

# **ROBERTO DEVEREUX**

**(Elizabeth and Essex)**

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## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

### **Queen Elizabeth I**

**Sara**, recently married to the Duke of Nottingham

**Roberto Devereux**, Earl of Essex

**The Duke of Nottingham**, his close friend

**Lord Cecil**, adviser to the queen

**Sir Walter Raleigh**

### *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court*

Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, returns to Westminster palace, court of Queen Elizabeth, after a military triumph in Ireland, but not to the hero's welcome that one might expect. He faces charges of treason, unproven charges that may have been concocted by his many envious political rivals.

Despite a pretense of argument and debate, it is obvious that the Council of Peers is out to get him. Yet his fate ultimately rests in the hands of one person alone -- the Queen, who must choose whether he is to live or die. She is suffering agonies

of indecision. Though unconvinced by the evidence brought against him, she fears him guilty of a crime even greater than treason, a betrayal that the world knows nothing of, a change of heart that she cannot forgive. An affront to Elizabeth the Queen is one thing; an affront to Elizabeth the woman quite another. However painful, it is becoming increasingly undeniable that her own passion is no longer reciprocated.

Is there another woman? She is obsessed with a corrosive curiosity to find out. Sara, her lady in waiting, recently married against her will to the elderly Duke of Nottingham, has good reason to feel uneasy.

## ACT I

*Scene: A room in the palace at Westminster*

### CHORUS OF COURTIERS

*(concerned over Sara)*

Silent, the signs of suffering  
Upon her face speak volumes.  
A grief too deep for utterance  
Within her heart lies buried.  
Sara! Milady!  
Without reserve, as friend to friend,  
Cast off the heavy burden.

### SARA

*(sitting apart, pretending to read a book, trying to hide her tears)*  
My sorrows you imagine.

### CHORUS

Imagine? Then why the tears you seek to hide?

### SARA

(Heart, oh do not betray me!  
Give me the strength I need!)  
Reading of thwarted lovers,  
I weep for poor Rosamonda.

### CHORUS

Ah, dwell not upon that tale of woe  
That comes too close to home.

### SARA

Too close to home?

### CHORUS

We've known you long;

Your secret you can share.

SARA  
Secret? Are you serious?

CHORUS  
Confide in us.

SARA (*with a forced smile*)  
Unhappy? No. I've nothing to explain.

CHORUS  
(Her smile is even sadder  
Than tears denied in vain.)

SARA



(Tears unnoticed remain a solace  
After hope has long departed.  
Yet the comfort that tears can offer,  
Even this comfort,  
From my quiver is withdrawn.

Rosamonda, your trials I envy;  
Hard to bear, yet soon they were over.  
You were granted peace everlasting;  
Ah, but a living death I endure.  
In the grave your sorrows ended;  
My ordeal goes on and on,  
Each day . . .

Laid to rest, your sorrows ended;  
My ordeal each day goes on and on.)

(Elizabeth enters preceded by pages)

ELIZABETH (*addressing Sara*)  
Milady ... To your husband I yield.  
His eloquent appeal has prevailed.  
Here face to face I'll see the Earl.  
But I hope and pray  
For the means of preventing  
A final rupture.  
Rumor has got around,  
Hinting of rank betrayal.



SARA

(The verdict!)

ELIZABETH

Proceed, sir.

SARA

(She cannot camouflage her loathing.)

CECIL

Of high crimes and treason  
We accuse the Earl of Essex.  
Only your extreme indulgence  
Keeps the man alive to answer.  
He deserves a lasting sentence  
That will put him out of action.  
We, the Peers, are so empowered,  
And the power we mean to use.

ELIZABETH

For his conviction,  
More persuasive proof is needed.

PAGE (*entering*)

The Earl of Essex comes to beg you to hear his plea.

CECIL

Essex!

ELIZABETH

Bring him! Bring him! I shall hear him speak.

CECIL & RALEIGH

(He is still at large and free.)

SARA

(Dismay and panic leave me weak.)

ELIZABETH (*in her own world*)

(Love, return with fire rekindled  
As in days of former splendor,  
And your foes will lie defeated  
In the dust where they belong.  
Let the nation, let all my people  
Call you serpent or son of Satan;  
If I find your love unfaded,

You for me can do no wrong.  
With love unfaded, you for me can do no wrong.  
Return repentant with fire rekindled,  
You for me can do no wrong.)

CHORUS

(Brief though brilliant, the day that started  
So full of promise is soon to wane.  
How long can his good luck go on? How long?  
Near the crest but soon to wane,  
How long can his good luck go on?)

ELIZABETH

(Love me, love me as ever.)

SARA

(Overlook my own misfortune;  
Let him prosper once again.  
My ordeal goes on and on.  
My long ordeal goes on and on.)  
*(Robert enters and kneels before Elizabeth.)*

ROBERT

Hear me, O Royal Highness! On bended knee ...  
*(His eyes seek out Sara, who turns away in confusion and embarrassment.)*

ELIZABETH

So humble! Robert!  
Stand up, I command you.  
*(to Courtiers)*  
Of my intentions I shall keep you informed,  
So leave me in private. *(Courtiers exit)*  
  
So at last you return,  
But under shadows of accusation.  
Can you indeed be guilty?  
Plotting to seize the sacred crown  
From a lawful ruler?

ROBERT

My naked breast, stamped with the scars of battle —  
A present from your enemies abroad —  
Will answer for me.

ELIZABETH

But ... the charges?

ROBERT

Concocted. The wounded foe upon the field had fallen, defeated.

I showed them mercy.  
That was my crime. For that alone,  
The Queen has given orders —  
I am to pay with blood.

ELIZABETH

One small correction:  
You were spared execution, thanks to my orders.  
Thanks to my intervention, you're still at large and free.  
Death is a mere idle threat.  
While I am sovereign, you go protected  
From either rope or ax.

For when the trumpet sounded for my soldiers  
To batter down the bulwarks, topple the towers of Cadiz,  
Back home, your foes were waiting,  
Jealous and vindictive, forever plotting  
Your overthrow and defeat.

*(pointing to a ring on Robert's finger)*

I gave you then this ring, and made a promise:  
For as long as I reign, whatever happens,  
By showing me the ring  
You guarantee your safety and freedom.

Ah, with the ring I journey back,  
I return to a paradise  
Of music and of magic,  
When life was full of hope  
Inspired by joy.  
That spring of budding blossoms,  
I well remember!



(When love came to flower,  
My heart was in heaven.  
As one, we meandered  
In meadows of rapture.  
I dreamed of horizons  
Forever unfolding,  
But found in reawaking,  
The rainbow was gone.)

ROBERT

(In vain was I driven  
By visions of power;

By fortune forsaken  
I founder and falter.  
The red rose of summer  
Has faded and fallen;  
In deserts of silence  
I wander alone.)

ELIZABETH

Still no answer?  
*(in a tone of sweet reproof)*  
Your heart has changed, then, with the season?

ROBERT

Still devoted. Give the order,  
And see your trusty soldier racing off to battle,  
Ever eager to display and prove his mettle.

ELIZABETH

*(The eager lover is the role I prefer.)*  
*(with pretended calm)*  
There must be someone,  
Yours alone, who sighs and suffers  
As you risk your life on far distant shores.  
One who hides an aching heart  
And only lives for your return ...

ROBERT

*(Who sighs ... and suffers ... mine alone ... )*  
Then you acknowledge ... *(Stop! Say nothing!)*

ELIZABETH

Go on! Continue. With a friend you can be candid.  
Why so timid? Come, come! Be bolder.  
Say the name of your beloved;  
I will name your wedding day.

ROBERT

You're mistaken.

ELIZABETH

*(A day of reckoning!)*  
Is there no one? No one you love!

ROBERT

Love? No!

ELIZABETH

(With deadly precision I see the light;  
At last my eyes are opened.  
Played upon, then tossed aside,  
I hunger to see them suffer.

The ungrateful charmer deserves to die;  
Nor shall I awaken with peace of mind  
Until my gloating rival  
Has tasted (of) my despair.  
I'll see my gloating rival  
Partake of my despair.)

ROBERT

(Upon the scaffold let me stand;  
Let fall the ax upon my head.  
But turn the fire away from her  
Whose only crime was love for me.

A victim of your jealousy,  
To death I'll guard my secret.  
My love, though never meant to be,  
I'll carry to the grave;  
My secret will ever lie buried there.)  
Your Highness ...

ELIZABETH

Go on ... Who is it?

ROBERT

Your Highness ...

ELIZABETH

Tell me ... There's no one?

ROBERT

There's no one.

ELIZABETH

(Liar!)

*(Elizabeth leaves)*

Highly prone to jealousy, like the Queen herself, it is doubtful that the Duke of Nottingham would plead so eloquently for his friend's acquittal if he were aware of the passion that continues to burn with undying intensity between Robert and his wife--- a fire that misfortune has by no means extinguished.

*(The Duke of Nottingham enters, and embraces Robert.)*

NOTTINGHAM

Dear Robert ...

ROBERT (*drawing back, abruptly*)  
Still with open arms!

NOTTINGHAM

You're pale as a ghost, a walking shadow.  
The verdict ... I am afraid to ask ...

ROBERT

I've heard no final answer;  
She vacillates and wavers.  
But if I read correctly,  
Her questions make it very clear:  
Blood she is after.

NOTTINGHAM

Oh, say no more.  
I, too, am stupefied with pain and devastation.

ROBERT

Have courage, and leave me to my destiny.  
In the embraces of a beloved wife,  
Forget a friend's misfortunes.

NOTTINGHAM

In marriage! Ah, if only that were possible!  
But I am neither helpful friend nor happy husband.

ROBERT

Not happy?

NOTTINGHAM

Buried deep in her heart,  
My Sara has a secret,  
Slowly but surely  
Snuffing out her soul and spirit.

ROBERT

(Her guilt has made her suffer.)

NOTTINGHAM

Yesterday, as light was fading,  
Even though rather early,  
I needed rest from my labors,  
And happened by her small inner sanctum

Where she is fond of sitting, lost to the world.  
Unnoticed, I heard a stifled sobbing,  
Loaded with meaning,  
That made me freeze at the threshold.  
As she embroidered  
A golden thread into a scarf of blue,  
She'd put it down, stopping her work to weep,  
Begging death to release her.  
I withdrew, full of shock and confusion,  
So badly shaken that I could barely hold the candle I carried.

Softhearted, sweet and sensitive,  
Tears to her eyes come easily.  
Man of the world, well-seasoned,  
I, too, have wept on occasion,  
I've shared bitter tears in privacy  
Not even knowing why.  
I've tasted agony, the tears of agony,  
Myself not even knowing the reason why.

And yet the doubt remains with me,  
Stirred by a jealous fever,  
Though reason tells me soothingly  
Fear and mistrust are foolish.  
I wonder, despite my faith in her,  
Is all I believe a lie?  
A wife that means the world to me  
Could never be untrue,  
Never be only a lie.

*(Lord Cecil enters, with courtiers.)*

CECIL

Duke! Come, sir! You now are needed.  
The Queen has summoned the Peers into Council.

NOTTINGHAM

On what issue?

CECIL

Come.

NOTTINGHAM

But for what purpose?

CECIL *(looking fixedly at Robert)*

To hear a sentence long deferred and long debated.

NOTTINGHAM

Lead on. *(to Robert, deeply moved)* Dear friend ...

ROBERT

So compassionate! For me you shed a tear.  
I must face my fate alone.  
Let them cast me to the lions.

CECIL

Come, sir.

NOTTINGHAM

To save your life I'd give my own.  
Though the world now calls you traitor,  
Though disgrace and death are pending,  
Count on me as your defender ...  
Would that I could make  
The will of heaven bend.

To restore your life and honor,  
I would challenge a hundred armies,  
Walk alone through fire and water.  
Persevering, I shall prove myself a friend.

Through affliction, through misfortune  
I remain a constant friend.  
Through oppression and persecution  
I remain a constant friend.

LORDS

*(Power-hungry, he plays with fire.  
No free hand shall we extend.) (exeunt all)*

In Sara's darkened apartment, it is long after midnight, when the world is presumably asleep. At great risk to herself, she has sent for Robert -- not for romantic indulgence, but to plead with him to save his life while he still can by fleeing the country. Also to explain, if possible, the sudden loveless marriage that has been forced upon her in an age where a woman has no rights whatever, unless she happens to be Queen of England. And before parting forever, to give him one last token of remembrance -- a scarf of blue, threaded with gold, to be worn close to the heart.

*Scene: Sara's apartment in the Nottingham palace.*

SARA (*alone*)  
Though all is silent, loudly within me  
Cries out the voice of conscience,  
Harsh, unrelenting and severe,  
Yet for no reason, only too human,  
I am prompted by pity, not by love.

Too mindful of the horrors,  
The dangers facing Robert,  
I overlook my own.  
A footstep! Oh, Robert!

ROBERT (*entering*)  
You remember the love  
That seemed to blossom ...  
It was a lie!  
A promise violated and betrayed!  
O faithless woman!  
What arrows of contempt do you not deserve?

SARA  
Forgive me! You had departed off to the battle,  
When a fatal illness befell my father  
And left me orphaned and penniless.  
"You will need support,"  
Said the Queen with concern.  
"I shall provide you a husband."

ROBERT  
You agreed?

SARA  
I pleaded, protested ... I prayed for release.  
But to my wedding bed they dragged me ...  
No! They dragged me to my deathbed.

ROBERT  
Oh, God!

SARA  
Unhappy though I may be,  
You have a life ahead.  
Turn to the Queen  
And to the love she would offer.

ROBERT  
Abhorrent! Love I have now discarded.

SARA

That ring ... sparkling on your finger.  
Surely it was accepted as a pledge from the heart.

ROBERT

Only a token. Here, take it!  
*(He throws the ring onto a table)*  
So much for your absurd assumption.  
For you alone, I would scale the highest mountain.

SARA

Oh, Robert! Our last time together!  
Grant me a favor. For Sara ...  
I beg for only one.

ROBERT

Ask for my blood ...  
Every drop I would shed for my darling.

SARA

Go on living ... Leave this country far behind you.

ROBERT

Live on without you?  
Oh, Sara! Too much you're asking.

SARA

Ah, if you love me,  
Forever you must leave me.

ROBERT

Forever?

SARA

Yes!

ROBERT

Am I to claim no longer  
Some place in Sara's heart;  
Has love turned to hatred?

SARA

Oh, Robert! For you I burn with love.



When you returned, at once I knew,  
Even though bound to silence.

Ashes that needed but stirring  
Burst into flames of passion.

Have mercy, and leave me  
To pray for you! Ah!  
Dearest, fight not with misfortune.  
Find a new life, far, far away.  
Let me redeem, ah! Let me redeem my own.

ROBERT  
Am I awake? Or dreaming?  
A separation so final?  
Am I to leave my only love?  
Lose you when I know you're mine alone?  
Oh, give me the strength of Hercules.  
Lend me a heart of iron.  
How can I run for safety?  
You are my reason for living.  
Heaven and earth I'd sacrifice.  
But this alone — no, no!  
This I cannot do.

*(Sara throws herself at his feet, pleading, weeping.)*

ROBERT  
My dearest! Weep not.  
No more sad tears for me.  
Yes ... I'll obey ... I will go!

SARA  
You promise!

ROBERT  
I'll do what must be done.  
Bravely, sadly, I'll do what must be done.

SARA  
You have no time to lose,  
You must away from me.  
You must depart, but when?

ROBERT  
Tonight, when silently  
The earth and sky are shrouded  
In veils of mournful shadow  
That hide foe and friend alike.  
Now would be fatal.

The glow of dawn  
Rekindles the pale horizon.

SARA

Here danger lurks; you must depart  
Before the world awakens.

ROBERT

Cast out of Eden!

SARA

One parting gift —  
*(giving him a blue and gold scarf)*  
Pledge of a love ill-fated.  
For me, please wear it ...

ROBERT

My love, place it here,  
On my wounded heart.

SARA

Courage! Go, but remember me  
When you're alone with God. Farewell, love!

ROBERT

Forever!

SARA

How hard it is!

ROBERT

This I do for you.

SARA

Farewell, love!

ROBERT

Farewell, love!

BOTH

Ah! Only seconds, then all is over,  
In a future bleak and barren.  
Say farewell to days of wonder  
That will never dawn again.

Ah, no more to dream of rapture!  
Nevermore to feast on hope!  
No more, no more to walk on air.  
Ah, separation complete and final!  
Leaving only tears of pain,  
Only sorrow and despair,

A life of sorrow and despair.  
Farewell love; forevermore.

*(They leave, in separate directions)*

## **Act II**

Night slowly turns into morning as Robert's trial drags on and on. The worn out, bleary eyed courtiers are numbed with waiting for the verdict. Elizabeth, tormented by private suspicions that have little to do with the case at hand, remains deaf to the Duke's passionate plea for mercy on his friend's behalf.

*Scene: the Palace at Westminster, as in Act I.*

TENORS

Hours have slipped away;  
Morning approaches.

BASSES

Parliament members  
Still are in session ...

TENORS

Lacking the Queen's  
Tender protection ...

BASSES

He is in danger,  
Headed for downfall.

TENORS

His ruin, his ruin is certain.

BASSES

For doom and death he is headed.

TENORS

Lucky no longer ...

BASSES

Lucky no longer.

TENORS

Headed for total ruin.

BASSES

Headed for ruin.

SOPRANOS

Oh, Lords! Be silent.  
The Queen, tormented,  
Fretting and frowning,  
Out for vendetta,  
Paces and ponders,  
Withdrawn and distant,  
Asking no questions,  
Giving no orders.  
A warning! Be careful!

TENORS & BASSES

Beware! Beware!

TUTTI

Bad sign for Essex!  
Odds go against him.  
Curtains of darkness  
Slowly descend.

His hour of judgment  
Draws ever closer.  
Omens of warning,  
Signal the end.

*(Elizabeth and Lord Cecil enter from opposite directions.)*

ELIZABETH

And so?

CECIL

Though clearly guilty,  
We discussed and debated,  
For after all, he is a former friend.  
With fervor did the Duke defend the traitor.  
No use! The Duke himself  
Is to hand you the sentence.

ELIZABETH

Which reads? . . .

CECIL

Death!

RALEIGH *(entering)*

Your Highness . . .

ELIZABETH

Have the court clear the chamber!

But be ready to return when I summon.  
*(all leave, except Elizabeth and Raleigh)*

ELIZABETH  
What took so long?

RALEIGH  
His house was empty.  
Guarding the door, we stayed till nearly dawn,  
When he at last returned.

ELIZABETH *(disturbed)*  
Continue.

RALEIGH  
First we disarmed him, then did a search ...  
Incriminating letters  
We were told that he carried ...  
But we found only,  
Close to his heart, concealed,  
A blue, silken scarf.  
When I asked my men to remove it,  
Flaring, with a burst of passion,  
Out of proportion,  
Livid, he cried:  
You'll first have to tear  
My heart from my breast.  
Of course, his resistance was futile.

ELIZABETH  
You took the scarf?

RALEIGH  
Here it is!

ELIZABETH  
*(How galling! Too clearly a pledge of love!)*  
Here to my presence  
Have him brought forward.  
*(Raleigh leaves)*  
*(A thousand furies claw at me.)*  
*(She throws down the scarf)*

NOTTINGHAM *(entering)*  
Never with heart so heavy  
Have I appeared before you.  
Stern duty leaves no choice:  
*(He hands her a paper.)*  
I bring the dread decree.  
No more as minister,  
But warmly as a friend on his behalf,  
I plead, I plead as a friend on his behalf.  
Spare him! Spare him!

ELIZABETH

Why? Why?

NOTTINGHAM

Oh, grant him pardon!  
Or live with death on your conscience.

ELIZABETH

My heart is granite;  
The case has been concluded.

NOTTINGHAM

So final!

ELIZABETH

By invitation, he called on a secret mistress  
Whose door was open.  
This very night of judgment  
He has betrayed me.

NOTTINGHAM

A rumor! No more than idle gossip.  
Work of a scandal monger.  
Slander and allegation!  
Opponents plotting ...  
Believe me! Trust me!

ELIZABETH

Rumor! Gossip! No, no! He is guilty!  
No, I can doubt no longer.  
They found upon his person  
Proof beyond denial.

*(She starts to sign the sentence.)*

NOTTINGHAM

Are you signing?  
Forgive him ... Have mercy ...  
Let not the bolt of lightning fall  
Upon his naked shoulders.  
I ask of you but one reward  
For years of honest service.  
With tears I beg and plead for him ...  
Be lenient, and let him live.

ELIZABETH

Quiet! Your words are a waste of breath.  
Turn not to me for tolerance.

He has betrayed me time and again.  
Scoundrels deserve no charity.  
Too late to fall upon your knees.  
Lies and deceit I'll not forgive.

NOTTINGHAM

Spare him! Spare him!

ELIZABETH

Too late to fall upon your knees.  
Deceit and lies I'll not forgive.  
Off with you! Go!

NOTTINGHAM

No! Your Highness! ...  
I implore you ... Have mercy ... No, no!  
Let not the bolt of lightning fall  
Upon his naked shoulders.  
Grant me, oh grant me but one reward  
For years of toil and sweat:  
With burning tears, I ask but one reward:  
Be lenient and let him live.

ELIZABETH

Too late to fall down upon your knees:  
Robert I'll not forgive.  
Expect no charity.  
His cruel lies I'll not forgive.  
Words wasted! His treachery I'll not forgive.  
(Now to confront him.)

*(Robert enters with guards, who withdraw at a signal from Elizabeth)*

ELIZABETH

Here face to face ...  
Look up, as proud as ever.  
Do you recall? My question was,  
Are you in love? Remember?  
No, was your answer. No, no!  
You lied to me.  
Oh, coward! You have been false to me,  
Made sport of me!  
Behold the proof uncovered  
That points a silent finger.

*(She displays the scarf.)*

Traitor! Soon the hand of death

Will silence your faithless heart.

ROBERT

What!

NOTTINGHAM

(A flash of stark revelation! ... Sara!)

ELIZABETH

Now you crumble.

ROBERT

(Oh, God!)

ELIZABETH

So unfeeling, and so unfaithful,  
You are soon to pay a heavy penalty.  
May you burn In fires eternal,  
Ever hounded by a God of vengeance  
For the sorrow you've inflicted  
On my father's deluded daughter.

Let them drag you, living, breathing,  
To the grave to writhe in anguish  
Underneath a nameless stone,  
There to lie forever after, lacerated,  
Lacerated by repentance  
For the wrong I'll not condone.

ROBERT

(Fast approaching the final summons,  
Not on my account I tremble.  
Danger threatening my beloved  
Turns my courage into terror.  
In his eyes I read a message  
Of betrayal, hurt and anger.  
They together wield a hammer.  
May it fall, oh may it fall on me alone!)

NOTTINGHAM

(Call it madness! Oh, say I'm dreaming,  
In the grip of wild delusion.  
My foundations dissolve and crumble  
As my life is torn asunder.  
In his eyes I read a message  
Of betrayal, guilt and squalor.  
They together relate a story

That has chilled me to the bone.)  
*(with blind rage)*  
Shorn of scruple, corrupted, degraded!  
In the silken guise of friendship  
You play on my trust.  
And the Queen you deceive, then abandon,  
Lust triumphant!

ROBERT  
(He puts me to torture.)

NOTTINGHAM  
Bring my sword! I demand satisfaction.  
Pay he shall for his double betrayal.  
When he falls to the floor, let him lie there  
Till the blood washes off his offenses.  
My sword! My sword!

ELIZABETH  
So devoted! So irate, so indignant  
At the outrageous affront to the Queen!  
*(to Robert)*  
I've an offer, a promise:  
The block has been prepared,  
The ax poised and sharpened.  
Simply tell me the name of my rival;  
And your life, your life I shall spare.  
Tell me! Tell me!

*(Silence. Nottingham stares at Robert, his eyes full of rage and fear)*

NOTTINGHAM  
(And my life exposed!)

ROBERT  
Let the ax, let the ax do its damndest!

ELIZABETH  
Death you ask for! You shall have it.

ROBERT  
Sooner die than betray my beloved.

NOTTINGHAM  
(With his head, the secret is silenced.)

*(At a signal from the Queen, Lords, Ladies, and Courtiers return.)*

ELIZABETH

Lords and Courtiers!  
The Peers have brought me the verdict.  
They have voted the sentence of death.  
I shall sign it.

*(Signs the sentence and hands it to Cecil.)*

Let all be put on notice:  
When the sun that already  
Has started on its journey  
Arrives at the zenith,  
One loud blast from the cannon will sound.  
On his head falls the ax of retribution.

CHORUS

*(Day of horror! With death standing by.)*

ELIZABETH *(lashing out at Robert)*

Go! Death swift and certain is waiting to claim you,  
Thrusting you down to a grave unlamented.  
Reap there a harvest of shame and dishonor,  
Remembered forever as scoundrel and traitor.  
Dust to dust, share a fate in common  
With the wretched, the loathsome, the vile.

ROBERT

Steeped in horror, the ax that is hovering  
I'll not stain with the blood of a coward.  
Wreak your havoc, exalt in your fury;  
Life you can have, but not my honor.  
My life you can have, but not my honor.

NOTTINGHAM

Death by sword is too good for the bastard.  
On the block let him bleed with the lowest.  
Only death hand in hand with dishonor  
Allows my afflictions to heal.

CHORUS

Out of favor with fate and with fortune,  
No repose will reward his ordeal.

ELIZABETH

Certain death and dishonor are pending  
As we finish the painful ordeal.

With the loathsome and vile  
A fate in common you will share.

ROBERT

Steeped in horror, the ax that hovers  
I'll not stain with the blood of a coward.  
Though soon sharing a fate in common  
With the wretched, the loathsome, the vile,  
I go with glory as well:  
Never shall I bow in despair  
And none shall see me fall in fear.

NOTTINGHAM

Kill the scoundrel! Kill the traitor!  
Only death with dishonor  
Allows my wound to heal.  
Kill him! Kill him! Slaughter him!  
Only, only through blood my loss I can repair.

RALEIGH & CECIL

On your head will the ax soon be falling;  
Truth and justice again will prevail,  
Along with all that we hold dear.

*(At a gesture from Elizabeth, Robert is surrounded by guards.)*

### ACT III

In the seclusion of her own apartment, unaware that her husband has discovered the tell-tale scarf that links her and Robert, Sara also waits anxiously to hear the outcome of the trial. Though prepared for the worst, her fears are nonetheless mitigated in knowing that she has the ring which Robert has left with her -- the ring which will guarantee his release if delivered to the Queen.

*Scene: Sara's apartment.*

SARA *(alone)*

And not a word as yet from my husband ...

SERVANT *(entering)*

Milady, one of the watchmen of the royal chamber,  
Good as they come, a former soldier of the Queen under Essex,  
Wants to see you. He carries an urgent letter,  
Asking, even pleading now to place it in your hands.

SARA

Let him enter.

*(Guard delivers a letter, then leaves.)*  
In Robert's hand. ...  
*(after reading the letter)* Then all is over!  
The Queen has signed the sentence.  
Yet ... There is hope. I've the ring ...  
A promise and guarantee  
That he will live.  
This minute! Yes, I must hurry to the Queen.

*(Nottingham appears; he stands motionless at the door, with a ferocious look fixed upon his wife.)*

(My husband! ... But not himself ...)

NOTTINGHAM

You have a letter?

SARA

(So angry!)

NOTTINGHAM

Sara ... I wish to see it.

SARA

It's nothing! ...

NOTTINGHAM

Nothing!

NOTTINGHAM

*(In a tone that admits of no answer)*

Obey me! Hand me the letter.

*(With trembling hand, Sara hands him the letter, which the Duke reads.)*

SARA

(I have no choice.)

NOTTINGHAM

It seems then you've got the means  
To block the execution ...  
Robert gave you a ring! Further,  
Last night you met him alone, in secret,  
And in the darkness you placed on his breast,  
As a token of love,  
A scarf of blue laced with gold.

SARA

(A blow that leaves me speechless!  
Without a warning! The work of an informer.)

NOTTINGHAM

So, you are guilty!  
Don't deny it! I know all!  
A god of wrath revenges  
Blinded, deluded husbands;  
His mighty hand implacable  
Pilots the wheel of justice.  
Adulteress! In me now recognize  
The god who wreaks revenge, I!  
A god of jealousy ...

SARA

How you wrong me!

NOTTINGHAM

The truth has come to light.  
Robert you hope to save.  
He was a friend I treasured —  
More than a friend, a brother.  
My wife I thought an angel, ah!  
Heart and soul, I loved her.  
For friend or wife so unparalleled,  
My life I'd freely offer.

Now who betrays me? Who abuses me?  
That same friend, that wife I trusted.  
Rubbish! Now is no time to weep.  
Blood I demand, not tears. His blood! His blood!  
Now is no time, no time to weep.

SARA

Reigns there a power in heaven,  
Cruel, malign and hostile,  
That curses the pure and blameless  
And honors deceit and treachery?

Oh thou, all-knowing and vigilant,  
From whom we have no secrets,  
Oh, God of mercy!  
Be my defender; reveal the truth.  
Say that I have never,

Neither in fact nor fantasy,  
Dishonored my vows to you.  
Judge not! Ah, judge not your friend.  
Know that I have never, that I have never  
Dishonored my vows to you.

*(A funereal march is heard from outside.)*

SARA  
From the street, macabre music. Ah!

NOTTINGHAM *(exultant)*  
They lead him off toward the Tower.

SARA  
(Death so close at hand,  
A mortal chill is coursing through my veins.  
Now the sharpened ax is lifted,  
Poised and ready, about to fall.  
Heaven, now help me!)

*(She tries to leave, but Nottingham seizes her by the arm.)*

NOTTINGHAM  
So hasty! To whom are you rushing?

SARA  
The Queen has to hear me.

NOTTINGHAM  
You would still presume to save him?

SARA  
Let go!

NOTTINGHAM  
You would still presume to save him?

SARA  
Let go!

NOTTINGHAM  
How dare you defy me?

SARA  
Sir, you force me!

NOTTINGHAM (*to servants*)  
Servants! Attend! Turn my house into a prison.  
Hold her captive.

SARA (*with a desperate cry*)  
Oh, God! Take pity on my despair.  
(*falling to her knees in front of him*)  
From a forced incarceration  
Grant reprieve for but one hour,  
And I swear that I'll return  
To pay in full for all you've suffered.

Later on, chastise, rebuke me,  
Crucify me, and I'll be grateful.  
With my dying breath I'll bless,  
I'll bless the hand that dealt the blow.

NOTTINGHAM  
Truth and trust you've violated;  
Pride and honor you have assaulted.  
Now you prove the point by pleading;  
With each frantic tear you confirm it.

Death so swift is far too lenient;  
Let him breathe to suffer longer,  
Die in slow and painful stages,  
Then to burn in hell below.

SARA  
Dear husband! I plead, implore!

(*Nottingham leaves in the height of fury.*)

Robert, now sentenced to death, is locked in a cell inside the Tower of London. But the gruesome, bloody end that seems to be imminent is not inevitable. In fact, he has good reason to hope. The note sent to Sara is bound to produce the ring that promises a reprieve, and with it, the chance to clear Sara's name. But why does the door leading out to freedom still fail to open?

*Scene: a prison cell in the Tower of London. Robert is alone.*

ROBERT  
And the door leading out to freedom  
Still fails to open.  
A premonition of total darkness  
Turns my blood to ice.  
My note was urgent,  
And the ring is my warrant  
That guarantees safe passage.

With death I'm long familiar;  
Studied daily in battle, I fear it not.  
My life I would lengthen  
To clear Sara's name.  
And after that, no matter ...

You thief, who took her from me,  
Snatching the pearl I treasured,  
My life I save for your sword alone;  
Take it with my blessing.  
Yet with the final breath that I can muster,  
Hear me softly whisper:



Faithful as she is lovable,  
Pure as a visiting angel.

I swear it, by all that's sacred,  
And with my blood confirm it.  
Spoken by one so near the end,  
My words must carry weight.  
Closing the final curtain,  
No one has need to lie. No, no, no!  
Gone is the need to lie.

From the dark, the music beckons;  
Now the door begins to open.  
My reprieve at last is granted!

*(The door opens, guards appear)*

GUARDS  
Come with us.

ROBERT  
Where?

GUARDS  
To death!

ROBERT  
To death? To death?  
Every hope now come to nothing,  
I despair for one alone ---

My beloved left in peril!  
God will hear me if God is there.  
No, no, no! My love I'll not abandon.

With tears still wet that flow no more,  
Even as blood pours over me,  
My ghost will rise to plead for you,  
Beseeching God for justice.

The farthest peaks of paradise  
Will echo my tale of sorrow;  
If tears are shed in heaven,  
I'll make the angels weep.

GUARDS

Follow, and prepare  
To take the final step.

*(Robert leaves, escorted by guards)*

Elizabeth, no longer in control of the wheels that she has set in motion, more than ever imprisoned in her own isolation and loneliness, more than ready to forgive, paces back and forth -- still hoping against hope that Robert will come to his senses and send her the ring which will provide a necessary pretext for his reprieve. But time is running out and still no messenger has arrived.

*Scene: Westminster, as before.*

ELIZABETH *(with ladies-in-waiting)*

(And Sara ... in such an agonizing moment,  
Could she forsake me?  
I sent Sir Walter Raleigh,  
Told him to bring her,  
Urging him to hurry. And yet ...  
I need the comfort only a friend can provide.  
No longer Queen, I'm but a lonely woman.  
The fire of anger has dwindled out.)

LADIES

(Close to defeat and failure,  
Dark and despair take over.)

ELIZABETH

(Oh, Sara!)

LADIES

Where is the pride and majesty  
Of former seasons of glory?

ELIZABETH

(I must continue to hope,  
As death draws near he'll reconsider:  
He will send me the ring,  
And live to be a wiser and better man.

Yet ... time is flying. Not even I can halt it.  
And just supposing he chose to die,  
Remaining true to that woman ...  
The very thought undoes me.  
He marches to the slaughter.  
A gesture could stop it!

Go forgiven to your beloved;  
Cast aside the proud but loving heart I offer.  
Leave me weeping in lonely splendor,  
Torn by memory and longing,  
To sigh in vain,  
Lamenting for a joy beyond recall.

Now to hide the signs of anguish!  
No, let no one boast to his neighbor  
Now or ever,  
That the Queen of mighty England  
Has allowed a single secret tear to fall.

Live on, forgiven.  
Leave me to weep in lonely splendor  
For a joy beyond recall,  
Torn by futile longing,  
To sigh in vain.)

*(Cecil enters)*

What has happened?

CECIL

Even now they lead him off to execution.

ELIZABETH

Ah! From the Tower!

CECIL

Yes.

ELIZABETH

He handed you no token  
To deliver to the Queen?

CECIL

He gave me nothing.

ELIZABETH  
Unyielding! Someone approaches. Let him enter ...

CECIL  
Only the Duchess ...

*(Sara enters; frantic, unable to speak, she thrusts the ring into Elizabeth's hands)*

ELIZABETH  
What's the meaning? ... You he trusted? ...  
So distressed! So distracted!  
Now I know it!  
Are you perhaps? ... Oh, speak!

SARA  
My naked terror tells the story. Yes, I ... I!

ELIZABETH  
Continue.

SARA  
I'm your rival.

ELIZABETH  
You!

SARA  
Punish me alone, but use your power to save him.

ELIZABETH  
Run! Release him! Stop the murder!  
If you bring him here still breathing,  
You can claim my crown and kingdom.

CHORUS  
Back in favor once again,  
The sun emerges after storm.

*(cannon shot)*

ELIZABETH & SARA  
Ah!

NOTTINGHAM  
*(entering, with savage glee)*

All is over.

CHORUS

He is dead.

ELIZABETH

*(to Sara, choking with rage and grief)*

You will answer ... your delay I hold responsible.

Come too late, you have thrust him to the grave.

Why were you so slow a messenger?

Had you come one minute sooner ...

NOTTINGHAM *(gloating)*

Stand corrected! I claim the honor.

In my trust I was betrayed.

Blood I wanted, and blood I got.

ELIZABETH

*(to Sara)* Wicked woman!

*(to Nottingham)* Malignant man!

CHORUS

No return! No return!

ELIZABETH



For car- nage and slaugh- ter you'l an- swer to heav- en

A savage injustice  
Is calling for vengeance.

The angel of death  
Is waiting to punish  
Your part in the drama  
With measure for measure.

But greater the burden  
My shoulders must carry,  
Reproaches that only  
The grave will relieve.

To God in His mercy  
I turn in repentance,  
To pray for the peace  
I am never to know,  
To pray for the peace

I'll never, never know.

**CHORUS**

Oh, take comfort!  
Remember, remember  
The Queen has a duty.  
You live for your people  
And not for your self.  
You still are Queen!

**ELIZABETH**

No longer! This hour ... I died ...

**CHORUS**

O Queen!

**ELIZABETH**

Be silent, and leave me.  
A vision of horror arises before me,  
A blade soaked and splattered  
With blood from the slaughter.

A hideous phantom  
Is roaming the palace,  
A headless cadaver  
That staggers and lurches.

With groaning and shrieking  
The walls are resounding,  
The hallways beshrouded,  
But no place to hide.

Replacing my throne,  
There is only a tomb,  
Whose door slowly opens  
To draw me inside.

Oh, leave me!  
My crown I crave no longer.  
Now James the First  
Is King of England.  
On James I bestow my crown.

**THE END**