full weight the rigor of the law.

BURLEIGH.

But he will seek thy presence; he will clear——

ELIZABETH.

I will never see him.

No never, never more. Are orders given
Not to admit him should he come?

BURLEIGH.

'Tis done.

DAVISON (entering).

The Earl of Leicester.

ELIZABETH.

The presumptuous man.

I will not see him. Tell him that I will not.

DAVISON.

I am afraid to bring my lord this message,
Nor would he credit it.

ELIZABETH.

And I have raised him

So high that my own servants tremble more
At him than me.

BURLEIGH.

The queen forbids his presence.

[DAVISON retires slowly.]

ELIZABETH (after a pause).

Yet, if it still were possible? If he
Could clear himself? Might it not be a snare
Laid by the cunning one, to sever me
From my best friends—the ever-treacherous harlot.
She might have writ the letter, but to raise
Poisonous suspicion in my heart, to ruin
The man she hates.

BURLEIGH.

Yet, gracious queen, consider.

*LEICESTER (bursts open the door with violence,
and enters with an imperious air).*

LEICESTER.

Fain would I see the shameless man who dares
Forbid me the apartments of my queen.
If for a Burleigh she be visible,

She must be so to me.

BURLEIGH.

My lord, you are
Too bold, without permission to intrude.

LEICESTER.

What permission?
I know of none who stands so high at court
As to permit my doings, or refuse them.
'Tis from my sovereign's lips alone that I——

ELIZABETH.

Out of my sight, deceitful, worthless traitor.

LEICESTER.

'Tis not my gracious queen I hear, but Burleigh,
My enemy, in these ungentle words.
To my imperial mistress I appeal;
Thou hast lent him thine ear; I ask the like.

ELIZABETH.

Speak, shameless wretch. Increase your crime—deny it.

LEICESTER.

Dismiss this troublesome intruder first.
Withdraw, my lord. You know between the queen
And me there is no need of witnesses.

Retire——

ELIZABETH (to BURLEIGH).

Remain, my lord; 'tis my command.

LEICESTER.

What has a third to do 'twixt thee and me?
I have to clear myself before my queen,
But what I say is to the heart addressed;
And I will justify what I have dared
To do, confiding in thy generous favor,
Before thy heart alone. I recognize
No other jurisdiction.

ELIZABETH.

Base deceiver,
'Tis this, e'en this, which above all condemns you.
My lord, produce the letter.

[To BURLEIGH.

BURLEIGH.

Here it is.

LEICESTER (running over the letter without losing his presence of mind).

'Tis Mary Stuart's hand——
Appearance is against me, yet I hope
I shall not by appearances be judged.

ELIZABETH.

Can you deny your secret correspondence

With Mary?—that she sent and you received
Her picture, that you gave her hopes of rescue?

LEICESTER.

It were an easy matter, if I felt
That I were guilty of a crime, to challenge
The testimony of my enemy:
Yet bold is my good conscience. I confess
That she hath said the truth.

ELIZABETH.

Out of my sight.

Away, conduct the traitor to the Tower.

LEICESTER.

I am no traitor. It was wrong, I own,
To make a secret of this step to thee,
Yet pure was my intention. It was done
To search into her plots and to confound them.

BURLEIGH.

And do you think, my lord—

LEICESTER.

I've played a dangerous game, I know it well,
And none but Leicester dare be bold enough
To risk it at this court. The world must know
How I detest this Stuart, and the rank
Which here I hold; my monarch's confidence,
With which she honors me, must sure suffice
To overturn all doubt of my intentions.

BURLEIGH.

If the course was good,
Wherefore conceal it?

LEICESTER.

You are used, my lord,
To prate before you act; the very chime
Of your own deeds. This is your manner, lord,
But mine is first to act, and then to speak.
In spite of all your cunning, Mary Stuart
Was free to-day, had I not hindered it.

BURLEIGH.

How? You?

LEICESTER.

Yes, I, my lord. The queen confided
In Mortimer; she opened to the youth
Her inmost soul. Yes, she went further still;
She gave him, too, a secret, bloody charge,
Which Paulet had before refused with horror.
Say, is it so, or not?

[The QUEEN and BURLEIGH look at one another with astonishment.]

BURLEIGH.

Whence know ye this?

LEICESTER.

Nay, is it not a fact? Now answer me.
And where, my lord, where were your thousand eyes,
Not to discover Mortimer was false?
That he, a papal tool, and Mary's creature,
Was come to free the Stuart, and to murder
The Queen of England.

ELIZABETH.

How? This Mortimer?

LEICESTER.

'Twas he through whom our correspondence passed.
This plot it was which introduced me to him.
This very day she was to have been torn
From her confinement; he, this very moment,
Disclosed his plan to me: I took him prisoner,
And gave him to the guard, when in despair
To see his work o'erturned, he slew himself.

BURLEIGH.

This happened then but now? Since last we parted?

LEICESTER.

For my own sake, I must lament the deed,
That he was thus cut off. His testimony,
Were he alive, had fully cleared my fame,
And freed me from suspicion; 'twas for this
That I surrendered him to open justice.
Who was it, then, my queen,
Who saved you? Was it Burleigh? Did he know
The dangers which surrounded you? Did he
Avert them from your head? Your faithful Leicester
Was your good angel.

BURLEIGH.

This same Mortimer

Died most conveniently for you, my lord.

ELIZABETH.

What I should say I know not. I believe you,
And I believe you not. I think you guilty,
And yet I think you not. A curse on her
Who caused me all this anguish.

LEICESTER.

She must die.

I now myself consent unto her death.
I formerly advised you to suspend
The sentence, till some arm should rise anew
On her behalf; the case has happened now,

And I demand her instant execution.

BURLEIGH.

You give this counsel? You?

LEICESTER.

Howe'er it wound
My feelings to be forced to this extreme,
Yet now I see most clearly, now I feel
That the queen's welfare asks this bloody victim.
'Tis my proposal, therefore, that the writ
Be drawn at once to fix the execution.

BURLEIGH (to the QUEEN).

Since, then, his lordship shows such earnest zeal,
Such loyalty, 'twere well were he appointed
To see the execution of the sentence.

LEICESTER.

Who? I?

BURLEIGH.

Yes, you; you surely ne'er could find
A better means to shake off the suspicion
Which rests upon you still, than to command
Her, whom 'tis said you love, to be beheaded.
ELIZABETH (looking steadfastly at LEICESTER).
My lord advises well. So be it, then.

LEICESTER.

It were but fit that my exalted rank
Should free me from so mournful a commission,
Which would indeed, in every sense, become
A Burleigh better than the Earl of Leicester.
But yet to prove my zeal, to satisfy
My queen, I waive my charge's privilege,
And take upon myself this hateful duty.

ELIZABETH.

Lord Burleigh shall partake this duty with you.

[To BURLEIGH.

So be the warrant instantly brought in.

*[BURLEIGH calls forth DAVISON who enters with a paper along with
SHREWSBURY]*

ELIZABETH.

Well, Davison?

DAVISON

Your Majesty.

[He offers the warrant. As she is about to take it, she shudders, and starts back.]

ELIZABETH

Oh, God.

BURLEIGH.

Obey

Thy people's voice; it is the voice of God.

ELIZABETH

Oh, my good lord, who will assure me now
That what I hear is my whole people's voice,
The voice of all the world? Ah, much I fear,
That, if I now should listen to the wish
Of the wild multitude, a different voice
Might soon be heard;—and that the very men,
Who now by force oblige me to this step,
May, when 'tis taken, heavily condemn me.

SHREWSBURY.

Hold fast, my queen, they wish to hurry thee.

ELIZABETH.

Good Shrewsbury, I am constrained—

SHREWSBURY.

Who can constrain thee? Thou art Queen of England,
Here must thy majesty assert its rights:
Command those savage voices to be silent,
Who take upon themselves to put constraint
Upon thy royal will, to rule thy judgment.
Thou hast for years considered, let not then
A moment ruled by passion hurry thee.
Yet listen but to this. Thou tremblest now
Before this living Mary—tremble rather
Before the murdered, the beheaded Mary.
She will arise, and quit her grave, will range
Around thy realm, and turn thy people's hearts
From their allegiance. For as yet the Britons
Hate her, because they fear her; but most surely
Will they avenge her when she is no more.
What head is safe, if the anointed fall?

ELIZABETH.

In very sooth

I'm weary of my life, and of my crown.
If Heaven decree that one of us two queens
Must perish, to secure the other's life—
And sure it must be so—why should not I
Be she who yields? My people must decide.
I give them back the sovereignty they gave.
God is my witness that I have not lived
For my own sake, but for my people's welfare.
If they expect from this false, fawning Stuart,
The younger sovereign, more happy days,
I will descend with pleasure from the throne.
I am not made to rule.
Now, comes my first important regal duty,

And now I feel how weak a thing I am.

BURLEIGH.

Now by mine honor, when I hear my queen,
My royal liege, speak such unroyal words,
I should betray my office, should betray
My country, were I longer to be silent.
You say you love your people 'bove yourself,
Now prove it. Choose not peace for your own heart,
And leave your kingdom to the storms of discord.
Here is no time for mercy;—to promote
Your people's welfare is your highest duty.
If Shrewsbury has saved your life, then I
Will save both you and England—that is more.

ELIZABETH.

I would be left alone. No consolation,
No counsel can be drawn from human aid
In this conjecture. I will lay my doubts
Before the Judge of all:—I am resolved
To act as He shall teach. Withdraw, my lords.

[To DAVISON, who lays the paper on the table.

You, sir, remain in waiting—close at hand.

*[The lords withdraw, SHREWSBURY alone stands
for a few moments before the QUEEN, regards her
significantly, then withdraws slowly.*

ELIZABETH

Oh, when
Shall I once more be free upon my throne?
I must respect the people's voice, and strive
To win the favor of the multitude,
And please the fancies of a mob. 'Tis not
A king who needs must please the world: 'tis he
Alone, who in his actions does not heed
The fickle approbation of mankind.
Have I then practiced justice, all my life
Shunned each despotic deed; have I done this
Only to bind my hands against this first,
This necessary act of violence?
Surrounded by my foes, my people's love
Alone supports me on my envied throne.
All Europe's powers confederate to destroy me;
The pope's inveterate decree declares me
Accursed and excommunicated. France
Betrays me with a kiss, and Spain prepares
At sea a fierce exterminating war;
Thus stand I, in contention with the world.
Oh, no, this fear must end. Her head must fall.

I will have peace.
The hated name of every ill I feel
Is Mary Stuart—were but she no more
On earth I should be free as mountain air.

[Standing still.]

With what disdain did she look down on me.
I am a bastard, am I? Hapless wretch,
I am but so the while thou liv'st and breath'st.
Thy death will make my birth legitimate.
The moment I destroy thee is the doubt
Destroyed which hangs o'er my imperial right.
As soon as England has no other choice,
My mother's honor and my birthright triumphs.

*[She signs, then lets her pen then fall. After
a pause she calls and DAVISON enters]*

Davison.

DAVISON.

Here, so please your Majesty

ELIZABETH.

Now sir, this paper,
Receive it back. I place it in your hands.

DAVISON.

My gracious queen—thy name. 'Tis then decided.

ELIZABETH.

I had but to subscribe it—I have done so—
A paper sure cannot decide—a name
Kills not.

DAVISON.

Thy name, my queen, beneath this paper
Is most decisive—kills. This fatal scroll
Commands the sheriff and commissioners
To take departure straight for Fotheringay,
And to the Queen of Scots announce her death,
Which must at dawn be put in execution.
There is no respite, no discretion here.
As soon as I have parted with this writ
Her race is run.

ELIZABETH.

Yes, sir, the Lord has placed
This weighty business in your earthly hands.
Seek him in prayer to light you with his wisdom.
I go, and leave you, sir, to do your duty.

[Going.]

DAVISON.

No, leave me not, my queen, till I have heard
Your will. The only wisdom that I need

Is, word for word, to follow your commands.
Say, have you placed this warrant in my hands
To see that it be speedily enforced?

ELIZABETH.

That you must do as your own prudence dictates.

DAVISON

Not mine—oh, God forbid. No point must now
Be left to be decided by your servant.
A small mistake would here be regicide.
Permit me, in this weighty act, to be
Your passive instrument, without a will.
Tell me in plain, undoubted terms your pleasure,
What with the bloody mandate I should do.

ELIZABETH.

Its name declares its meaning.

DAVISON.

Do you, then,
My liege, command its instant execution?

ELIZABETH.

I said not that; I tremble but to think it.

DAVISON.

Shall I retain it, then, 'till further orders?

ELIZABETH.

At your own risk; you answer the event.

DAVISON.

I? gracious heavens - Oh, speak, my queen, your pleasure.

ELIZABETH.

My pleasure is that this unhappy business
Be no more mentioned to me; that at last
I may be freed from it, and that forever.

DAVISON.

It costs you but a word—determine then
What shall I do with this mysterious scroll?

ELIZABETH.

I have declared it, plague me, sir, no longer.

DAVISON.

You have declared it, say you? Oh, my queen,
You have said nothing. Please, my gracious mistress,
Be patient with me; nor deny your servant
A light to lead him clearly to his duty.

[He stands in despair;

then speaks with a tone of resolution.

Take, take again this paper—take it back.
Within my hands it is a glowing fire.
Select not me, my queen; select not me
To serve you in this terrible conjecture.

ELIZABETH.

Go, sir;—fulfil the duty of your office.

[Exit.

DAVISON.

What to do I know not;
Should I retain it, should I forward it?

[BURLEIGH enters.

Oh, I am glad that you are come, my lord,
'Tis you who have preferred me to this charge;
Now free me from it, for I undertook it,
Unknowing how responsible it made me.

BURLEIGH.

How now? Take courage, sir. Where is the warrant?
The queen was with you.

DAVISON.

She has quitted me
In bitter anger. Oh, advise me, help me,
My lord, here is the warrant: it is signed.

BURLEIGH.

Indeed? Oh, give it, give it me.

DAVISON.

I may not.

BURLEIGH.

What?

DAVISON.

She has not yet explained her final will.

BURLEIGH.

Explained? She has subscribed it;—give it to me.

DAVISON.

I am to execute it, and I am not.
Great heavens, I know not what I am to do.

BURLEIGH.

It must be now, this moment, executed.
The warrant, sir. You're lost if you delay.

DAVISON.

So am I also if I act too rashly.

BURLEIGH.

Give it me.

[Snatches the paper from him, and exit with it.

Exeunt

SCENE .

The Scene the same as in the First Act.

MELVIL is brought in by PAULET and left to wait.

After a moment, HANNAH KENNEDY in deep mourning, and she is stunned to see him there.

KENNEDY.

Melvil? Is it you? Behold I you again?

MELVIL.

Yes, faithful Kennedy, we meet once more.

KENNEDY.

You come—

MELVIL.

To take an everlasting leave
Of my dear queen—to bid a last farewell.

KENNEDY.

O, Melvil, Melvil, why was it our fate
To see the dawn of this unhappy day?

MELVIL.

Let us not melt each other with our grief.
Let's lead her with heroic resolution,
And be her staff upon the road to death.

KENNEDY.

Melvil, you are deceived if you suppose
The queen has need of our support to meet
Her death with firmness. She it is, my friend,
Who will exhibit the undaunted heart.
Oh, trust me, Mary Stuart will expire
As best becomes a heroine and queen.

MELVIL.

Received she firmly, then, the sad decree
Of death?—'tis said that she was not prepared.

KENNEDY.

She was not; yet they were far other terrors
Which made our lady shudder: 'twas not death,
But her deliverer, which made her tremble.
Freedom was promised us; this very night
Had Mortimer engaged to bear us hence:
And thus the queen, perplexed 'twixt hope and fear,
Sat waiting for the morning. On a sudden
We hear a boisterous tumult in the castle;
Our ears are startled by repeated blows
Of many hammers, and we think we hear
The approach of our deliverers: hope salutes us,
And suddenly and unresisted wakes
The sweet desire of life. And now at once
The portals are thrown open—it is Paulet,
Who comes to tell us—that—the carpenters
Erect beneath our feet the murderous scaffold.

MELVIL.

Where is she now? Can you not lead me to her?

KENNEDY.

She spent the last remainder of the night
In prayer, and from her dearest friends she took
Her last farewell in writing: then she wrote
Her will with her own hand. She now enjoys
A moment of repose, the latest slumber
Refreshes her weak spirits.

Enter MARGARET CURL.

KENNEDY.

How, madam, fares the queen? Is she awake?

CURL.

She is already dressed—she asks for you.

KENNEDY exits.

Melvil, sure,

The ancient steward?

MELVIL.

Yes, the same.

CURL.

Oh, sir,

This is a house which needs no steward now.

Melvil, you come from London; can you give

No tidings of my husband?

MELVIL.

It is said

He will be set at liberty as soon—

CURL.

As soon as our dear queen shall be no more.

Oh, the unworthy, the disgraceful traitor.

He is our lady's murderer—'tis said

It was his testimony which condemned her.

MELVIL.

'Tis true.

CURL.

Oh, curse upon him. Be his soul

Condemned forever. He has borne false witness.

MELVIL.

Think, madam, what you say.

CURL.

I will maintain it

With every sacred oath before the court,

I will repeat it in his very face;

The world shall hear of nothing else. I say

That she dies innocent.

MELVIL.

God grant it true.

Enter HANNAH KENNEDY.

KENNEDY (to CURL).

Go, madam, and require a cup of wine—
'Tis for our lady.

MELVIL.

Is the queen then sick?

KENNEDY.

She thinks that she is strong; she is deceived
By her heroic courage; she believes
She has no need of nourishment; yet still
A hard and painful task's allotted her.

MELVIL.

May I approach her?

KENNEDY.

She will come herself.

*Re-Enter MARGARET CURL, bearing a golden cup of wine;
she hastily hands it MELVIL, and leans,
pale and trembling to HANNAH.*

MELVIL.

How, madam, what has frightened you?

CURL.

What, alas, have I beheld?

MELVIL.

Come to yourself, and say what you have seen.

CURL.

As I went down the staircase which conducts
To the great hall below, a door stood open;
I looked into the chamber, and I saw—
Oh heaven.

MELVIL.

What saw you?

CURL.

All the walls were hung
With black; a spacious scaffold, too, o'erspread
With sable cloth, was raised above the floor,
And in the middle of the scaffold stood
A dreadful sable block. Upon it lay
A naked, polished axe:—the hall was full
Of cruel people, crowding round the scaffold
Who, with a horrid thirst for human blood,
Seemed waiting for the victim.

HANNAH.

Be calm; the queen approaches.

Enter MARY in white.

MARY.

How? Melvil here? My worthy sir, not so;
Arise; you rather come in time to see
The triumph of your mistress than her death.

Why these sad looks? Why weep ye? Ye should rather
Rejoice with me, for all my suffering
Has come unto its end. My cell is air,
My prison paper, and my fettered soul
Arises with fair swallow's wings, and seeks
The land of everlasting liberty.
One comfort, which I never had expected,
Is granted me, that after death my name
Will not be quite abandoned to my foes;
One friend at least, one partner of my faith,
Will be my witness in the hour of death.
Sir, to your loyal bosom I commit
My latest wishes. Bear then, sir, my blessing
To the most Christian king, my royal brother,
And the whole royal family of France.

[Turning to her servants.

What I, though poor and plundered, still possess,
Of which I am allowed to make disposal,
Shall be amongst you shared; for I have hope
In this at least my will may be fulfilled.
You, Margaret, possess the nearest claims,
To you I should be generous: for I leave you
The most unhappy woman of them all.
That I have not avenged your husband's fault
On you I hope my legacy will prove.
The worth of gold, my Hannah, charms not thee;
My memory, I know, will be to thee
The dearest jewel; take this handkerchief,
I worked it for thee, in the hours of sorrow,
With my own hands, and my hot, scalding tears
Are woven in the texture:—you will bind
My eyes with this, when it is time: this last
Sad service I would wish but from my Hannah.

KENNEDY.

O Melvil, I cannot support it.

MARY.

Come,

Come all and now receive my last farewell.

[She stretches forth her hands.

Farewell, farewell, my friends, farewell for ever.

*[She turns suddenly from them; all but MELVIL
retire at different sides.*

MARY (after the others are all gone).

Melvil, one thought alone there is which binds
My troubled soul, nor suffers it to fly
Delighted and at liberty to heaven.

MELVIL.

Disclose it to me.

MARY.

I see eternity's abyss before me;
Soon must I stand before the highest Judge,
And have not yet appeased the Holy One.
A priest of my religion is denied me,
And I disdain to take the sacrament,
The holy, heavenly nourishment, from priests
Of a false faith. I die in the belief
Of my own church, for that alone can save.

MELVIL.

Compose your heart. The fervent, pious wish
Is prized in heaven as high as the performance.
The might of tyrants can but bind the hands,
The heart's devotion rises free to God,
The word is dead—'tis faith which brings to life.

MARY.

The heart is not sufficient of itself.
The heavenly benediction pierces not
My prison walls: its comfort is denied me.

MELVIL.

Yes, it can pierce them—put thy trust in Him
Who is almighty—in the hand of faith,
The withered staff can send forth verdant branches
And he who from the rock called living water,
He can prepare an altar in this prison,
Can change the earthly contents of this cup
Into a substance of celestial grace.

MARY.

Melvil. Oh, yes, I understand you, Melvil.
Here is no priest, no church, no sacrament;
But the Redeemer says, "When two or three
Are in my name assembled, I am with them,"
Well, then, though unordained, be you my priest;
To you will I confide my last confession,
And take my absolution from your lips.

MELVIL.

I tell thee that for thine especial comfort,
The Lord may work a miracle. Thou say'st
Here is no priest, no church, no sacrament—
Thou err'st—here is a priest.

*[At these words he uncovers his head,
and shows a host in a golden vessel.]*

I am a priest. I have received
Upon my head the seven consecrations.

I bring thee, from his Holiness, this host,
Which, for thy use, himself has deigned to bless.

MARY.

Is then a heavenly happiness prepared
To cheer me on the very verge of death?
As before me your knees were wont to bend,
Before you humbled, now I kiss the dust.

[She sinks before him on her knees.

MELVIL (making over her the sign of the cross).

Hear, Mary, Queen of Scotland:—in the name
Of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Hast thou examined carefully thy heart,
Swearest thou, art thou prepared in thy confession
To speak the truth before the God of truth?

MARY.

Before my God and thee, my heart lies open.

MELVIL.

Declare the sin which weighs so heavily
Upon thy conscience since thy last confession.

MARY.

My heart was filled with thoughts of envious hate,
And vengeance took possession of my bosom.
I hope forgiveness of my sins from God,
Yet could I not forgive my enemy.

MELVIL.

Repentest thou of the sin? Art thou, in sooth,
Resolved to leave this world at peace with all?

MARY.

As surely as I wish the joys of heaven.

MELVIL.

What other sin hath armed thy heart against thee?

MARY.

Ah, not alone through hate; through lawless love
Have I still more abused the sovereign good.
My heart was vainly turned towards the man
Who left me in misfortune, who deceived me.

MELVIL.

Repentest thou of the sin? And hast thou turned
Thy heart, from this idolatry, to God?

MARY.

It was the hardest trial I have passed.
This last of earthly bonds is torn asunder.

MELVIL.

Has then thy heart no other accusation,
Which hath not been confessed and washed away?

MARY.

All you have heard with which my heart is charged.

MELVIL.

Think on the presence of Omniscience.

Think on the punishments with which the church

Threatens imperfect and reserved confessions

This is the sin to everlasting death,

For this is sinning 'gainst his Holy Spirit.

MARY.

So may eternal grace with victory

Crown my last contest, as I wittingly

Have nothing hid.

MELVIL.

How? Wilt thou then conceal

The crime from God for which thou art condemned?

Thou tell'st me nothing of the share thou hadst

In Babington and Parry's bloody treason:

Thou diest for this a temporal death; for this

Wilt thou, too, die the everlasting death?

MARY.

I am prepared to meet eternity;

Within the narrow limits of an hour

I shall appear before my Judge's throne.

But, I repeat it, my confession's ended.

'Tis true that I have called upon all princes

To free me from unworthy chains; yet 'tis

As true that, neither by intent or deed,

Have I attempted my oppressor's life.

MELVIL.

Your secretaries then have witnessed falsely.

MARY.

It is as I have said. What they have witnessed

The Lord will judge.

MELVIL (making over her the sign of the cross).

Go, then, and expiate them all by death;

Now, then, by the authority which God

Hath unto me committed, I absolve thee

From all thy sins.

[He gives her the host.

Receive the body which for thee was offered—

*[He takes the cup which stands upon the table,
consecrates it with silent prayer, then presents
it to her*

Receive the blood which for thy sins was shed.

*[She takes the cup. Hearing a noise,
he covers his head, and goes to the door;*

MARY remains in silent devotion on her knees.

MELVIL (returning).

A painful conflict is in store for thee.
Feel'st thou within thee strength enough to smother
Each impulse of malignity and hate?

MARY.

I fear not a relapse. I have to God
Devoted both my hatred and my love.

MELVIL.

Well, then, prepare thee to receive my Lords
Of Leicester and of Burleigh. They are here.

Enter BURLEIGH, LEICESTER, and PAULET.

*[LEICESTER remains in the background, without raising
his eyes; BURLEIGH, who remarks his confusion, steps
between him and the QUEEN.*

BURLEIGH.

I come, my Lady Stuart, to receive
Your last commands and wishes.

MARY.

Thanks, my lord.

BURLEIGH.

It is the pleasure of my royal mistress
That nothing reasonable be denied you.

MARY.

My will, my lord, declares my last desires;
I've placed it in the hand of Sir Amias,
And humbly beg that it may be fulfilled.

PAULET.

You may rely on this.

MARY.

I beg that all

My servants unmolested may return
To France, or Scotland, as their wishes lead.

BURLEIGH.

It shall be as you wish.

MARY.

And since my body

Is not to rest in consecrated ground,
I pray you suffer this my faithful servant
To bear my heart to France, to my relations—
Alas, 'twas ever there.

BURLEIGH.

It shall be done.

What wishes else?

MARY.

Unto her majesty
Of England bear a sister's salutation.

Tell her that from the bottom of my heart
I pardon her my death; most humbly, too,
I crave her to forgive me for the passion
With which I spoke to her. May God preserve her
And bless her with a long and prosperous reign.

BURLEIGH.

Say, do you still adhere to your resolve,
And still refuse assistance from the dean?

MARY.

My lord, I've made my peace with God.

[To PAULET.

Good sir,

I have unwittingly caused you much sorrow,
Bereft you of your age's only stay.

Oh, let me hope you do not hate my name.

PAULET (giving her his hand).

The Lord be with you. Go your way in peace.

HANNAH KENNEDY and MARGARET CURL come forward.

MARY.

What ails thee, Hannah? Yes, my hour is come.

These men are come to lead me to my fate,

And part we must. Farewell.

CURL.

We will not leave thee,

KENNEDY

We will not part from thee.

MARY (to MELVIL).

You, worthy sir,

And my dear, faithful Hannah, shall attend me

In my last moments. I am sure, my lord

Will not refuse my heart this consolation.

BURLEIGH.

For this I have no warrant.

MARY.

How, my lord;

Can you deny me, then, this small petition?

Respect my sex; who shall attend me else,

And yield me the last service? Sure, it never

Can be my sister's pleasure that in me

My sex should be insulted; that these men

With their rude hands should touch my royal person.

BURLEIGH.

'Tis ordered that no woman shall ascend

The scaffold steps with you. Their tears and moans—

MARY.

She shall not weep, my lord; she shall not moan;

I answer for my Hannah's resolution.
Be merciful; divide me not so soon
From my most faithful one, from my friend.
She bore me in her arms quite through this life;
Let her then gently lead me to my death.

PAULET (to BURLEIGH).

Allow it.

BURLEIGH.

Be it so.

MARY.

I now

Have nothing in this world to wish for more.

[She takes the crucifix, and kisses it.

My God, my Comforter, my blest Redeemer,
As once thy arms were stretched upon the cross,
Let them be now extended to receive me.

[She turns round to go; at the same moment her eyes fall upon LEICESTER, who, on her going, starts involuntarily, and turns his eyes towards her; at this sight MARY trembles, her knees fail her, she is about to fall, when LEICESTER catches at her, and receives her in his arms; she regards him for some time earnestly, and in silence; he cannot support her looks; at length she speaks.

You keep your word, my Lord of Leicester: for
You promised me your arm to lead me forth
From prison, and you lend it to me now.
At length the wished-for day is come, and what
Was oft the object of my fondest dreams
Is now accomplished: and the Earl of Leicester,
The long-expected, the long-wished-for friend,
Appears at length in Fotheringay Castle.
I see him standing in my prison, all
Is ready for the journey, all the gates
Stand open, and at length I cross the threshold,
Conducted by his hand; and now I leave
These dismal walls behind me, and forever.
All is fulfilled, and you have saved your honor.
Yes, Leicester; not for liberty alone
I wished to be indebted to your hands.
Led by your hand, and happy in your love,
I hoped once more to taste the joys of life.
Now, Leicester, I may venture to confess
Without a blush the frailty I have conquered.
Farewell, my lord, and, if you can, be happy.
To woo two queens has been your daring aim;

You have disdained a tender, loving heart,
Betrayed it in the hope to win a proud one.
May your reward not prove your punishment.
Farewell; I now have nothing more on earth.

*[She goes, at her side MELVIL, CURL and KENNEDY;
BURLEIGH and PAULET follow;*

LEICESTER (remaining alone).

Do I live still? Can I still bear to live?
She's gone, a spirit purged from earthly stain,
And the despair of hell remains for me,
To see her head descend upon the block
With unaverted and indifferent eyes?
Now pity must I smother and convert
Mine eyes to stones, for I must now attend.
I will see—I will be witness of her fall.

*[He advances with resolute steps towards the door
through which MARY passed; but stops suddenly half way.*

No. No.

I cannot look upon the dreadful deed;
I cannot see her die – Hark. What was that?
They are already there. Beneath my feet
The bloody business is preparing. Hark -
She prays aloud.

Her voice is strong—now all is still, quite still.
Now, they undress her; they remove the stool;
She kneels upon the cushion; lays her head—

*[Having spoken these last words, and paused awhile,
he is seen with a convulsive motion suddenly to shrink
and faint away.*

SCENE.

The Second Chamber in the Fourth Act.

ELIZABETH

Will evening never come? I can no more
Remain upon the rack of expectation.
Is it accomplished? Is it not? I shudder
At both events, and do not dare to ask.
My Lord of Leicester comes not,—Burleigh too,
Whom I appointed to fulfil the sentence.
If they have quitted London then 'tis done.
Who's there?

Enter a DAVISON.

ELIZABETH.

Where are the lords?

DAVISON.

My Lord High-Treasurer and the Earl of Leicester?

ELIZABETH.

Where are they?

DAVISON.

They are not in London.

ELIZABETH.

No?

DAVISON.

No, Majesty. Before the dawn, in haste

They quitted London.

ELIZABETH.

Leave me.

Exit DAVISON

I am Queen of England!

[Walking up and down in the greatest agitation.

She is dead;

Now have I room upon the earth at last.

Why do I shake? Whence comes this aguish dread?

My fears are covered by the grave; who dares

To say I did it? I have tears enough

In store to weep her fall.

[SHREWSBURY enters

SHREWSBURY.

Majesty.

ELIZABETH.

Welcome, my noble lord. What tidings; say

It cannot be a trifle which hath led

Your footsteps hither at so late an hour.

SHREWSBURY.

My liege, the doubts that hung upon my heart,

And dutiful concern for your fair fame,

Directed me this morning to the Tower,

Where Mary's secretary, Master Curl,

Is now confined as prisoner, for I wished

Once more to put his evidence to proof.

The miserable Curl no sooner saw me

Than at my feet he fell, and there, he straight

Implored, conjured me to acquaint him with

His sovereign's destiny, for vague reports

Had somehow reached the dungeons of the Tower

That she had been condemned to suffer death.

When I confirmed these tidings, adding, too,

That on his evidence she had been doomed,—

He started wildly up and cursed himself

And his companions to the depths of hell.

His evidence was false. The fatal letters

To Babington, which he had sworn were true,

He now denounced as forgeries; for he
Had set down words the queen had never spoken.
The traitor has accused his mistress falsely.

ELIZABETH.

You said yourself that he had lost his wits;
A madman's words prove nothing.

SHREWSBURY.

Yet this madness
Serves in itself to swell the proof. My liege,
Let me conjure thee; be not over-hasty;
Prithee, give order for a new inquiry.

ELIZABETH.

I will, my lord, because it is your wish,
Not that I can believe my noble peers
Have in this case pronounced a hasty judgment.
To set your mind at rest the inquiry shall
Be straight renewed. Well that 'tis not too late.
Upon the honor of our royal name,
No, not the shadow of a doubt shall rest.

Enter DAVISON.

ELIZABETH.

The sentence, sir, which I but late intrusted
Unto your keeping; where is it?

DAVISON

The sentence?

ELIZABETH.

Which yesterday I gave into your charge.

DAVISON.

Into my charge, my liege -

ELIZABETH.

The people urged
And baited me to sign it. I perforce
Was driven to yield obedience to their will.
I did so; did so on extreme constraint,
And in your hands deposited the paper.
To gain time was my purpose; you remember
What then I told you. Now, the paper, sir.

SHREWSBURY.

Restore it, sir, affairs have changed since then,
The inquiry must be set on foot anew.

DAVISON.

Anew? Eternal mercy.

ELIZABETH.

Why this pause,
This hesitation? Where, sir, is the paper?

DAVISON.

Oh, I am lost.
I have it not.

ELIZABETH.

How? What?

SHREWSBURY.

Oh, God in heaven.

DAVISON.

It is in Burleigh's hands—since yesterday.

ELIZABETH.

Wretch, is it thus you have obeyed my orders?

Did I not lay my strict injunction on you

To keep it carefully?

DAVISON.

No such injunction

Was laid on me, my liege.

ELIZABETH.

When did I order you

To give the paper into Burleigh's hands?

DAVISON.

Never expressly in so many words.

ELIZABETH.

If evil come of this officious deed,

Your life shall answer the event to me.

Earl Shrewsbury, you see how my good name

Has been abused.

SHREWSBURY.

I see, Oh, God in heaven.

Enter BURLEIGH.

BURLEIGH (bowing his knee before the QUEEN).

Long life and glory to my royal mistress,

And may all enemies of her dominions

End like this Stuart.

[SHREWSBURY hides his face. DAVIDSON wrings his hands in despair.]

ELIZABETH.

Speak, my lord; did you

From me receive the warrant?

BURLEIGH.

No, my queen,

From Davison.

ELIZABETH.

And did he in my name

Deliver it?

BURLEIGH.

No, that I cannot say.

ELIZABETH.

And dared you then to execute the writ

Thus hastily, nor wait to know my pleasure?
Just was the sentence—we are free from blame
Before the world; yet it behooved thee not
To intercept our natural clemency.
For this, my lord, I banish you my presence;
And as this forward will was yours alone
Bear you alone the curse of the misdeed.

[To DAVISON.]

For you, sir; who have traitorously o'erstepped
The bounds of your commission, and betrayed
A sacred pledge entrusted to your care,
Let him be straight conducted to the Tower,
And capital arraignments filed against him.
My honest Talbot, you alone have proved,
'Mongst all my counsellors, an upright man:
You shall henceforward be my guide—my friend.

SHREWSBURY.

Oh, banish not the truest of your friends;
Nor cast those into prison, who for you
Have acted; who for you are silent now.
But suffer me, great queen, to give the seal,
Which, these twelve years, I've borne unworthily,
Back to your royal hands, and take my leave.

ELIZABETH.

No, Shrewsbury; you surely would not now
Desert me? No; not now.

SHREWSBURY.

Pardon, I am

Too old, and this right hand I think unfit
To set the seal upon your later deeds.

ELIZABETH.

Will he forsake me, who has saved my life?

SHREWSBURY.

'Tis little I have done: I could not save
Your nobler part. Live—govern happily.
Your rival's dead. Henceforth you've nothing more
To fear—henceforth to nothing pay regard.

[He makes to leave]

ELIZABETH.

Where is my Earl of Leicester?

BURLEIGH.

He desires

To be excused—he is embarked for France.

The Curtain drops.