

MARY STUART

By
Gaetano Donizetti

English Version by
Donald Pippin
(1985, 1996)

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Queen Elizabeth I

Lord Talbot

Lord Cecil

Earl of Leicester

Hannah

Mary Stuart

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court

Mary Stuart

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Act I

The scene is Whitehall, palace of Queen Elizabeth, a day in which two important decisions are pending. The first concerns a marriage proposal from the King of France which could resolve a long-standing national obsession. The second pertains to the fate of Mary Stuart, presently a political prisoner.

The two issues are more closely related than might appear. The outcome of each depends very much upon the behavior of Robert, Earl of Leicester. On the issue of marriage, it would be difficult to keep our present audience in suspense. Yet this is precisely what Elizabeth is trying to do to Robert, hoping thereby to enkindle a spark of passion that heretofore has been so painfully lacking.

In truth, she is loath to accept the offer of the King of France, despite the obvious advantages of uniting the two great neighboring powers, as long as she can cling to the hope of greater personal fulfillment in the arms of Robert.

She is reluctant as well to pursue the issue of Mary Stuart to the drastic conclusion that Lord Cecil, her chief adviser, urges upon her, despite the very real political threat that Mary poses. Catholic authority has not recognized or accepted the divorce of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, nor consequently the

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validity of his marriage to her mother Anne Boleyn, nor consequently her own legitimacy and her claim to the throne. Mary Stuart, a devout Catholic, has powerful supporters that consider hers to be the stronger claim, indeed the only valid claim, a belief fervently held by Mary herself.

But again the issue is personal as well as political. And again, Robert, Earl of Leicester, plays a pivotal role. Elizabeth suspects that Mary Stuart, of whose charm and beauty she has long nourished a secret, begrudging envy, is her rival not only for the crown, but for the man that she loves. The uncertainty is agonizing, an aching tooth which must be extracted however painful the process. Before acting, she has to know beyond a doubt: is Robert merely cold and heartless, or is his heart irrevocably given to Mary Stuart?

Robert, on dangerous ground, eager for her to believe that he is stirred by sympathy for Mary's plight, not by love, pleads with Elizabeth to meet with Mary for a possible reconciliation. Overjoyed by her eventual consent, he is naively unaware that every word that he so eloquently utters on Mary's behalf is making her harsh fate an increased certainty.

Scene: Westminster palace

CHORUS Here we'll see her!
 Our royal lady returns from Council.
 Pride and glory of all the nation,
 Guiding light and inspiration,
 She is loved throughout the land,
 Adored by all throughout the land.
 What a day of celebration
 When she gives her virgin hand.

(from within) The Queen of England!

ELIZABETH So — the King of France comes seeking
 Both my heart and my kingdom,
 Yet I remain reluctant
 To accept this royal bargain.
 True — a marriage,
 Uniting rival powers
 Has much to offer
 For the good of my people.
 On a throne even greater
 I would shine like a beacon,
 Over France as well as England,
 Neighbors brought together.

(to herself)
 How fair is the hand he offers me,
 Lofty the regal destiny;
 Were pride or prudence my sole concern,
 Right well I would know the way to turn.

Yet still do I waver and seek delay;
Too dear the price my heart would pay.
Within my breast there burns a flame,
A need unsatisfied by fame,
A star now yielding unto dawn,
For sweet is the hope that draws me on.
I wait for one alone,
Far more dear than crown or throne.

TALBOT *(enters)*
On such a day when all rejoice,
Should Mary Stuart cast a shadow?
Grant her clemency, extend your hand;
Let not her grief disturb the land.

CHORUS Pardon, pardon Mary Stuart!

ELIZABETH *(interrupting)*
Hold off! Her silent features invade my sleep;
I wake and find no freedom.
Am I to wring my hands and weep
Because she craves my kingdom?
She well deserves her fate.

CECIL The axe on the head
Of the traitor and whore!
The queen who though captive
Men blindly adore!
A threat to the nation,
And justly confined.

ELIZABETH No more, sir! I ponder, yet know not my mind.

She was born of summer, to flower
In the sunlight of beauty and laughter.
I, a slave to pride and power,
With the rival queen may now be reconciled.

Should I find her hand extended
To the man whose heart I would claim,
If through her charm I've lost a lover,
She shall rue the pangs I suffer.
Hope of pardon, hope of peace and pardon ended,
I'll reduce them both to shame.

CHORUS Our Queen is wise as she is gracious,
Filled with the milk of mercy mild.

CECIL Oh, beware, Elizabeth!
A tender heart is soon beguiled.

LEICESTER Queen! Yet a plaything of cruel fortune!
She sent a message? Oh, tell me!

TALBOT I must first know for certain:
Are you a man I can trust?

LEICESTER Loyal to Mary!

TALBOT Here's a portrait, and a letter
Handed me by Mary Stuart,
Queen of blighted glory, of beauty
Rivaled only by her pride.

LEICESTER My delight!

TALBOT With mingled smiles and tears,
Your name she gently sighed.

LEICESTER Wondrous portrait!

 Fair and lovely as I remember!
 Eyes of velvet, eyes enraptured,
 Glow in beauty here recaptured.
 Warm and vibrant
 Is the fervor you inspire!

 Born of tragedy,
 Her smile rejoices.
 Deep inside of me,
 Radiant voices
 Raise a hope, however slender,
 Call to life the smoldering fire.
 Raise a hope, however slender,
 Call back to life the smoldering fire.

TALBOT Time is short, her days are numbered;
Gone the royal masquerade.
Shorn of pomp, no more encumbered,
Now to you she turns for aid.

LEICESTER Fair as ever, confined, tormented!
Though I die, to save your life I go contented.

TALBOT Have you decided?

LEICESTER I shall save her,
Though prepared with her to die.

TALBOT Other plans have met with failure;
Hopes before have gone awry.

LEICESTER Armed with love to face the challenge,
Death and danger I defy.
Both death and danger I defy.
I go to save her!

Love spurs me onward!
My heart aglow,
Herald of freedom,
To her I go.
Yet if my time is come,
So it shall be:

We die together,
If that is what the gods decree,
Proudly together,
If such a fate the gods decree.

TALBOT By love spurred onward,
I fear you go
To bring not freedom,
But greater woe.
Though life and liberty
You hope to give her,
Death would deliver
The final blow.

(Talbot exits)

ELIZABETH *(enters)*
Do I disturb you?

LEICESTER Oh, no! (Be careful!)

ELIZABETH Talbot ... you spoke with him in secret ...

LEICESTER We spoke. (What simmers?)

ELIZABETH (Not even him I trust.
My rival corrupts them all.)
So, just conversing ...
Did he convey a message,
Perchance from Mary Stuart?

LEICESTER Can you doubt such a trooper?
Your tried and trusty Talbot?
His mind you know.

ELIZABETH *(ironically)*
Yours I know also.
Out with the truth! I demand it!

LEICESTER Of no importance.

ELIZABETH So you refuse me? A pity ...

(she starts to leave)

LEICESTER No, do not leave! Be patient.
 Yes, he brought me ... A letter ...

ELIZABETH That I must have!

LEICESTER (The storm approaches.)
 Take it then.
 To plead for mercy I kneel before you.
 Through me, she begs a meeting,
 But a brief interview ...

ELIZABETH No need to grovel ...
 For a friend, you go far.
 (Thus does the charmer
 Connive to gain my heart,
 Surprise and scale the fortress.)

(reads)
 She has suffered.

LEICESTER (She starts to weaken.)

ELIZABETH Forced to beg from me a visit.

LEICESTER Only that.

ELIZABETH Where now the splendor?
 Where the fruit of vast ambition?

LEICESTER Like a comet in the dark,
 A train of light, then gone for good ...

ELIZABETH Crushed beneath the wheel of fortune,
 Pride and glory, youth and promise
 Grow pale and die.

LEICESTER Show her mercy.
 To you I plead with all my heart ...

ELIZABETH Heart she has captured ... Has she not?

LEICESTER (A Queen so jealous!)

ELIZABETH So I am told ...
 At court, there is rumor ...

LEICESTER Merely gossip!

ELIZABETH (He deceives me!)

LEICESTER Idle gossip!

ELIZABETH (Oh, the liar!)

LEICESTER Only pity stirs my heart.

ELIZABETH (Truth will out! Yes, yes, he loves her!
And I, disdained! Despised! Ignored!)
She ... is lovely? ... Youthful? ...

LEICESTER Yes!

ELIZABETH Yes? Yes? Yes?

LEICESTER Yes! Fair as the pearl beyond a price,
Drawn from the wind-blown water;
Beauty conceived in paradise,
Venus would claim her daughter.

 Lovely in grief her teardrops are,
And lovely her smile of cheer;
Radiant light! The northern star
Fell from its celestial sphere!

ELIZABETH A Queen of fable! My compliments —
I'd not suggest you flatter.
Superb in beauty — intelligence
I would presume another matter.

 I see ... Her charms intoxicate,
In prison walls dank and drear.

LEICESTER Your highness ... Pity!Pity!

ELIZABETH (Oh, faithless man! Blinded advocate!
Your praise may cost her dear!
Oh, fickle man! Foolish advocate!
Your lavish praise may cost her dear!)

LEICESTER See her.

ELIZABETH (The monster pleads for her.)

LEICESTER To please me, to please me,
Oh grant her sole request.

ELIZABETH How then? Where?

LEICESTER No time to lose!
Through the forest round her prison
You can lead a hunting party.
In the woods, she walks attended ...

ELIZABETH Earl! You beg me?

LEICESTER I pray you!

ELIZABETH You plead well (though unwisely)
So I surrender.

 (The crown from my forehead
Her plan is to plunder.
The hearts of my people
She wrenches asunder.
My court she may covet —
This I could pass over,
But now my beloved
She snatches away.
Her final maneuver
I mean to repay.)

LEICESTER Too great her ambition —
While reaching, she faltered.
Now humble, repentant,
In grief has she altered.

 Be gracious, forgive her
Unseasoned behavior.
From death, oh deliver
The weak, wounded prey.

ELIZABETH Leave me.

LEICESTER Inspired by our savior,
His love you relay.

ACT II

The scene changes to the grounds outside the prison at Fotheringay, where Mary Stuart is allowed a daily walk, attended by her faithful Hannah, with the inevitable guards in the background. Although known to posterity as Mary of Scotland, Mary of France would be a more fitting title. Her mother was French; it was in France that she spent her youth, and it was there, at the age of sixteen, that she became Queen of France. These are the days that she recalls with such nostalgia, in the loneliness of her present confinement -- a prison to which one person alone holds the key.

Scene: A park at Fotheringay

HANNAH Oh, not so brisk, Your Highness!

MARY Release! An hour

Out of doors in the open!
Escape from darkness!
Around us,
The sky alone confines and encloses;
My world's expanding. I breathe!
Oh, friendly trees that hide my prison.

HANNAH Of granite and mortar,
Those heavy walls are still intact.

MARY See, the meadow sparkles,
New spread with daffodils and daisies,
Happy family of flowers!
They nod, see,
And smile to greet me.

The breeze that softly murmurs,
Warm from skies of my own France,
Bids me laugh and rejoice,
As in that budding,
That spring awakening of my youth,
So carefree.

Oh, cloud, floating gently
Past meadow and grove,
Bear onward my yearning,
Bear onward my love
To that far off land
Where I lived long ago,
The scene of my childhood,
The people I know,
The home so familiar
I left long ago.

Be kind and come closer;
Your wings I would borrow
To bear me toward France
Far away from my sorrow.

MARY But gone is the cloud,
Born on currents that blow
Toward that far off land
Where I lived long ago,
The land of my childhood,
The people I know,
The home so familiar
I left long ago.

(fanfare) Horns! Hunters!

CHORUS *(offstage)*
The horn calls the hunter,
The hounds and the horses;

Up, over and under,
We cover the courses.

The deer we have sighted,
Confounded, affrighted.
The huntsman rejoices:
The deer is to die!

MARY Bold voices!

HANNAH Not far the hunters,
The Queen's royal party.

MARY Ever closer the hounds and the hunters,
Toward the quarry ...

CHORUS Hail the Queen! Hail the Queen!

MARY Ah! My judge and my jailer!

HANNAH Now the tyrant would gun down the prey.

MARY She arrives in the role of the hunter,
With her power and pride to assail me;
Unprepared now, oh I fear to confront her;
My heart and my courage both fail me.

On a throne high above those that suffer,
Turn your eyes from the Queen you've mistreated.
Now undone, so degraded, defeated,
I can find neither friend nor ally.

HANNAH I spot danger. Avoid her, avoid her!

MARY Away, then! Her disdain I would not dignify.

HANNAH Her disdain you shall not dignify. No!

(Leicester enters)

MARY Ah! Let my joy not deceive me!
My Robert! You've come! You've come!

LEICESTER As ever, I adore you,
And bring hope for your freedom.

MARY Free from a constant fear,
Free from my prison!
Free to live,
And yours forever!
I can't believe it!
Say again, is it true?

LEICESTER Here Queen Elizabeth heads for a visit.
The hunt is but a pretext,
A display of decorum.
Kneel, kiss her hand, be humble,
Submissive ...

MARY Become a beggar!

LEICESTER One time, one only ...

MARY For her! To kneel down! To grovel!
You ask too much;
My wrongs I feel too keenly.

LEICESTER If you love me, you can do it.

MARY Oh, must I?

LEICESTER It's our one hope.

MARY Friends having long departed,
From day to day I live in fear;
Lonely and heavy-hearted,
Waiting the end that hovers near,
Barred from the world, I suffer;
Daily I sigh in vain.
Only the love you offer
Relieves and calms my pain.

LEICESTER Trust in a change for better.
The Queen, so jealous of her throne,
Wept when she read your letter
And felt your sorrow as her own.

MARY Can I hope? Felt my sorrow ...

LEICESTER Winter will soon be over;
Lilac will bloom again.
Hold to your faith in a lover
That she may turn humane.

MARY (*with sarcasm*) Of her mercy I have seen enough already.

LEICESTER She is human, and at times can feel compassion.

MARY Not for one she deems her rival.

LEICESTER Then I'm prepared to stir up trouble.
If her ear is deaf to pleading,
That's the course I have to take.

MARY Then we'd only die together.
Spare your own life for my sake.

 Until now I have had cause to tremble,
Here confined and condemned as a traitor,
Force me not to a fear even greater!
Oh, risk not your own life for me.

 Never mind my claim to title;
Your love is all I've wanted.
I can go to my death undaunted,
Knowing you're alive and free.

LEICESTER By my hand, my pride, my honor,
By our love, till now ill-fated,
You shall go from here vindicated;
Joy and freedom again you shall see.

 Then my hand to you I'll offer,
Not the hand that rules a nation,
But of one whose adoration
Was the force that set you free.

(Mary exits)

In response to Robert's pleading, under the pretext of a hunting party, Elizabeth does indeed come for a visit. The anticipated reconciliation does not go as hoped. After a bad start, things rapidly deteriorate. Elizabeth, offended by Mary's apparent haughtiness, launches a scathing verbal attack. Mary has more than ample weaponry with which to retaliate.

ELIZABETH *(enters)* Where have you brought me?

LEICESTER Fotheringay!

ELIZABETH Her prison! Proud Mary Stuart!

LEICESTER Face to face. A moment,
And your wise and trusted Earl of Talbot
Will bring her to you.

ELIZABETH I assume you know the sacrifice I'm making
To please you.
Dismiss the hunting party;
They can go on without me.
I long for leisure in this secluded spot.

CECIL *(enters)* Like a Goddess, how your subjects adore you!
Need I remind you
Whose fair head they are demanding?

ELIZABETH *(to Cecil)*
Careful!

LEICESTER
Ah! Do remember
You come to comfort.
Give her your hand; acknowledge
A wretched sister.
With all my heart, I beg you.
Long she has had to suffer;
You alone can restore her fallen glory.

ELIZABETH *(Odious woman! None but her is he aware of.)*

(Mary and Talbot enter)

TALBOT *(to Mary)* Courage!

MARY *(to Talbot)* No! No farther!
Lead me back to my lone exile.

ALL The prisoner!

MARY *(to Hannah)* A torment!

ELIZABETH
As haughty as ever!
Of guilt not a token;
The pride still unbroken
Will drive me insane;
The vixen is clever
And eager to reign.

Of guilt not a token,
The pride, silent yet though unbroken;
Too eager to reign.

MARY
A frown of disfavor!
The tack she has taken
Cannot be mistaken:
Her hatred is plain.
My plight becomes graver;
The demons remain.

TALBOT *(referring to Elizabeth)*
The wrath she would cover
Is there even stronger;
I fear she'll no longer
Control her disdain.
The passions that move her
She cannot contain.

LEICESTER *(referring to Mary)*
Her step does not waver!

Despair for a lover
To see her so suffer
This torrent of pain!
If I could but save her,
Restore her domain!

HANNAH Her face shows a fever!
 Though silent, unspoken,
 Her spirit is broken;
 The burdens remain.
 Could I but relieve her!
 I try, oh I try, but in vain.

CECIL (*referring to Mary*)
 The witch would take over!
 Entirely too eager,
 A tireless intriguer
 That time does not tame.
 Her head I would cover
 With ashes of shame.

LEICESTER (*to Elizabeth*)
 Go, embrace her.

ELIZABETH (*to Leicester*)
 I'd rather be hunting.

TALBOT (*to Mary*) Come, have courage!

MARY (*to Talbot*) The abyss lies before me.

ELIZABETH (*to Leicester*)
 Still unbending.

LEICESTER (*to Elizabeth*)
 Made wiser by sorrow,
 Now repentant,
 She begs you forgive.

MARY (*coming forward*)
 Dead to ambition, past dreams of glory,
 Power and majesty, here I kneel,
 Bow my head and plead for pardon.
 Sins of youth I've long repented.
 Oh, extend the hand of mercy!
 Ah, my sister! The battle between us is over ...
 May peace prevail.
 For most humbly I surrender.
 Oh, pursue your prey no longer;
 Raise your sister from despair.
 I, your sister ...

CECIL (*privately to Elizabeth*)
 Though her words are meek and mild,
 She is false as she is fair.

ELIZABETH
 No! You well deserve your prison;
 You can pray for mercy there.

MARY
 Oh, endurance! So hard, so unyielding!
 For what reason?

ELIZABETH
 Ask your conscience.
 There you will find deceit and malice.
 Murder! Betrayal!

MARY (
 Am I to turn the other cheek?)

ELIZABETH
 Go inquiring.
 Ask around to find the reason.
 Go inquiring!
 Ask your husband that lies buried;
 Ask the assassin you took for a lover;
 Ask the ghost that cries for vengeance.
 You have plotted, incited treason.
 Your roving eye
 You have cast upon my throne.
 Seek no further for the reason:
 Look within yourself alone.

MARY
 Help me, Robert!
 How much more am I to bear?

LEICESTER
 Be strong, be patient.

CECIL (*to Elizabeth*)
 Astute and sly, put nothing past her.
 Disregard the face so fair.

LEICESTER (*to Mary*)
 Bear the charge without defending;
 On your patience all's depending.
 Only thus we avert disaster.
 Grant her not the satisfaction
 Of responding to her anger,
 Bear in mind how much I care.

ELIZABETH (*to Leicester*)
 Such bravado! And in my presence!
 Earl, explain it.

LEICESTER
 What must I say?

ELIZABETH (*to Mary*)

Thrice already you have married,
 And three husbands have you buried.
 Comb the country of the north:
 Who would dare become the fourth?

MARY Cruel laughter!
 She has gone beyond recall.

ELIZABETH Who? On the head of Mary Stuart
 May the wrath of heaven fall!
 Shame eternal from heaven fall!
 Shame eternal on her fall!

MARY Ah! Hear her, Robert!
 She has gone beyond recall.

LEICESTER Say not a word, for fear of losing all.

MARY How much longer am I to bear it?

HANNAH, LEICESTER and TALBOT
 Make no answer! Patience!

ELIZABETH Where's your answer? Answer!

MARY Wait! Daughter of the whore Anne Boleyn,
 Jealous of the crown you've stolen,
 Dare you boast of rank and honor?
 Painted hag! I spit upon her!
 Where's the majesty,
 The pride of England,
 With a bastard on the throne?

TALBOT Disaster!

ELIZABETH *(to guards)*
 Take her away!

OTHERS Raving madness! Insane delirium!
 She is lost! All hope now gone!

CECIL (She is lost! And shall atone!)

ELIZABETH Drag her off, a fiend demented!
 Death to one abhorred and hated!
 My own mother desecrated,
 And my rightful claim denied!
 Though to see her I consented,
 Her abuse I'll not abide.

CECIL Guards, attend her! A whore and traitor!
 She shall render the price of pride.

MARY Praise to God, I breathe contented!
I have seen the witch deflated.
Straight ahead, now vindicated,
To my death I walk with pride.

HANNAH Fleeting triumph, all too hollow!
Queen and woman have you offended.
Though the forfeit soon will follow,
Still my place is by your side.

LEICESTER Wrath ill-fated! Hope is ended!
Dreams and visions, all are over.
Though a sworn and faithful lover,
Never shall I claim my bride.

TALBOT Fleeting triumph, all too hollow!
Queen and woman you've offended.
Fear the forfeit bound to follow,
For her rage will not subside.

CHORUS On the scaffold now for certain
She shall pay the price of pride.
On her future draw the curtain:
Hope and promise here have died.

ACT III

Scene: Westminster palace

CECIL You ponder, do nothing!
And meanwhile, she lives to gloat!
Alliances in Europe
Have rallied round her;
Day after day, she's plotting
For your crown and your title.

ELIZABETH You goad me on!
Now is the time when power
Weighs like a burden,
And yet I shudder to use it.
This warrant ...
Who will defend me
From future critics?

CECIL No need to! For the truth will clear you.
Throughout your kingdom,
You are beloved,
Worshipped and respected.
Well-known are the crimes of Mary Stuart.
Weighed in the balance,
Who doubts the verdict?

ELIZABETH No more! Stop!
 She insulted and mocked me.
 Oh, how she relished
 Each bitter moment of her triumph!
 I suffer while she lives.
 Ah! Give me counsel!
 I long for peace,
 But she would steal it from me.

CECIL She will remain a canker
 Till you take action.

ELIZABETH *(impetuously)*
 My mind is settled! Settled!
 I go onward
 To a deed of all most abhorrent.
 Down with scruple!
 I'll sign that final warrant
 And her fate thus seal
 Forever.

 Yet I waver, my hand suspended,
 Rage, relief, revulsion blended.
 Would the deed were done!
 Would all were over,
 And the horrid nightmare ended.
 Only then shall I recover
 That repose I seek in vain.
 Ah, mighty God! Until that moment
 Shall the fear and doubt remain.

CECIL Why the storm of agitation?
 What new phantoms and fears awaken?
 Rest assured that all the nation
 Will admire the course you've taken —
 Your watchful nation.

 She has plotted, fabricated,
 Flouted every law created.
 True compatriots of your dominion
 Leap to rally round the throne.
 Sign the warrant! World opinion
 Will applaud you and condone.

ELIZABETH Signed!
 (hastily gives warrant to Cecil)

LEICESTER *(entering)*
 Your Highness!

ELIZABETH Too late your timing!

I have acted.

LEICESTER You've signed her warrant?
 And you have it?
 (to Cecil)

CECIL Here's the order!

LEICESTER Is it final?

ELIZABETH Death on the scaffold!
 She stands condemned,
 Brought to justice.

LEICESTER So thus the innocent are slaughtered ...

ELIZABETH You dare imply? ...

LEICESTER Drag her not off, too young to go
 Forced to the final hour.
 Yield to my prayer! Relent, forbear!
 Show mercy wedded to power.
 Look to that power over us,
 Guiding with loving hand;
 Royal in grace and charity,
 Do you fulfill our Lord's command.
 Oh, relent! Show her mercy!

ELIZABETH Vainly you pray and plead for her;
 Now pity and I are strangers.
 Not until she can strike no more
 Shall I sleep free of danger.
 Only through blood and fortitude
 Will peace relight the land.

CECIL *(quietly to Elizabeth)*
 Mere empty rant and raving!
 Her plots have been uncovered.
 Your title she's long been craving;
 Over your head she's hovered.
 Until the day you're free of her,
 Your power is built on sand.

LEICESTER Hard-hearted queen! Oh, barbarous!
 To death you send your sister.

ELIZABETH You I shall send as witness
 To see her climb the scaffold.
 For there your love shall perish
 After the fatal cannon,
 In voice of dreaded thunder,
 Has sounded out three times.

LEICESTER You send me as witness?

ELIZABETH Go to her! Go to her!

LEICESTER Have mercy!

ELIZABETH Go to her. My heart has turned to stone.

LEICESTER Your Highness! Your highness!

ELIZABETH Fool undeserving,
Unworthy of my favor!
Go, attend her,
And leave me to suffer.

 Seek nothing further
That love can offer —
Mary Stuarr
Is doomed to die.

 Leave me. Unworthy!
Seek nothing further
That love can offer —
Mary Stuart
Is doomed to die.
Mary Stuart shall die.

LEICESTER Tears and persuasion
Are helpless to save her.
Lost is the battle
To shield her, defend her.
Comfort only
Do I have now to render:
On that support she can always rely.

CECIL Firm of purpose!
You're lost if you waver.
Signed and sealed,
Here you end an awkward story.

 Thank God, today
You restore former glory.
England marches
With head lifted high.

Scene: Mary's apartment in Fotheringay castle

MARY Oh, sweet revenge!
After long, profound humiliation,
One fleeting triumph ...
A burden falls from my heart.
So arrogant!

For once, I hurled her
Down from her lofty summit.
Triumph!
I fear for Robert ... She's a tyrant ...
Upon his head will fall the hammer!
Ah! Was I born only to bring misfortune?

(She sits and weeps. Cecil and Talbot enter)

MARY What brings you?

CECIL A grievous errand,
An order brought from the queen,
A royal warrant,
That will conclude your sorrows
Now and forever.

MARY Is this your English custom?
A queen in but half a day tried and sentenced?
Informers bribed and corrupted?

CECIL Due process ...

MARY Justice!

CECIL But ...

MARY You mock me! Go ... *(Cecil leaves)*
Talbot, stay with me.
Dear faithful Talbot!

TALBOT A favor granted by Elizabeth.
I'll stay beside you
As your last hour approaches.

MARY Ah, yes! To comfort,
Cheer my anguished soul
Before its journey.

TALBOT And yet with what composure
You received the decree
Whose blow is lethal.

MARY Oh, Talbot! My face
Showed not the stricken terror
Trembling inside me ...
Where is Leicester?

TALBOT He has been ordered here to observe
Your execution,
A desire of the Queen.

MARY Her brand of torture!
Oh, why must he be punished?
Are my own tears too meager?
The tyrant meanwhile
Remains to gloat.
Oh, why does Jove
Not smite with a deadly thunderbolt?

TALBOT No more, please!

MARY Exiled from Scotland,
My kingdom and my religion,
I came to her,
Searching for peace and refuge,
And instead found a prison.

TALBOT Seek within you:
Does not your faith sustain you,
The hope of heaven?

MARY Ah, no! Heaven ... disowns me.
Blood stains my conscience.
A nightmare of ghostly phantoms
Will not go away,
Barring ever from me
The grace of God.

Recalled from the sleep of the dead,
Rising out of the grave,
The dark and angry shadow of Darnley!

(beside herself)
Do you not see him now?
Young, handsome Rizzio ...
There is his butchered body.

TALBOT Ah, be of comfort!
Brood no more upon the past.
Soon shall you enter
Those gates of the immortal;
Upon the threshold,
Wipe from your heart
All trace of earthly passion.

MARY Could I but cleanse my conscience,
Wash out my errors
With my blood and my tears!
My true friend, now am I ready
To kneel and pray for pardon.

TALBOT Comfort!

MARY From a realm calm and clear,
Your voice consoles me.

Bathed in a glow, my life began,
A sparkling morn, new-showered;
There in a garden of innocence
My soul awoke and flowered.
By love was I transported
To the open pit of hell.

A love so sweet allured me on —
My husband observed and glowered.
Oh, Rizzio! My lover! I see him yet,
In pools of blood contorted.
Still do his cries so dolorous
Toll in my heart like a knell,
A mournful knell.

Death close upon me, be reconciled,
You shades of dark that hover.
May tears of sorrow wash away
The stains of guilt I suffer,
Stains of a horror that never leaves me free.
Repose from years of penitence
Oh, pray to God for me!

TALBOT Near the portals of eternity,
May heaven hear your plea.
Are not you hiding unconfessed
A crime more recent?

MARY Ah! Name it!

TALBOT The plot in league with Babington.

MARY You wrong me! A charge unfounded!

TALBOT Through His grace, our sins are forgiven;
Sheep that stray are welcomed to the fold.
On the threshold of hell or heaven,
Search your heart:
Is there no secret you withhold?

MARY No! I've none.
To God my heart lies open.
Sir, within the limit of an hour
I shall stand before that throne of judgment.
I repeat the words I've said already!
Death upon me, by all that's sacred —
There I'm guiltless, falsely betrayed.
I swear it! God, hear me!
I swear by our savior.

TALBOT May the mercy of the Lord
 Console you in your hour of need,
 Comfort you in time of need.

MARY Hope ... Hope ...

TALBOT Freed from the chains of mortality,
 By prison walls surrounded,
 Ascend to a mansion in paradise,
 On wings of love conveyed.

 There in the glow of radiance,
 Bathing in bliss unbounded,
 You will forget life's agony;
 The storm and fury will fade.

MARY Now that the light is lowering,
 Soon will the call be sounded;
 I shall approach my journey
 Tranquil and unafraid.

 Nourished too long on tears of woe,
 On fragile hopes unfounded,
 There to a greater life I go,
 Beyond this barricade.

TALBOT Your fears are conquered?

MARY I go in peace.

TALBOT Free of malice, and forgiving,
 You leave this troubled earth?

MARY I have relinquished to heaven
 My hate and my love.

TALBOT Freed from the chains of mortality,
 By prison walls surrounded,
 Ascend to a mansion in paradise,
 On wings of love conveyed.

 There in the glow of radiance,
 Bathing in bliss unbounded,
 You will forget life's agony;
 The storm and fury will fade.

Scene: Anteroom of execution chamber

CHORUS You saw it?
 And shuddered!
 A chamber of horrors!

The platform ... The basket ...
The axe poised and polished.

From baron to beggar —
Amusement for the masses!
They mob toward the scaffold
And jostle for place.

Excited and eager,
They wait till she passes,
A scene of disorder,
Of frenzy and fever.

Oh, England! Remember
This cold-blooded murder,
A stain of dishonor,
Of shame and disgrace,
Dark disgrace.

Hannah!

HANNAH One final visit she requested.

CHORUS Her time so near the end!

HANNAH Her spirit still unbroken,
She comes to greet you.
Ah! Unto the heavy weight
Of her sorrow,
Add not your own.

CHORUS We promise.

(Mary enters)

MARY You come to see me off?

CHORUS So soon to lose you.

MARY I seek a fair and freer land,
Out and beyond these four walls.
I go unfearing
To the loving arms of God.
Oh, flee from England!
From a land so hostile.

CHORUS Near death, she thinks of us.

MARY Ah! Weep no longer.
Hannah! You must not leave me;
To the end, you are loyal.
All that I own

I'd have you share between you.
To Meg and Alice,
My few remaining trinkets.
This piece of linen
Must serve to bind my own eyes.
Are yours still wet with tears?
Mourn not my leaving.
Together, in loving friendship,
Come, let us pray for release
From agony and fear,
For freedom everlasting.

(kneels)

Father and comforter,
Watchful and tender,
Humble and penitent,
I turn to thee.

Unto thy mercy
My soul I surrender,
Shorn of mortality,
Forever free.
Hear me, Father
Hear me, O Father.

(rises)

Guided by heaven,
Grief is transcended.

CHORUS

Follies and errors
All are here ended.

Far from life's burdens,
Far from life's shadows,
Enter those verdant
Meadows above.

MARY

Far from life's burdens,
Far from life's shadows,
I walk in meadows
Of eternal love.
Of boundless love.

(a cannon sounds)

CHORUS

The signal!

CECIL

In but a moment you go to execution.
Our gracious ruler bids us to grant
Your final wishes. Speak out.

MARY

From her I never hoped for such compassion.

Grant then a special favor.
Let Hannah walk beside me to the scaffold.

CECIL That she may do.

MARY My first wish
You have heard and have granted.
Ah! Now have I but one more.

From one whose sorrows
Will soon be over,
Go, tell my oppressor
That I forgive.

I wish her ever
Laurels and luster;
In song and story,
Long may she live;

For troubled England
A lasting glory,
A lighted beacon
That shall not fade.

And may her rigor
Go unlamented;
In blood and ashes
My debt is paid.

Ah! From one whose sorrows
Are nearly over,
Tell my oppressor
That I forgive her.
Of death no longer
Am I afraid.
No! In blood and ashes
My debt is paid.

HANNAH and TALBOT
So full of promise,
Her life is ended.
Sweetness and beauty
Cut by the blade.

CECIL Proud, overbearing,
The throne she offended.
Death was the order!
I but obeyed.

(Leicester enters)

TALBOT *(to Mary)* The Earl has arrived.

MARY Ah! A scene harsh and painful
He comes to witness.

LEICESTER Our final meeting!
The hope come to nothing,
A victim of power,
They lead you to death ...

MARY Robert! You come in time!
Farewell, love, forever!

CECIL The clock is ticking.

LEICESTER Stunned and bewildered,
Can I do nothing? Am I to stand by
And see you slaughtered?

CECIL We'll wait no longer.

LEICESTER Stay away! Oh, tiger!

MARY Futile ...

LEICESTER Oh, tremble, you men of evil!
May God have vengeance!
His mighty wrath fall upon your head.

MARY (*to Leicester*) Yourself you ruin!

CHORUS Could I but shoulder this awful burden,
I'd be content to die instead.

LEICESTER Tiger!

MARY O Robert! O Robert! Remember! ...

 Arm in arm, love, you promised to guide me
 From the dark of a long degradation.
 Unto death, knowing you walk beside me,
 Armed with courage and comfort I go.

 With my blood may the turmoil be mended,
 Though my guilt to the end I deny.
 Forever peace to her I offended;
 Peace to all here below,

 Hannah, farewell! Dear Robert, I leave you. Ah!
 Arm in arm, love, you promised to guide me
 From the dark of a long degradation.
 Unto death, knowing you walk beside me,

Armed with courage and comfort I go.

MARY With my blood may the turmoil be mended,
 Though my guilt to the end I deny.
 Forever peace to her I offended;
 Peace to all friends I leave below,
 Peace to all here below.

CHORUS She goes serenely, her passion transcended.

CECIL On my service the Queen has depended;
 Thanks to me is England
 Rid of a dangerous foe.

CHORUS Rage and terror now transcended,
 She receives the mortal blow.

The End