

by Friedrich Schiller

a new translation by Andrew Cowie.

Characters.

ELIZABETH I, Queen of England.

MARY STUART, Queen of Scots, a prisoner in England.

HANNAH KENNEDY, Mary's servant.

SIR AMIAS PAULET, keeper of Mary at Fotheringay Castle.

SIR EDWARD MORTIMER, Paulet's nephew.

THE EARL OF LEICESTER, Robert Dudley

GEORGE TALBOT, Earl of Salisbury.

LORD BURLEIGH, William Cecil, Lord High Treasurer.

SIR WILLIAM DAVISON, Secretary of State at Elizabeth's court.

COUNT L'AUBESPINE, the French Ambassador at Elizabeth's court.

OFFICER of the Guard at Elizabeth's court.

SIR ANDREW MELVILLE, Mary's former steward in Scotland.

Notes:

1. The Officer and Sir Andrew Melville can be doubled.
2. Dialogue marked with a / shows where the next speaker's cue interrupts the preceding line.

Prologue.

On Bosworth Field Richard the Third was slain
By Henry Tudor, seventh of that name.
King Henry took to wife the Yorkist Liz
And had seven children, of whom four lived.

First was Arthur, who wed Catherine of Spain,
The second was Henry, who married her again,
Third was Margaret, who married James the Scot,
Fourth was Mary; married French, best forgot.

Henry the Eighth had two girls and one boy,
Each to a different wife but each his joy,
They all ruled England, starting with his son,
Then Mary next when, sadly, Edward's gone.

When Mary died, Queen Catherine's only child,
Next came Eliz'beth, last of Henry's line.
While in Scotland, Henry's sister - remember her? -
Queen Margaret, had a son who had a girl -

Whose name was Mary too; queen, in days,
Of Scotland, then of France; a beauty they say.
And so the stage is set with our two queens;
One of Scotland, one of England, all seems -

Well, but each claims the crown from the other,
Depending on the merits of their mothers.
What they do and what they have to say,
Is now the business of this, our play.

Act I. Scene I. A room in Fotheringay Castle.

(PAULET and HANNAH are discovered on. PAULET is searching Mary's room.)

PAULET. Am I getting warm?

HANNAH. I don't know what you're looking for.

PAULET. I think you do.

(He finds a cabinet and tries to force it open.)

HANNAH. *(gives him a key)* Please don't break it.

PAULET. *(carefully unlocks the cabinet with the key and takes out some papers)* That's more like it.

HANNAH. It's nothing, just letters.

PAULET. Just letters? In a secret, locked cabinet? Why would she keep 'just letters' in a secret, locked cabinet? Do you keep your letters in a secret, locked cabinet?

HANNAH. I would if they were personal.

PAULET. I'll bet you would.

HANNAH. She writes to her friends. She's allowed to do that.

PAULET. Not if her friends are also Her Majesty's enemies. *(he looks at the letters)* They're in French.

HANNAH. Of course they are.

PAULET. What's she got to say in French she couldn't say in English?

HANNAH. She can't write in English.

PAULET. Then it's time she learned. Secret letters in a foreign language – it doesn't look good does it?

(Paulet reaches inside the cabinet and finds some jewellery.)

PAULET. Well, well, well, what have we here?

HANNAH. Please let her keep them.

PAULET. You know I can't do that.

HANNAH. It's all she has left.

PAULET. I doubt that. She did well to keep them hidden for so long but then it's easy to deceive people who trust you isn't it?

HANNAH. She didn't deceive you.

PAULET. She didn't have to – you did it for her.

HANNAH. I am her loyal servant.

PAULET. And she should be the loyal servant of Her Majesty on whose protection she depends.

HANNAH. She is!

PAULET. Really? Secret boxes? Secret letters?

HANNAH. *Personal* letters! You have no right / to treat her like this...

PAULET. I have every right! Why should I trust her?

HANNAH. Because she gave you her word.

PAULET. Which she breaks at every turn.

HANNAH. No!

PAULET. Yes!

HANNAH. Please sir, leave her something.

PAULET. Don't worry, she'll get it back. I give you my word.

HANNAH. This is no way to treat a queen.

PAULET. There's only one Queen in this country.

HANNAH. She has no mirror...

PAULET. Vanity.

HANNAH. ...no books...

PAULET. She has her Prayer Book.

HANNAH. ...no music. What possible danger can there be in her listening to music?

PAULET. She should spend her time in quiet contemplation and repentance.

HANNAH. Repentance for what?

PAULET. For inciting regicide and civil war. She should be grateful Her Majesty is merciful.

HANNAH. You call this mercy? She's a prisoner!

PAULET. She's alive. There are plenty who would wish her otherwise.

HANNAH. Including you?

PAULET. Her Majesty commands me to protect the Scottish queen so that is what I do.

HANNAH. Against your better judgement.

PAULET. I do my duty. I am loyal to my Queen, you and your mistress should learn to do likewise.

HANNAH. She *is* loyal!

PAULET. Nonsense! She claims the English crown as her own, she'd sell England to the French and betray the Church to Rome. You call that loyalty? Tell her to mend her ways and she can have all the books and music she likes.

(Enter MARY.)

MARY. *(to Paulet)* What are you doing?

HANNAH. May it please you Ma'am, he searched your room. I couldn't stop him Ma'am.

MARY. *(to Paulet again)* Is that true?

HANNAH. Please you Ma'am, he was going to break open your cabinet but I gave him the key so he wouldn't damage it.

MARY. Thank you Hannah.

HANNAH. Ma'am.

MARY. *(to Paulet)* There is no need for violence, You should have asked me.

PAULET. Ma'am.

MARY. You will find a letter there to my cousin, the Queen. I'd be grateful if you would deliver it for me.

PAULET. Very good, Ma'am.

MARY. Be sure to put it into her hands alone.

PAULET. Yes Ma'am.

MARY. You're a good man Paulet, I know I can trust you.

PAULET. Ma'am.

MARY. I've asked for an audience with the Queen. Do you think she'll grant it?

PAULET. Her Majesty will act in the best interests of her subjects, Ma'am.

MARY. Very diplomatic. I have the right to be judged by my peers, do I not?

PAULET. That is the law, Ma'am.

MARY. I have no peer in England but Elizabeth. Therefore I will submit to no justice but hers. That's fair isn't it?

PAULET. The Queen's justice, Ma'am, may be administered by her lawfully appointed delegates.

MARY. I don't trust them.

PAULET. Nor they you, Ma'am.

MARY. That was less diplomatic but probably true.

PAULET. You are subject to English law and to English courts. If you wished to avoid their jurisdiction, Ma'am, you should not have come here.

MARY. It was not by choice, I can assure you. I have also asked to see a priest.

PAULET. You have a dean / who awaits your instruction...

MARY. I don't want a dean! I said a priest, a proper Catholic priest.

PAULET. The law does not permit it, Ma'am.

MARY. She has no right to do this.

PAULET. She has every right, Ma'am.

MARY. Thank you Paulet. You may go.

PAULET. Very good, Ma'am.

MARY. And send a notary to prepare my will.

PAULET. Certainly Ma'am.

MARY. I hope I will be allowed to dispose of my belongings after my death?

PAULET. Of course, Ma'am.

MARY. Talk to me Paulet, please. What's going to happen to me?

PAULET. I do not know the Queen's mind on the matter, Ma'am.

MARY. But you know yours.

PAULET. Yes Ma'am, I know mine.

MARY. Which is?

(Paulet refuses to answer)

MARY. I can guess. I'm held against my will and then put in front of a tribunal to face allegations based on what?

PAULET. Surveillance and intelligence, Ma'am.

MARY. Forgeries and lies! Where is the evidence? Who are the witnesses? What kind of justice is this?

PAULET. Justice will be done, Ma'am, you may depend upon it.

MARY. Have they reached their judgement?

PAULET. I cannot tell.

MARY. Can't or won't? Am I condemned?

(Paulet again refuses to answer.)

MARY. These silences of yours are deafening. Am I to face death or exile?

PAULET. I cannot answer, Ma'am.

MARY. She is surrounded by people who hate me; Burleigh and the rest of them. The longer she waits, the more they'll poison her mind against me. But even she would not order the execution of a sovereign queen. Would she?

PAULET. She will execute the will of parliament and the rule of law.

(MORTIMER enters.)

MORTIMER. *(to PAULET)* There you are. Are you coming?

(MORTIMER exits. PAULET respectfully bows to MARY)

PAULET. Will that be all, Ma'am?

MARY. Yes. No, teach your nephew some manners; I am still a queen and I will be treated as such.

PAULET. Ma'am, your son rules in Scotland, your brother-in-law in France and your cousin in England. You are no queen, Ma'am, and you would do well to remember it.

(PAULET exits.)

HANNAH. How dare he speak to you like that!

MARY. Is that how they see me Hannah?

HANNAH. No, of course not!

MARY. It's true though, isn't it? What is a queen without a country?

HANNAH. You have more right to Scotland than James and more right to England than Elizabeth.

MARY. But what use are rights if you can't enforce them?

HANNAH. Your loyal followers will restore you to your throne, I know they will.

MARY. Not while I'm Elizabeth's prisoner they won't. She still blames me for Darnley's murder, I know she does.

HANNAH. But you had nothing to do with it!

MARY. I could have stopped it. Well, I am paid for it now aren't I?

HANNAH. You are forgiven for it now.

MARY. There is no forgiveness without repentance and I can't repent. I hated him and I wished him dead. I still do.

HANNAH. He was disloyal and unfaithful, you can't blame yourself for that.

MARY. He was my husband. A wife's love should be unconditional. But I stopped loving him and in return I have lost the love of my people.

HANNAH. You were young, Ma'am. You were too easily seduced.

MARY. By Bothwell? No, I can't blame him, if anything I was too easily seduced by Darnley.

HANNAH. Forgive me Ma'am, but Lord Bothwell bewitched you. Everyone knows it, nobody blames you.

MARY. Really? Is that true?

HANNAH. You did all you could.

MARY. I was in an impossible position, Scotland needed a king as much as I needed a husband.

HANNAH. Exactly! He took advantage of you, he looked to his own interests when you needed someone to look after your own.

MARY. He was very persuasive. But do the people see that?

HANNAH. I'm sure they do. You are their queen, Ma'am, you always will be.

MARY. Someone's coming.

HANNAH. It's Mortimer. Shall I tell him you're unwell?

MARY. No, I'll see him.

(Enter MORTIMER.)

MORTIMER. You can leave us now Hannah. I have business with the queen.

MARY. *(to Hannah)* Stay where you are.

MORTIMER. *(He gives MARY a letter.)* Read this. *(to HANNAH)*. Guard the door. Don't let my uncle in.

(HANNAH looks to MARY)

MARY. Do as he says.

(HANNAH exits.)

MARY. *(reading)* "Confide in Mortimer, who brings you this; you have no truer friend in England."

MORTIMER. From your uncle in France, the Cardinal of Lorraine.

MARY. Is this true? My best friend in England is my gaoler's nephew?

MORTIMER. *(kneeling)* Forgive me Ma'am but the pretence was necessary to avoid suspicion.

MARY. You may rise. How do you know my uncle?

MORTIMER. He heard my first confession.

MARY. You're a Catholic?

MORTIMER. I was raised an Anglican but when I turned twenty I travelled through France and Italy and I ended up in Rome. I found myself in the great square in front of St Peter's when the Pope came out onto the balcony to address the faithful.

MARY. I wish I could have been there.

MORTIMER. He was extraordinary. It was as if he spoke only to me. I knew then I had found my spiritual home. Everything I'd been told was corrupt in the Catholic faith; the churches, the vestments, the Mass, I could see existed solely for the glory of God. And the Holy Father is there to lead us to Him.

MARY. Go on.

MORTIMER. I realised my whole life had been a denial of God. You can't worship Him in drab churches and with dull prayers, He deserves the most magnificent cathedrals and the Latin Mass in all its poetry. What else is there? What purpose is there in life but to love God?

MARY. Your words are a comfort to me, thank you. I don't get much of that here.

MORTIMER. Your faith is your comfort, the lives of the saints teach us that.

MARY. I am no saint, Mortimer.

MORTIMER. Your uncle taught me to submit my mind and body to God; then no harm can come to us on earth.

MARY. You spoke to him? Does he remember me?

MORTIMER. Of course. I followed him to a Jesuit school in Rheims where I saw a portrait of the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. He told me her story; how she was raised a Catholic and was exiled in a Protestant country, how she served her people and how she suffered for her faith.

MARY. He said that?

MORTIMER. And more. He told me how your rightful claim to the English crown was usurped by Elizabeth. He told me how the death of your first husband drove you from France and the death of your second forced you to flee from Scotland. He told me how the rightful queen of England, France and Scotland has been kept prisoner for nineteen years by her cousin Elizabeth whose contempt for her people is matched only by her treachery towards you.

MARY. I still have hopes while men like him, and you, live. Does he know you are here?

MORTIMER. He gave me his blessing. I returned to England with no other purpose than to restore you to your rightful throne. *(he kneels to her)*

MARY. *(she raises him up again)* I'm glad to have a friend; I need all I can get.

MORTIMER. I see now why Elizabeth keeps you hidden from view.

MARY. Why?

MORTIMER. If the men of England could see you, they would lay down their lives in your service.

MARY. Let's hope it doesn't come to that.

MORTIMER. I hear news the tribunal has delivered its verdict.

MARY. And?

MORTIMER. Guilty. Parliament wants the sentence carried out as soon as possible.

MARY. What does the queen say?

MORTIMER. The queen withholds her royal assent.

MARY. Does she? So she's taken pity on me at last?

MORTIMER. Not pity; politics. She wants to be rid of you but not by her own hand.

MARY. Exile then. I can assure her there would be no happier exile than me.

MORTIMER. Exile is not an option.

MARY. If I can't be freed and I can't be executed; what then? A lifetime of internment? Or am I to be assassinated?

MORTIMER. It's possible Ma'am. She fears you more alive than dead. We have no time to lose. My friends and I have pledged to free you.

MARY. Your friends? What friends?

MORTIMER. We will take you from here to the house of the French ambassador. You can hide there until we put you on a ship to France.

MARY. How many people know about this?

MORTIMER. There are twelve of us.

MARY. Twelve? How appropriate. And which one is your Judas I wonder?

MORTIMER. I would trust each of them with my life, Ma'am.

MARY. And apparently with mine. It's too many; Burleigh's men are everywhere.

MORTIMER. I'm not afraid of Burleigh.

MARY. You should be. I want you to take a letter to Lord Leicester.

MORTIMER. Leicester? Why him?

MARY. I'll give you my portrait in miniature to prove it came from me.

(MARY takes a locket from her neck and gives it to MORTIMER.)

MORTIMER. I don't understand.

MARY. Leicester will explain. Take it.

(HANNAH enters.)

HANNAH. Sir Paulet is coming Ma'am and he's got a gentleman with him.

(MORTIMER and HANNAH exit and LORD BURLEIGH and PAULET enter.)

PAULET *(to Mary)*. Lord Burleigh to see you, Ma'am.

MARY. *(to Burleigh)* You may speak.

BURLEIGH. I am here on behalf of the court of justice.

MARY. Since Lord Burleigh is their messenger I can guess the message.

BURLEIGH. You have acknowledged the jurisdiction of the tribunal / which convened on the...

MARY. No I haven't. I have a right to be judged by my peers. My only peer in England is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. She was not present therefore, under English law, the tribunal was illegal.

BURLEIGH. But you were present, Ma'am, and you heard the accusations against you.

MARY. I did, but I was misled. I was told my absence would be taken as an admission of guilt.

BURLEIGH. It would.

MARY. But I had no defence counsel and no access to the papers used to condemn me. What kind of justice is that?

BURLEIGH. Your acknowledgement of the court is a courtesy. While you are in England you will submit to our laws whether you agree to them or not.

MARY. I am a foreign queen; you have no jurisdiction over me.

BURLEIGH. You cannot foment treason in a foreign country, Ma'am, and use your nationality as a defence.

MARY. I don't object to English laws, just the English judges.

BURLEIGH. You object to the judges? On what grounds? Do you think we picked beggars off the street? You think men like Talbot can't judge the evidence laid before them?

MARY. Forgive me Lord Burleigh, I am no lawyer. I came to this country seeking shelter. Since then I have been kept prisoner; no charges have been brought against me, I've had no right of appeal and no remission. If I am unwelcome then let me go. If I have offended the Queen then I apologise. You tell me to trust the tribunal. I wish I could but the men you sent to judge me are the same men who make laws one year and revoke them the next; they ratify Henry's marriage to Catherine then annul it. They anoint Lady Grey as their queen and then order her execution. They condemn Elizabeth as a bastard and then elevate her to the throne. They renounce the Pope at Henry's bidding, they honour him under Mary and renounce him again under Elizabeth. These men are not honourable, Lord Burleigh, and I will not submit to their judgement.

BURLEIGH. You speak well for someone who is not a lawyer, Ma'am. I'm sure you had no difficulty defending yourself before the tribunal.

MARY. No Scot can expect justice from an Englishman and no Catholic from a Protestant. What chance did I have?

BURLEIGH. Justice was both done and was seen to be done.

MARY. Come Burleigh, let us speak frankly. We both know that England's enemy is Scotland's friend and those who plot against Scotland will always find safe harbour in England. And it will remain so until our countries are united under one king.

BURLEIGH. Or queen?

MARY. Indeed.

BURLEIGH. And one faith?

MARY. Of course.

BURLEIGH. At least we can agree on something. A united kingdom living at peace under Queen Elizabeth free from Papist interference. Shall I tell Her Majesty or will you?

MARY. That would, of course be one option.

BURLEIGH. It is the only option.

MARY. No, it's not. Think of it Burleigh; not just England and Scotland but France, Spain and Italy too; a united Catholic Europe!

BURLEIGH. And we would have a Stuart queen to thank for it would we?

MARY. Yes! Why not? My ancestor ended the war between York and Lancaster, why shouldn't I end the conflict between England and Scotland?

BURLEIGH. And you would win this peace by inciting civil war and deposing England's queen?

MARY. No! I never wanted that! How can you say that?

BURLEIGH. I didn't come here to re-open the tribunal. I came to deliver its verdict.

(BURLEIGH produces a document and reads from it)

BURLEIGH. The Act reads as follows: *(reading)* "If a plot henceforth should rise in England, in the name or for the benefit of any claimant to England's crown, then justice should be done on such pretender, and the guilty party be prosecuted unto death." It has been proved / that the Scottish queen...

MARY. *(interrupting him and snatching the document away from him)* That law was passed solely to authorise my execution.

BURLEIGH. That law was passed to warn you not to plot against Her Majesty The Queen. A warning which you ignored.

MARY. Where is your evidence?

BURLEIGH. Your letters were presented at the tribunal.

MARY. Copies! Forgeries! Show me the proof that they came from me.

BURLEIGH. Babington named you in his confession.

MARY. But you executed him before he could testify in person.

BURLEIGH. Your secretaries swore under oath they were transcribed from your dictation.

MARY. Am I to be condemn on the evidence of my servants?

BURLEIGH. Are they dishonest?

MARY. Not dishonest but weak. I know your methods; they told you what you wanted to hear.

BURLEIGH. Her Majesty's government neither supports nor condones the use of torture. They gave their evidence freely.

MARY. But in secret, not in front of me! You can't dispense justice behind closed doors. Paulet, tell him; I have a right to hear my accusers do I not?

PAULET. Strictly speaking, she does.

MARY. *(to Burleigh)* You hear that? I don't want any special treatment but if I am subject to the sanctions of English law then grant me its protection too.

BURLEIGH. It wasn't just the Babington plot / you also wrote...

MARY. *(interrupting him)* That's what I was tried for so let's stick to that.

BURLEIGH. You also wrote to the Spanish ambassador...

MARY. Stick to the point.

BURLEIGH. ... and you incited Her Majesty's enemies...

MARY. Stick to the point! I came to England as England's friend but what loyalty do I owe a country that imprisons me? Do you think you can fight Her Majesty's enemies by imprisoning her friends?

BURLEIGH. You incited Her Majesty's enemies to raise armies against...

MARY. *You* incited them by imprisoning me! You have turned the whole world into a breeding ground for nationalists and religious fanatics. Please, Lord Burleigh, I beg you; I seek no quarrel with you or Her Majesty but we both know the Act was a fraud, the tribunal was a sham and this verdict is worthless so don't call it justice. *(Mary hands the verdict back to Burleigh)* I am in your hands; you can kill me but you cannot judge me. Do what you want but know what you are.

(MARY exits.)

BURLEIGH. I feel like I've just been dismissed by your prisoner.

PAULET. Old habits die hard.

BURLEIGH. I thought there'd be tears.

PAULET. She's tough.

BURLEIGH. Does she know the queen won't sign her death warrant?

PAULET. I wouldn't be surprised. This place leaks gossip.

BURLEIGH. That would explain it then. She thinks we're bluffing.

PAULET. You are, aren't you?

BURLEIGH. No, I'm not.

PAULET. And she's right, Babington should have been called to give evidence.

BURLEIGH. It's perfectly legal to hear evidence in secret where national security is at stake.

PAULET. But the secrecy is doing us more harm than good.

BURLEIGH. Don't you think we'd have got rid of her by now if we could? We're not stupid.

PAULET. Sorry, but nineteen years detention without trial – that's not the action of a civilised country.

BURLEIGH. Then tell me what to do with her! Set her free to incite civil war? Exile her to lead an invading army? Execute her and turn her into a martyr? What the hell am I supposed to do with this bloody woman? I wish to God she'd never come here.

PAULET. If every action leaves us open to censure then we have no reason not to be just.

BURLEIGH. That is the most perverse logic I've ever heard.

PAULET. If they're going to hate us whatever we do then we can at least satisfy our own consciences.

BURLEIGH. You can clear your conscience on Sunday. The rest of the week you serve Her Majesty.

PAULET. I don't separate the two.

BURLEIGH. Don't you? I do it all the time. Sometimes we have to put the interests of the Crown ahead of our own personal scruples. That is a form of sacrifice, Paulet, is it not?

PAULET. I suppose so, yes.

BURLEIGH. A sacrifice that is not difficult is not worth making, wouldn't you agree?

PAULET. Yes, I would.

BURLEIGH. So if you had to make the most difficult sacrifice of all then, as Her Majesty's loyal subject, you would do it.

PAULET. I would try, if I were able.

BURLEIGH. I'm sure you are Paulet. The Queen wants to be rid of her.

PAULET. I know, but there's nothing she can do.

BURLEIGH. Correct; there's nothing *she* can do.

PAULET. What does that mean?

BURLEIGH. You can do what the Queen cannot. And you can do it with a clear conscience because you would be serving her. Do you understand?

PAULET. Yes, I think so.

BURLEIGH. Yes you understand or yes you'll do it?

PAULET. I understand what you're asking me to do but I can't do it.

BURLEIGH. Can't or won't?

PAULET. Why me?

BURLEIGH. Who better? She's in your charge so it can be by any means and at any time you like.

PAULET. I have no mandate from Her Majesty.

BURLEIGH. Think of it as a silent mandate.

PAULET. A silent mandate? To kill a queen?

BURLEIGH. To deliver Her Majesty from a messy situation.

PAULET. Since when did Her Majesty's silent mandate override her spoken one?

BURLEIGH. Look, Paulet, when the Stuart woman was transferred from Talbot to you I think the intention was clear enough.

PAULET. I hope the intention was to keep her safe.

BURLEIGH. Well, yes and no. Talbot got too close to her. We wanted someone she couldn't seduce.

PAULET. And you found him.

BURLEIGH. Did we? I hope so, Paulet. She's an attractive woman, I'd hate to think your loyalty to Her Majesty has in any way been compromised.

PAULET. I can assure you I fulfil my commission to the letter.

BURLEIGH. I believe you, Paulet, but it doesn't look like that in London. We need something tangible. Put her in solitary confinement, spread the word that she's sick, and in a couple of weeks announce that she sadly lost her brave battle with whatever it is people die of round here. Your good name will be unblemished.

PAULET. But not my conscience.

BURLEIGH. Very well, you don't have to do it yourself, I'll send someone.

PAULET. No. I won't permit a murder under my roof. I was entrusted with the life of the Scottish queen and I will be worthy of that trust. When the time comes I will hand her over to the proper authority, whether that is to her freedom, to another gaoler or to her executioner. Good day sir.

(PAULET exits.)

BURLEIGH. We'll see about that.

(BURLEIGH exits.)

ACT II. SCENE I. London, a Hall in the Palace of Westminster.

(Enter TALBOT and DAVISON.)

DAVISON. My Lord Talbot, back so soon? Is the tournament over already?

TALBOT. Davison, how are you? You didn't go?

DAVISON. Working.

TALBOT. Shame, you'd have enjoyed it. Terrific spectacle; Her Majesty's virtue laid siege by the dastardly French; that sort of thing. Horses, artillery; excellent.

DAVISON. And did the Virgin Queen manage to defend her honour?

TALBOT. Of course.

DAVISON. Not much encouragement for poor old Anjou then.

TALBOT. It's theatre, dear boy. When it comes to the real thing she'll roll over and have her tummy tickled, you mark my word.

DAVISON. You think so? I'm not so sure.

TALBOT. Her Majesty's not stupid, and neither is Anjou. She wants an heir and he wants an ally. It's a marriage made in heaven.

DAVISON. Does she love him?

TALBOT. What a strange question.

(Enter ELIZABETH talking to COUNT AUBESPINE followed by LEICESTER, wearing the blue ribbon of the Order Of The Garter, and BURLEIGH who join TALBOT and DAVISON while ELIZABETH and AUBESPINE speak.)

ELIZABETH (*to Aubespine*). You must miss your home while you are away from France, sir.

AUBESPINE. Not at all, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. I'm afraid we can't compete with the splendour of the St Germain court.

AUBESPINE. The glory of the English court is its queen, Ma'am, and in that you have no equal.

ELIZABETH (*flattered*.) Too kind.

AUBESPINE. Your Majesty, the Duke of Anjou is impatient for news. I beg leave to convey to him your consent to his proposal of marriage.

ELIZABETH. You may convey it, Aubespine, when you have it.

AUBESPINE. Of course, Ma'am. May I convey to him when he might hope for an answer?

ELIZABETH. Not now. My people do not wish me to die a maid and I welcome the prospect of a closer alliance with France, you may convey that. But my personal happiness, and his, must take second place to more pressing matters of state.

AUBESPINE. I understand, Ma'am, forgive me, Ma'am. I hope we may look forward to your consent in happier times?

ELIZABETH. You may hope, Aubespine. For my part, I had hoped to remain unmarried but my subjects would have me breed, so breed I must.

AUBESPINE. Your Majesty, your people's hopes for your succession are a token of their love for you.

ELIZABETH. Or their fear of the alternative.

AUBESPINE. No man is worthy of you, Ma'am, but if ever one came close then, by virtue of rank and descent, it is my lord the Duke of Anjou.

ELIZABETH. Yes, yes, very well. You may convey to him this: if I must be wed then there is no-one I would marry with less reluctance than him. Let that satisfy him.

AUBESPINE. I will give him your message, Ma'am, but he looks for more.

ELIZABETH. Does he? (*She takes a ring from her finger*) Then give him this.

AUBESPINE (*kneels and kisses her hand*). I receive this present, and all it represents, in the name of my lord and on his behalf I express his gratitude and his service to you, my Queen.

ELIZABETH *(to Leicester)*. May I? *(She takes the blue ribbon from his neck, and invests Aubespine with it)*. Invest him with this, as I invest you, and receive you into the duties of my gallant order. Let this end the enmity between our countries and unite the crowns of England and France.

AUBESPINE. This act of kindness and diplomacy becomes you, Ma'am. May I invite you to shed the same light of wisdom and compassion on France's dowager queen, and your cousin, Mary of Scotland?

ELIZABETH. That's enough. If France is my friend then my enemies are hers too, and that includes the Scottish queen. Leave us.

(AUBESPINE exits with DAVISON.)

BURLEIGH. May we wish for a happy outcome to your Majesty's conference with the French ambassador?

ELIZABETH. You may.

BURLEIGH. Your people will be glad of it.

ELIZABETH. I aim to please.

BURLEIGH. But they look for further reassurance, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Do they? Regarding what?

BURLEIGH. Your cousin, Ma'am. Your people cannot be sure of England's peace while she lives.

ELIZABETH. Aubespine wants me to pardon her and you want me to execute her.

BURLEIGH. Not I, Your Majesty, your people.

ELIZABETH. So 'my people' want to marry me off to the French Duke and then execute his former queen, is that it? Perhaps 'my people' should think before they speak, Lord Burleigh.

BURLEIGH. Ma'am, the tribunal has delivered its verdict on the Scottish queen.

ELIZABETH. So?

BURLEIGH. So, we await your royal assent to carry out the sentence.

ELIZABETH. I believe the conspiracy was exposed and the conspirators arrested, were they not?

BURLEIGH. Yes, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Then I am in no hurry to foment another one by dragging my cousin to the scaffold.

BURLEIGH. Your Majesty, I have reason to believe new plots are laid against you in which she is involved.

ELIZABETH. You have evidence of this?

BURLEIGH. Not evidence, Ma'am, but I am recently returned from Fotheringay and I have intelligence / from the most reliable....

ELIZABETH. (*interrupting him*) Intelligence? Or gossip?

BURLEIGH. ...intelligence, Ma'am, from the most reliable of sources.

ELIZABETH. I cannot remove a sovereign head of state on intelligence alone. Rumours buzz around her like flies, they always have done. Bring me evidence or keep your peace.

BURLEIGH. If you wait for this conspiracy to reveal itself, Ma'am, it will be too late. My intelligence is that the Cardinal of Lorraine is running a training centre in Rheims to radicalise young Papists. He teaches them they are fighting a holy war and that if they die in the service of their religion they will be rewarded in heaven.

ELIZABETH. What of it?

BURLEIGH. These men are now in England, Ma'am. They intend to murder you and restore Catholic rule to England with the Scottish queen at its head.

ELIZABETH. I see. What do you say, Talbot?

TALBOT. I agree with Burleigh, delay is dangerous.

BURLEIGH. Thank you.

TALBOT. But so is haste. You can only apply English law to English subjects.

BURLEIGH. Here we go again!

ELIZABETH. Carry on.

TALBOT. The Scottish queen is not an English subject / so sentence of death...

BURLEIGH. (*interrupting him*) She's on English soil / so she is subject to...

TALBOT. ...she is not an English subject so sentence of death cannot lawfully be carried out on her.

BURLEIGH. So the tribunal was wrong was it? And Parliament? No-one has any powers over her?

TALBOT. By all means detain her or expel her but you cannot legally execute her.

BURLEIGH. You're as bad as she is, do you know that? She can't commit treason on English soil without facing English justice. Your Majesty, I know this is a difficult decision but the situation requires us to make difficult decisions. We didn't want her here but she came and we've got to deal with it. You must carry out the will of the people and they want her head.

ELIZABETH. You're unusually quiet Lord Leicester.

LEICESTER. I was stunned into silence by my Lords Burleigh and Talbot.

ELIZABETH. I know the feeling. What do you think we should do with her?

LEICESTER. I must admit I'm surprised to hear idle gossip presented at court as 'intelligence' and the good natured grumbings of a nation at peace with itself described as a conspiracy. Did I miss something? Are we at war? Are there riots in the streets? How is she a threat? She couldn't even keep her own kingdom, let alone lay claim to yours.

ELIZABETH. Thank you Leicester. Some common sense at last.

LEICESTER. Your Majesty has exercised a policy of containment for the last nineteen years. That policy is prudent, merciful and effective. The country is at peace, the Anglican faith respected and your right to the throne is secure. Some of your political opponents are Catholics - so what? The fact that they can express their views is a sign of Your Majesty's strength, not weakness. I say leave her where she is.

BURLEIGH. You approved her sentence. Why the change of heart?

LEICESTER. She was sentenced in accordance with the law but we must act now in the best interests of the state. She can remain under sentence of death for another nineteen years if necessary.

(Enter PAULET with a letter and MORTIMER.)

ELIZABETH. Paulet; what brings you from Fotheringay?

PAULET. Your Majesty, grant me leave to present my nephew, newly returned from Rheims.

MORTIMER *(kneeling)*. God keep Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH. You may rise. What news from France?

MORTIMER. Much, Ma'am. I befriended several Scottish exiles to gain their confidence and learn their plans.

PAULET. They gave him coded messages for the Scottish queen which he has turned over to us.

ELIZABETH. Were you able to break the code?

PAULET. With some difficulty, yes Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. And what did you learn?

MORTIMER. They know that the Duke of Anjou is your suitor Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. You need no code breakers to discover that.

(PAULET gives ELIZABETH a letter which she starts to read while MORTIMER continues to brief her)

MORTIMER. So they are turning their attention away from France and recruiting in Spain.

ELIZABETH. Go on.

MORTIMER. They also received a new papal bull calling on all Catholics to rise up against you.

LEICESTER. 'Pope condemns Anglican queen'. That's hardly news.

(ELIZABETH withdraws to read the letter. MORTIMER and LEICESTER speak privately together as do BURLIEGH, TALBOT and PAULET).

BURLEIGH. *(to Paulet)*. What's that?

PAULET. It's from the Scottish queen.

BURLEIGH. Why haven't I seen it?

PAULET. She asked me to deliver it into Her Majesty's hands.

BURLEIGH. And you do everything she tells you?

PAULET. Not everything.

TALBOT. What does it say?

PAULET. She wants to meet her.

BURLEIGH. Well she can't.

TALBOT. Why not?

BURLEIGH. Because we've just convicted her of treason, that's why not.

TALBOT. The Queen might take pity on her.

BURLEIGH. I'm sure she will, that's why it must never happen. You heard what Mortimer said; we form an alliance with France and the fanatics move to Spain or, worse still, to Scotland. We'll never be shot of them until we get rid of that woman.

ELIZABETH (*having read Mary's letter*). She's changed; I feel sorry for her.

TALBOT. Then be merciful Ma'am. Visit her at Fotheringay and decide for yourself if she's a threat.

BURLEIGH. That's exactly what she wants. Don't do it.

LEICESTER. It's up to Her Majesty who she meets. I think we can trust her to decide what's best, don't you?

ELIZABETH. You may leave me now. All of you.

(*The lords start to leave.*)

ELIZABETH. Mortimer, can I have a word?

(*MORTIMER remains behind with ELIZABETH as the others exit.*)

ELIZABETH. You've done well. Thank you.

MORTIMER. Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. You have a sense of adventure, I like that. My advisers are cautious men, which is of course as it should be, but you're young and ambitious; you take risks.

MORTIMER. Yes, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. You see, Mortimer, our cousin Mary isn't really the problem.

MORTIMER. Ma'am?

ELIZABETH. The problem is her followers. She's been taken up by a ragged coalition of nationalists and fundamentalists who'd normally spend their time fighting each other but they've latched onto her instead.

MORTIMER. Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Leicester says I should leave her there and let her die of natural causes; what do you think?

MORTIMER. I would not presume to question the wisdom of Your Majesty's counsellors, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. It's the least worst option I suppose but how long will that take? One year? Five years? Twenty five? A lot can happen in twenty five years.

MORTIMER. Yes, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. But if she were to die of natural causes in, say, a month, that would be quite different.

MORTIMER. Is she unwell, Ma'am?

ELIZABETH. Who knows? It happens all the time. If you returned to Fotheringay with your uncle and in a month from now you told me she'd died in her sleep I would be most grateful.

(PAULET enters.)

MORTIMER. I will do all in my power to serve you, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. I'm glad to hear it.

(ELIZABETH exits leaving MORTIMER with PAULET)

PAULET. What did she say?

MORTIMER. Nothing.

PAULET. I'm not stupid. Don't be taken in by all this.

MORTIMER. You brought me here.

PAULET. I know. Don't make me regret it.

MORTIMER. I'm learning a lot.

PAULET. I'm sure you are, but whatever she asked you to do, and whatever she promised in return, nothing is worth losing your conscience or your good name for.

MORTIMER. I don't know who should be more insulted by that remark, me or Her Majesty.

PAULET. Look, I know what she said because Burleigh asked me to do the same thing. I refused and I hope you did too.

(enter LEICESTER.)

LEICESTER. Mortimer, there you are! Congratulations on your new commission. You don't waste much time do you?

(PAULET looks at MORTIMER and walks out.)

LEICESTER. What's the matter with him?

MORTIMER. I don't know. What do you know about my commission?

LEICESTER. Nothing; I was fishing. Interesting reaction though. You wanted to see me.

MORTIMER. Can I speak in confidence?

LEICESTER. Of course.

MORTIMER *(producing a letter)*. I have a letter for you from the Queen of Scotland.

(MORTIMER gives a letter to LEICESTER)

MORTIMER. And she gave me this. *(hands him the locket)*

LEICESTER *(opening the locket)*. That's her picture! *(kisses the locket and then reads the letter)* You know what's in it?

MORTIMER. No. As far as I knew you were Elizabeth's friend and Mary's enemy.

LEICESTER. You can't too careful – Burleigh's spies are everywhere. You know we were engaged?

MORTIMER. To Mary or Elizabeth?

LEICESTER. Mary, but I got greedy and went after Elizabeth.

MORTIMER. And with some success I gather.

LEICESTER. No, she'll marry Anjou and keep me as a pet until she finds someone new. *(looking at Mortimer)* Someone younger. Meanwhile the woman I love is your uncle's prisoner.

MORTIMER. Then set her free.

LEICESTER. How? You want me to storm the castle single-handed?

MORTIMER. Not single-handed. I can help.

LEICESTER. By doing what?

MORTIMER. I'll release her from the inside. They trust me there.

LEICESTER. It's too dangerous.

MORTIMER. We can't leave her there.

LEICESTER. You could make things worse for her.

MORTIMER. She's been a prisoner for nineteen years; how could I make things worse?

LEICESTER. We need to be patient.

MORTIMER. We need to act! I'll die for her if I have to.

LEICESTER. What if she's the one that dies?

MORTIMER. She's under sentence of death. If we do nothing she'll die anyway.

LEICESTER. Elizabeth won't sign the warrant.

MORTIMER. No, she asked me to murder her instead.

LEICESTER. What did you say?

MORTIMER. I said yes.

LEICESTER. You said yes?

MORTIMER. Only to stop her asking anyone else.

LEICESTER. That'll buy us some time.

MORTIMER. Not much, she's given me a month.

LEICESTER. Is that all? So she's got a month to distance herself from Mary's murder.

MORTIMER. By doing what?

LEICESTER. Good question. She should look as if she were just about to pardon her.

MORTIMER. But she won't.

LEICESTER. She might.

MORTIMER. I've got a better idea; let's kidnap Elizabeth and force her to free Mary on pain of death.

LEICESTER. Kidnap the Queen of England?

MORTIMER. Why not? Plenty of English Catholics would help us.

LEICESTER. No-one in their right mind would help you, I certainly wouldn't.

MORTIMER. So what am I supposed to tell Mary?

LEICESTER. Tell her to wait.

MORTIMER. Is that it?

LEICESTER. Tell her the people who love her still think of her.

MORTIMER. Tell her yourself!

(Exit MORTIMER and enter ELIZABETH.)

ELIZABETH. I thought I heard voices.

LEICESTER. *(startled)* It was Mortimer.

ELIZABETH. What's the matter?

LEICESTER. Nothing. Why?

ELIZABETH. You look flustered.

LEICESTER. By your beauty, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Oh that.

LEICESTER. And the thought of losing you to the Duke of Anjou.

ELIZABETH. I cannot marry where I will, Leicester, you know that. The Scottish queen lost her throne to a reckless marriage, I've no intention of following her example. They tell me she's beautiful. Is she?

LEICESTER. You should meet her and judge for yourself.

ELIZABETH. You didn't answer my question. She's younger than me of course.

LEICESTER. I wouldn't have said so.

ELIZABETH. She wants to meet me.

LEICESTER. Then do it.

ELIZABETH. Burleigh disapproves.

LEICESTER. It's not up to Burleigh.

ELIZABETH. You think I should?

LEICESTER. I think you should avoid looking like Burleigh's puppet.

ELIZABETH. Is that how they see me?

LEICESTER. They might.

ELIZABETH. Is it how you see me?

LEICESTER. Meet her; what have you got to lose?

ELIZABETH. How? She can't come here and it looks bad if I go to her.

LEICESTER. You can meet by accident. There are woods near Fotheringay, you could run into each other there.

ELIZABETH. As simple as that?

LEICESTER. As simple as that.

ELIZABETH. Very well, but if this goes wrong I shall blame you.

(Exeunt.)

Act II. Scene I. A wood near Fotheringay Castle.

(Enter MARY, running, followed by HANNAH, walking.)

HANNAH. Slow down, I can't keep up!

MARY. Free at last!

HANNAH. Let's not get carried away Ma'am, it's a walk in the woods, that's all.

MARY. It's as free as I get so let me enjoy it.

HANNAH. Very well Ma'am, but don't go too far.

MARY. What if I just kept walking? What could they do to me?

HANNAH. They could take you back and never let you out again, that's what.

MARY. No, this is Leicester's doing. They're going to set me free, I know it.

HANNAH. *(dubious)* Maybe.

(Hunting horns sound in the distance.)

MARY. That's the hunt! Shall we follow them Hannah?

(Hunting horns sound again, louder this time.)

HANNAH. They're coming this way!

(Enter PAULET.)

PAULET. Good day Ma'am, and I hope it is a good day?

MARY. It is, it is, thank you, thank you, thank you!

PAULET. I gave the Queen your letter Ma'am.

MARY. And she set me free? Just like that?

PAULET. Not exactly Ma'am. You heard the horns?

MARY. Yes?

PAULET. The Queen is hunting in these woods.

MARY. What?

PAULET. And she will be here soon.

HANNAH. Are you all right Ma'am?

PAULET. That's what you wanted isn't it? So you can talk to her and ask for clemency?

MARY. Why didn't you warn me? I don't know what to say to her. What am I supposed to say?

(Enter TALBOT.)

MARY. Talbot! I can't see her now. Take me back!

TALBOT. She's coming Ma'am.

MARY. I had it all worked out in my head but now it's gone.

TALBOT. Just be respectful and humble.

MARY. Humble? To her?

TALBOT. Don't make demands, appeal to her generosity.

MARY. I can't do it. Why did I ask to see her? Why didn't you stop me?

TALBOT. She has feelings too you know. She was moved by your letter.

MARY. Is Burleigh with her?

TALBOT. No, just the Earl of Leicester.

MARY. Leicester?

TALBOT. He talked her into it.

MARY. I knew it!

PAULET. The Queen!

(Enter ELIZABETH and THE EARL OF LEICESTER.)

ELIZABETH *(to Leicester)*. Where are we?

LEICESTER. Fotheringay, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. We will walk here awhile. *(to Talbot, looking at Mary)* Who is this lady?

TALBOT. A supplicant Ma'am, who begs word with you.

ELIZABETH. Begs? I see no begging.

MARY. *(taking the hint to kneel to her)* I bless the power which raised you to your throne Ma'am. May you now be charitable to a sister brought low by less fortunate circumstances.

ELIZABETH *(leaving her on her knees)*. You are where your fate has brought you as I am where mine has delivered me.

MARY. It's true I have earned my fate but we are of one blood. Look kindly on your cousin who wishes you only love and respect.

ELIZABETH. Love and respect? Did you conspire to murder me out of love and respect?

MARY. *(stands)* No, I did no such thing, I just want to be free.

ELIZABETH. That's not what the tribunal said.

MARY. I mean you no harm. I came to you as a cousin and you spurned me, I came to you as a queen and you imprisoned me. I came to you as a Christian but you have not shown me Christian charity.

ELIZABETH. I have kept you safe from your enemies, what more do you want?

MARY. I don't blame you, other people have come between us. Please, let us talk; tell me what I've done wrong and I'll explain.

ELIZABETH. Other people? So you never declared yourself Queen of England? And when the Pope instructed English Catholics to rise up against me you took my side did you?

MARY. I was in their hands / I was powerless...

ELIZABETH. No! You could have shown the loyalty you now ask of me but you did not.

MARY. I never wanted to depose you, only to be acknowledged as your successor.

ELIZABETH. And how long would I have lived if I'd done that?

MARY. If I ever had ambitions to the throne of England, those days are gone. I'm older now, I just want to live in peace. Look at me, I am what you have made me; weak and poor and friendless.

ELIZABETH. No more tricks up your sleeve? No assassins waiting to murder me as I sleep? Good. Then I was right to lock you up and I am right to leave you there.

MARY. Please, listen to me; your people fear you, be merciful to me now so they may learn to love you before their fear turns to hatred.

ELIZABETH. Is that a threat?

MARY. No, of course not, I want to help.

ELIZABETH. You hear that Leicester? She's threatening me. So much for that slippery tongue Burleigh warned me of.

MARY. You don't understand; I have made mistakes, I admit it / but I never...

ELIZABETH. Darnley was in her way so she got rid of him, now I'm in her way and she'd get rid of me too if she could.

MARY. What? No, that's not true! How can you say that?

ELIZABETH. I will not be lectured by Bothwell's whore on how a queen should conduct herself.

MARY. How dare you! Your mother was the whore and so are you!

ELIZABETH. And now we see who she really is; the bawling fishwife! / The common slut!

TALBOT. *(to Mary)* Please madam, calm yourself...

MARY. I will not calm myself! / I've spent nineteen years calming myself!

TALBOT. *(to Elizabeth)* She doesn't know what she's saying Ma'am...

LEICESTER. *(to Elizabeth)* Don't listen to her Ma'am, let's go...

(LEICESTER, TALBOT and PAULET lead ELIZABETH away while MARY shouts after her)

MARY. The Queen of England is a bastard whore! How dare you judge me! I am the rightful queen here, not you! I am the Queen of England! Do you hear me? I am the Queen of England!

HANNAH. What have you done, Ma'am?

MARY. Something I should have done years ago. I showed her up for what she really is.

(Enter MORTIMER.)

MORTIMER. You may leave us Hannah.

HANNAH. But Ma'am, we ought to get back / before they...

MARY. Go.

(HANNAH exits.)

MORTIMER. I heard it all. You were magnificent!

MARY. You don't think I went too far?

MORTIMER. You didn't go far enough!

MARY. Did you speak to Leicester? Did you give him my letter?

MORTIMER. I've never seen anyone stand up to her like that. You were like a wild animal!

MARY. The letter, what did Leicester say when you gave him the letter?

MORTIMER. You'll get nothing from him, he's hopeless.

MARY. What do you mean? He was here just now.

MORTIMER. He won't save you. He doesn't deserve you!

MARY. You did give him the letter didn't you?

MORTIMER. Why do you keep talking about Leicester? You don't need him, you've got me now.

MARY. What can you do?

MORTIMER. Well for a start I can help you escape from here. We're leaving tonight.

MARY. Tonight? What do you mean, tonight? What are you talking about?

MORTIMER. You don't think she'll let you get away with that do you? I've made my confession and I'm not afraid to die.

MARY. What are you going to do?

MORTIMER. I'll come to your room, I'll kill the guards and we'll leave together.

MARY. You can't do that. What about your uncle?

MORTIMER. I'll kill him too. I have absolution; I can do anything I like! I could kill Elizabeth if I wanted to. Isn't it wonderful?

MARY. No, Mortimer, listen to me...

MORTIMER. Don't think I wouldn't, either. You have no idea what I'm capable of.

MARY. You mustn't.

MORTIMER. Life must be lived with passion or not at all. I see that now. They can torture me or kill me or do anything they like, as long as I have you.

(MORTIMER tries to embrace MARY)

MARY. Leave me alone.

MORTIMER. Just one kiss before we die.

MARY. Get away from me, please.

MORTIMER. Our souls will be united in death, so let our bodies be united in our last few hours of life.

MARY *(calling out)*. Hannah!

MORTIMER. There's no one to help you, only me.

MARY. Stop it now, you're scaring me.

MORTIMER. Call all you like, no one's going to come. You're not a queen any more, you're just a woman, alone with a man who adores you.

MARY. Help me! Hannah!

MORTIMER. Surely my sacrifice is worth something? Some reward? Let's face it, I wouldn't be the first would I?

MARY. Please don't.

MORTIMER. Do I frighten you? Some women like to be frightened. They find it exciting.

MARY. Please Mortimer.

MORTIMER. Do you want me to frighten you? Do you?

(enter HANNAH)

HANNAH. They're coming! The castle is surrounded.

MORTIMER (*startled*). Already? Don't worry, I'll defend you.

HANNAH. Quickly!

(*HANNAH and MARY exit. PAULET enters*)

PAULET. Where is she?

MORTIMER. Where's who?

PAULET. Our prisoner. Where is she?

MORTIMER. Why? What's the matter?

PAULET. Her Majesty has been murdered on the road to London.

(*Exit PAULET and enter LEICESTER*)

LEICESTER (*rushing in*). There you are.

MORTIMER. What's happened?

LEICESTER. Some madman attacked her.

MORTIMER. So it's true then? Elizabeth is dead and Mary will ascend the English throne!

(*exeunt*)

Act II. Scene II. Elizabeth's palace.

(*Enter COUNT AUBESPINE and BURLEIGH.*)

AUBESPINE. How is she?

BURLEIGH. She'll live. Talbot disarmed him.

AUBESPINE. Who was it?

BURLEIGH. I don't know, some Frenchman.

AUBESPINE. A madman, surely. Thank God the Queen was spared. I would be grateful if you would bring me to her so I can express my people's sincere gratitude / for her merciful...

BURLEIGH. No need, I'll tell her myself.

AUBESPINE. My Lord Burleigh, I know my duty.

BURLEIGH. Apparently not. Your diplomatic immunity will get you as far as the Channel but if you're still here tomorrow I can't guarantee your safety.

AUBESPINE. You don't think I had anything to do with this?

BURLEIGH. You signed his papers.

AUBESPINE. I sign a lot of papers, that doesn't mean I know what people are going to do with them.

BURLEIGH. He's already confessed and he named you.

AUBESPINE. You can't do this. I warn you, Anjou will break off the engagement.

BURLEIGH. Too late, she already has. *(calls to off-stage)* Davison! *(to Aubespine)* I'll have you escorted to your ship. Don't show yourself in the street or they'll tear you apart.

(Enter DAVISON.)

BURLEIGH. The French ambassador is leaving. Give him safe conduct to the coast.

DAVISON. Yes, sir.

BURLEIGH. And prepare the Stuart woman's death warrant.

DAVISON. Very good, sir.

AUBESPINE. The King will hear of this.

BURLEIGH. Tell him you failed.

(Exeunt DAVISON and AUBESPINE and enter LEICESTER.)

LEICESTER. So this is where your French alliance got us; an attempt on Her Majesty's life.

BURLEIGH. My conscience is clear. How's yours?

LEICESTER. You're loving this aren't you? Yet again the security of the nation is in your hands. I almost suspect you of cooking up the whole thing yourself.

BURLEIGH. I'd be careful where I point the finger if I were you.

LEICESTER. What does that mean?

BURLEIGH. You went behind my back to bring the queen to Fotheringay.

LEICESTER. I did nothing of the kind.

BURLEIGH. Where, purely by coincidence, an assassin was waiting for her.

LEICESTER. What are you trying to say?

BURLEIGH. Don't execute the Scottish queen you said. She's harmless you said. Let the Queen meet who she likes you said.

(Enter MORTIMER)

MORTIMER. Leicester! There you are.

LEICESTER. *(to Burleigh.)* Are you saying I set this up?

BURLEIGH. Are you saying you didn't?

(Exit BURLEIGH).

MORTIMER. They're on to us. We must run.

LEICESTER. You run, I'm not going anywhere.

MORTIMER. They know about the French plot.

LEICESTER. That's nothing to do with me.

MORTIMER. Me neither but they know I was in Rheims / and they've put two and two...

LEICESTER. *(interrupting him)* Don't drag me into this. It's your problem, you deal with it.

MORTIMER. No, listen to me...

LEICESTER. No, you listen to me! I had nothing to do with this and I have nothing to do with you!

MORTIMER. It's too late for that. They found the letter.

LEICESTER. What letter?

MORTIMER. Your letter from Mary.

LEICESTER. Where is it now?

MORTIMER. Burleigh's got it.

LEICESTER. Then I'm dead.

MORTIMER. I'm going to Scotland, you can come with me if you like?

LEICESTER. I've got a better idea. *(calls to off-stage)* Guard! Guard, come quickly!

MORTIMER. What are you doing?

(The OFFICER enters)

LEICESTER. Seize him! He tried to kill Her Majesty!

MORTIMER. Get away from me!

(MORTIMER draws a dagger.)

OFFICER. Give me the weapon.

MORTIMER. A curse on those who have betrayed their faith and Queen Mary! A curse on those who have sold themselves to Henry's bastard!

OFFICER. Give it to me.

(The OFFICER and LEICESTER move in on MORTIMER)

MORTIMER. God damn you all!

(MORTIMER stabs himself and falls into the arms of the OFFICER who carries him off with LEICESTER).

Act II, Scene III. Another part of the palace.

(Enter ELIZABETH with Mary's letter to Leicester in her hand and BURLEIGH.)

ELIZABETH. So he lured me to Fotheringay to present me as a gift to his whore?

BURLEIGH. Your Majesty was deceived; we all were.

ELIZABETH. Take him to the Tower.

BURLEIGH. Very good, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Is her death warrant ready?

BURLEIGH. It's on its way, Ma'am.

(Voices off, we hear LEICESTER arguing with the Queen's guards outside the door)

ELIZABETH. Is that him?

BURLEIGH. I believe so, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. They've been told not to let him in?

BURLEIGH. They have, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Might he be innocent? Could this be a forgery?

BURLEIGH. No Ma'am, the letter is without doubt...

(Enter LEICESTER.)

LEICESTER. How dare they try to stop me seeing my Queen!

BURLEIGH. Get out.

LEICESTER. *(to ELIZABETH)* If you can see Burleigh you can see me.

BURLEIGH. My lord, you have been instructed not to enter the Queen's chamber.

LEICESTER. Instructed? By who? If Her Majesty wants me to leave, she can say it to my face.

ELIZABETH. Go away.

LEICESTER. Is that your wish or Burleigh's?

ELIZABETH. *(hands him Mary's letter)* Read this.

LEICESTER. I can explain. *(to Burleigh)* I want to speak to the Queen in private.

ELIZABETH *(to Burleigh)*. Stay where you are. *(to Leicester)* Is it genuine?

LEICESTER. Yes, it is.

ELIZABETH. You said you'd help her?

LEICESTER. Yes.

ELIZABETH. Why?

LEICESTER. It was a trick.

ELIZABETH. Oh for God's sake!

} *(spoken together)*

BURLEIGH. Do you expect us to believe that?

LEICESTER. I took a risk and it worked.

BURLEIGH. What worked? What are you talking about?

LEICESTER if I hadn't intervened then the Stuart woman would now be free.

BURLEIGH. What?

LEICESTER. Her Majesty gave young Mortimer a secret commission. *(to Elizabeth)* Shall I go on?

(ELIZABETH looks at him and at BURLEIGH but says nothing.)

LEICESTER. She told him to murder the Scottish queen.

BURLEIGH. *(to ELIZABETH)* Is that true?

LEICESTER. But he never intended to kill her. He planned to free her and to kill you.

ELIZABETH. No.

LEICESTER. *(to Burleigh)* Where were your spies, Burleigh? Where was your 'intelligence'? I knew Mortimer would read any letters he carried between us so I used them to win his confidence. Then as soon as he confessed I took him prisoner and handed him over to the authorities.

ELIZABETH. Where is he now?

LEICESTER. He killed himself. If he'd lived he would have cleared my name.

BURLEIGH. Your alibi is dead? How convenient. Did he kill himself, or did you kill him?

LEICESTER. Guard!

(The OFFICER enters)

OFFICER. Sir?

LEICESTER. Tell the Queen how Mortimer died.

OFFICER. Yes sir. I was on duty in the palace and my lord *(indicating Leicester)* instructed me to arrest the gentleman saying he was intent on killing Your Majesty. I tried to apprehend him but he grew angry and drew his weapon. He then swore a violent oath and stabbed himself to death.

LEICESTER. Thank you. That will be all.

OFFICER. Sir.

(Exit OFFICER.)

ELIZABETH. I don't know what to think. I want to believe you.

LEICESTER. Think what you like about me but the Stuart woman must die.

BURLEIGH. You were the one saying we should let her live.

LEICESTER. Only until she gave herself away. We now have the evidence we need so we should act on it.

BURLEIGH. I agree. Perhaps you'd care to witness the execution?

LEICESTER. What?

ELIZABETH. Good idea.

LEICESTER. I'm sure that duty would better become Lord Burleigh than me.

ELIZABETH. He can go with you. *(to Burleigh)* Bring me the warrant.

(Exit BURLEIGH. An angry demonstration is heard outside.)

ELIZABETH. What's that noise?

LEICESTER. I don't know. It's coming from the street. Guard!

(the OFFICER re-enters)

OFFICER. Sir?

LEICESTER. Who are those people?

OFFICER. A demonstration has gathered outside the palace, sir.

ELIZABETH. What do they want?

OFFICER. They've heard of an attempt on your life, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Tell them I'm safe.

OFFICER. They have been told, Ma'am, but they want the head of the Scottish queen.

ELIZABETH. Do they think they'll get it by marching through the streets?

(BURLEIGH re-enters with TALBOT and DAVISON carrying a paper).

ELIZABETH. What is it?

DAVISON. I have the warrant, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Oh yes. Thank you.

(She makes no attempt to take the paper.)

BURLEIGH. Your people demand it, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. *Some* of my people demand it.

TALBOT. If you don't think it's the right thing to do, Ma'am, then don't do it.

BURLEIGH. You have no choice.

TALBOT. They're frightened, that's all. You need to reassure them.

BURLEIGH. Sign the warrant, Ma'am.

(The sound outside gets louder)

DAVISON. They're getting nearer.

BURLEIGH. Or there's more of them. You must act now, Ma'am.

TALBOT. No. If it was right to delay execution before then it's still right now.

BURLEIGH. It was not right before and it's not right now! She was nearly murdered for God's sake!

ELIZABETH. That's enough. Leave me, all of you. Davison, will you wait outside please?

(They all leave ELIZABETH alone on stage. DAVISON leaves the warrant with her.)

ELIZABETH. I've had enough of this. They should have killed me while they had the chance. If one of us must die so the other can live then why not me? I govern in name only, every move I make is dictated by the public. Today they want Mary's head; if I sign her death warrant, how long before someone else signs mine?

(pulling herself together) Leaders should lead. Why have rulers at all if we offer no guidance? Very well then, I'll set a good example and pardon her. But the people want her dead and if I lose their trust, what do I have left? I'll follow my conscience; which is the greater sin; to betray my cousin or my country? I don't know. There's no right in this, just shades of wrong. My duty then. She attacked the throne, the sanction is death therefore she must die. That's the law. But she's weak and the law is there to protect the weak, not persecute them. *(Deciding at last)* She called me bastard and while she lives she would take my throne, therefore I must serve my people and preserve the succession. Nothing personal. *(Elizabeth signs the warrant and then calls to off-stage.)* Davison?

(DAVISON enters.)

ELIZABETH. Where are the others?

DAVISON. Gone to talk to the crowd, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. I can't hear anything.

DAVISON. No, my Lord Talbot calmed them down and they're dispersing.

ELIZABETH. Just like that? God bless the poor, you can't count on them for anything can you? I have signed the warrant. You can take it with you if you like.

DAVISON. Yes Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. I thought long and hard before signing it, you should think before delivering it. Or not, as you see fit.

(ELIZABETH starts to exit, leaving the warrant on stage)

DAVISON. Sorry? Do you want me... I don't understand... don't you want me to deliver it?

ELIZABETH. It's up to you.

DAVISON. What? No it's not, if you tell me to deliver it I'll deliver it, if you tell me not to then I won't. I just do what I'm told. What do you want me to do?

ELIZABETH. You brought me a warrant for the royal assent.

DAVISON. Yes, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Which I've now given. What happens next is up to you.

DAVISON. Is it? Do you want me to hold onto it for a while? Is that what you want?

ELIZABETH. If you think that's best.

DAVISON. I don't know what's best! Please, Your Majesty, tell me what to do.

ELIZABETH. I don't want to talk about it any more.

DAVISON. Please, just one word.

ELIZABETH. I've already told you.

DAVISON. Have you? What did you say?

ELIZABETH. I shouldn't have to tell you twice. You have the warrant, now you must do your duty as I have done mine.

(Exit ELIZABETH. DAVISON picks up the warrant as BURLEIGH enters).

BURLEIGH. Has she signed it?

DAVISON. Yes.

BURLEIGH. Good. Give it to me.

DAVISON. I don't think I can.

BURLEIGH. Why not?

DAVISON. I'm not sure she wants me to.

BURLEIGH. What *does* she want?

DAVISON. I don't know.

BURLEIGH. If she signed it, she wants us to act on it. If she didn't want us to act on it, why would she sign it?

DAVISON. I don't know!

BURLEIGH. Oh, for God's sake!

(BURLEIGH snatches the paper from him and exits with it followed by DAVISON.)

Act III. Scene I. Mary's room in Fotheringay Castle, the same as in Act I.

(HANNAH enters dressed in mourning. She is packing up Mary's belongings; papers and boxes, etc. MELVILLE enters behind her and startles her.)

MELVILLE. Hallo Hannah. It's been a long time.

HANNAH. Melville! You made me jump. *(hugs him)* I'm glad you came.

MELVILLE. I wanted to say goodbye to her.

HANNAH. She'll be pleased to see you. *(becoming upset)* God knows she needs all the friends she can get today.

MELVILLE. *(comforting her)* Come on, we'll mourn her when she's gone but we need to set a good example.

HANNAH. She's the one setting the example. She's been comforting me.

MELVILLE. How is she?

HANNAH. Very calm under the circumstances. She was still half hoping to be rescued so when we heard voices and hammering she thought they were breaking the door down to set her free but it was the carpenters building the scaffold.

MELVILLE. And that's the first she knew?

HANNAH. Yes. She hasn't wept for herself, at least not in front of me, but when she heard about Mortimer and how Leicester betrayed her that upset her.

MELVILLE. I'm not surprised.

(Enter MARY, dressed in white and carrying a crucifix and rosary. MELVILLE and HANNAH kneel as she enters)

MARY. Melville, welcome. *(she draws him up from kneeling and embraces him.)*

MELVILLE. Ma'am.

MARY. I'm sorry I can't offer you better hospitality but as you see we're packing.

MELVILLE. I'm so sorry, Ma'am.

MARY. There's no need, I'm ready for it. Perhaps I'll be more use to my friends when I'm dead than I was while I was alive. But how about you? How have you been?

MELVILLE. I'm well, I only wish I could have done more to help you.

MARY. How's Didier? He's probably dead by now isn't he?

MELVILLE. Not yet Ma'am, he sends his prayers.

MARY. Does he? That's kind of him. I'll pray for him too. I wish I could die amongst my friends in France; send them my blessings when you go back. *(to Hannah)* I've been sorting out my will. I've left you some jewellery and enough money for a pension. Go back to France with Melville, it'll be safer than staying here.

HANNAH. Yes Ma'am.

MARY. You can have my clothes too.

HANNAH. No Ma'am, please...

MARY. Well someone should have them, there's no point burying me in them. And I'd like you to have this handkerchief. We embroidered it together, do you remember?

HANNAH. Oh Ma'am. *(she weeps)*

MARY. *(comforts Hannah)* Shh, it's all right Hannah, if I can do this then so can you. Would you excuse us, I'd like to speak to Melville alone.

HANNAH. Very good, Ma'am.

(Exit HANNAH.)

MARY. I've settled my affairs, although after all these years in gaol there wasn't much to settle.

MELVILLE. You seem at peace.

MARY. I am. I spent my life wishing the world were other than it is but I've stopped doing that now so in a funny way I'm happier than I've been for ages. I only have one thing left to do.

MELVILLE. What is it? Can I help?

MARY. I want to make my confession but they won't let me see a Catholic priest.

MELVILLE. Confess yourself to God, that will be enough.

MARY. It might be enough for God but not for me. I'd like the holy sacrament before I die.

MELVILLE. I can hear your confession if you want me to?

MARY. Thank you. *(Mary kneels)* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. My last confession was...*(MARY pauses.)*

MELVILLE. Yes?

MARY. I don't know, I can't remember.

MELVILLE. It doesn't matter.

MARY. No, I should know. It's been years. How can I be forgiven if I can't remember my last confession?

MELVILLE. Do you repent all your sins?

MARY. Yes.

MELVILLE. Then God will forgive you. Carry on.

MARY. I committed the sins of envy and hatred. I could not forgive my enemy although I hope for the forgiveness of God.

MELVILLE. Have you forgiven her now?

MARY. Yes, I have.

MELVILLE. What else have you to confess?

MARY. I desired a man but our union was unlawful.

MELVILLE. Have you turned your heart to God?

MARY. Yes.

MELVILLE. Have you any other sins to confess?

MARY. One more.

MELVILLE. Go on.

MARY. The king my husband was murdered and I could have prevented it.

MELVILLE. Why didn't you?

MARY. He was cruel. He made me unhappy and I wished him dead.

MELVILLE. Do you now repent?

MARY. With all my heart.

(BURLEIGH, LEICESTER and PAULET enter unobserved by MARY.)

MELVILLE. Is there anything else?

MARY. No. I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life.

MELVILLE. What about the crime for which you have been convicted? That you conspired against Her Majesty the Queen?

MARY. I have always wished to be free but I never intended any harm to her.

MELVILLE. So your secretaries lied?

MARY. They must answer to God for their actions, I will answer for mine. I have no more sins to confess.

MELVILLE. Then you will face the executioner with a pure heart. *(He makes the sign of the cross over her.)* I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

MARY. Amen.

MELVILLE. My lords?

BURLEIGH. *(stepping forward)* I have come to receive any last instructions from the prisoner.

MARY. Oh. Thank you Burleigh.

BURLEIGH. Her Majesty The Queen commands that no reasonable request should be denied you.

MARY. She is gracious, and generous. Will you let Hannah go back to France?

BURLEIGH. Yes, of course.

MARY. I understand my body is to be interred in England.

BURLEIGH. Yes, Ma'am.

MARY. Then let her take my heart with her to receive a Catholic burial.

BURLEIGH. Very well. Anything else?

MARY. Tell my cousin I forgive her as I ask her to forgive me. May God bless her and grant her a long and prosperous reign.

BURLEIGH. Ma'am.

MARY. *(To Paulet.)* I must ask your forgiveness too. I expect you're glad to be rid of me, aren't you?

PAULET. *(very respectful)* No Ma'am. God bless you Ma'am.

(The voices of the guards are heard outside and HANNAH enters.)

MARY. Are they ready for me now, Hannah?

HANNAH. Yes Ma'am, but they won't let me go with you.

BURLEIGH. I have no warrant for any attendants at the execution.

MARY. It is forbidden?

BURLEIGH. No Ma'am, not forbidden, but not approved either.

PAULET. *(to Burleigh)* Let her go with her.

MARY. Thank you. *(MARY removes her white gown revealing a red petticoat. She notices Leicester)* My Lord Leicester, I see you kept your word.

LEICESTER. Ma'am?

MARY. You said you'd lead me from my prison cell and here you are to do just that.

LEICESTER. Forgive me, Ma'am.

MARY. I forgive you, for what it's worth. You courted two queens; this one loved you, I hope you will be happy with the other. *(to Paulet and Burleigh)* Shall we go now?

(Exeunt, MARY dressed all in red.)

Act III, Scene II. Elizabeth's palace.

(Enter ELIZABETH and the OFFICER.)

ELIZABETH. Where's Burleigh?

OFFICER. Gone Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. And Leicester?

OFFICER. Gone too, Ma'am. They left together. I don't know where.

ELIZABETH. Get Davison for me.

OFFICER. Ma'am.

(Exit OFFICER and enter TALBOT)

ELIZABETH. Talbot.

TALBOT. Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Well?

TALBOT. I've just been to the Tower.

ELIZABETH. The Tower? Why?

TALBOT. I wanted to see her secretaries again, to make sure we're doing the right thing.

ELIZABETH. And are we?

TALBOT. I'm not sure. They've heard about the warrant and now they're denying everything.

ELIZABETH. But we've got the letters.

TALBOT. Forgeries apparently.

ELIZABETH. Do you believe them?

TALBOT. I don't know but we need to slow down. It must be legal and we've got nothing if they won't testify.

ELIZABETH. We've got a resolution from the tribunal. It's legal.

TALBOT. We need evidence.

ELIZABETH. We've got evidence.

TALBOT. Not any more. We have to claim the moral high ground or it'll do us more harm than good.

(Enter DAVISON.)

ELIZABETH. Davison; where's the warrant?

DAVISON. What warrant?

ELIZABETH. The death warrant for the Scottish queen which I signed and gave you for safe keeping. Where is it?

DAVISON. Safe keeping?

TALBOT. The secretaries won't testify against her so we've got to re-open the tribunal.

ELIZABETH. And I need the warrant back to make sure nobody does anything stupid.

DAVISON. Re-open the tribunal?

ELIZABETH. Are you just going to repeat everything we say?

DAVISON. Sorry, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Give me the warrant.

DAVISON. I haven't got it.

TALBOT. Where is it?

DAVISON. My Lord Burleigh took it.

ELIZABETH. I told you to keep it safe.

DAVISON. No you didn't.

ELIZABETH. I beg your pardon? Did I tell you to give it to Burleigh?

DAVISON. Not in so many words, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Then you shouldn't have. I hope for your sake he's done nothing with it.

(Enter BURLEIGH.)

ELIZABETH. Speak.

BURLEIGH. Your Majesty, I have good news for you.

ELIZABETH. What?

BURLEIGH. The threat to your Majesty's crown and person from the Scottish queen is ended.

TALBOT. What have you done?

ELIZABETH. Did you have a warrant?

BURLEIGH. Yes, Ma'am.

TALBOT. You had nothing of the kind!

ELIZABETH. Did I give to you?

BURLEIGH. No Ma'am, I took it from Davison.

TALBOT. You took it from him?

ELIZABETH. Did he have my authority to give it to you?

BURLEIGH. I don't know, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. Did you ask?

BURLEIGH. Has Your Majesty changed her mind in this matter?

TALBOT. The secretaries have withdrawn their evidence. We need to start again.

BURLEIGH. Is that all?

TALBOT. We cannot allow ourselves to be portrayed as aggressors, we must be seen to defend ourselves against a threat.

BURLEIGH. We don't need her secretaries to tell us she's a threat! We know she's a threat!

TALBOT. But to maintain good diplomatic relations with our neighbours we need evidence of a conspiracy.

BURLEIGH. Or what? They'll invade? They don't want a war any more than we do.

TALBOT. We can't base our strategy on the assumption she's weak and justify pre-emptive action by claiming she's a threat.

ELIZABETH. Get out, Burleigh.

BURLEIGH. But Ma'am, the warrant was signed / what else did you expect...

TALBOT. (*cutting him off*). You heard what Her Majesty said.

BURLEIGH. Shut up, Talbot! Your Majesty / I acted in the full...

ELIZABETH. Get out!

(Exit BURLEIGH.)

ELIZABETH. Send me Leicester.

DAVISON. My lord of Leicester's gone to France, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH. What? When? And why are you still here? Surrender yourself to the sergeant at arms.

DAVISON. Yes Ma'am.

(Exit DAVISON.)

ELIZABETH. *(to Talbot)* Have him taken to the Tower.

TALBOT. Don't be too harsh with him Ma'am. He only did what he was told.

ELIZABETH. Too harsh? My God, Talbot, this is a farce!

TALBOT. Your Majesty, I wish to tender my resignation.

ELIZABETH. Are you deserting me too? Well, you can't, I need you.

TALBOT. I have served you for many years, Ma'am, but I cannot condone this action. The longer I have served you, the greater the respect I have for your good sense and wisdom. I do not doubt that the Scottish queen was a threat, but I am not persuaded that she was a clear and present danger to England. I wanted the tribunal to be given more time, and I suspect that we are being pushed too quickly into conflict by those of your court with their own agenda. Above all, I am uneasy at England going out on a limb against the hostility of many of our traditional allies. It is for that reason, and for that reason alone, and with a heavy heart, that I resign from the government.

(Exit TALBOT, leaving ELIZABETH alone on stage)

ELIZABETH. Talbot, come back! I am the Queen of England! Do you hear me? I am the Queen of England!

THE END

The Captive Song Of Mary Stuart.

Though I was crowned a French princess
My day was quickly done
To trail my childhood's royal dress
In the Paris sun.

My husband was to be a king
But died a little child
And I was sent without my ring
Back to Scotland wild.

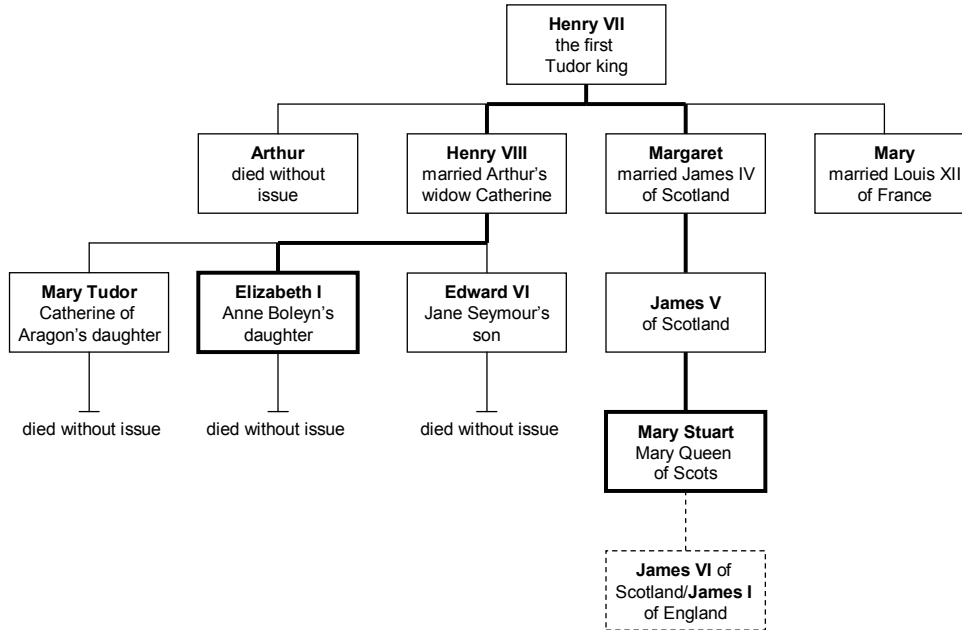
O Mary, Mother, hear my prayer
My cousin is a queen
Most powerful, though not so fair
As I have always been.

From this high window seems the earth
A desert or a stone
Despite the son I brought to birth
Who'll sit the English throne.

To rule where I have never stood
To rule when I am dead
Who'll nought remember of my good
Nor any word I said.

Words: Laurence Josephs
Tune: Jean Redpath

THE TUDOR SUCCESSION
Mary Queen of Scots' and Elizabeth the First's
respective claims to the English crown.



Mary and Elizabeth were both descended from Henry VII, the first Tudor king, which gave them both a claim to the English throne. The English royal succession is based on the principle of primogeniture which means that the succession goes to any male heir before reverting to the female line if there are no surviving males. Henry VII's succession therefore went first to Arthur, who died before he could ascend the throne, and then to Henry. By the same principle, Henry's VIII's succession went first to Edward, his son by his third wife, Jane Seymour, and then to his daughters. The competing claims of Mary and Elizabeth therefore arose because Henry VIII had no surviving sons after Edward died. The supporters of the two queens' claims to the throne divided along religious lines:

The Protestant case for Elizabeth's claim to the throne: After nearly twenty years of marriage to Catherine of Aragon and only a single surviving daughter to show for it, Henry petitioned the Pope to annul the marriage on the grounds that, as Catherine was his brother Arthur's widow, the marriage was incestuous and his daughter by her, Mary, illegitimate. The annulment made Anne Boleyn his first wife and Elizabeth his legitimate heir after the death of his son Edward.

The Catholic case for Mary's claim to the throne: The Catholic Church refused to endorse the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine; in their view Mary Tudor was his sole heir and both Elizabeth and Edward were illegitimate. Consequently, once Mary Tudor died Henry VIII's line was extinct and Henry VII's succession switched to his next surviving daughter, Margaret, and through her to Mary Stuart.

An extract from Robin Cook's resignation speech, delivered to The House Of Commons on 17 March 2003.

For four years as Foreign Secretary I was partly responsible for the western strategy of containment. Over the past decade that strategy destroyed more weapons than in the Gulf war, dismantled Iraq's nuclear weapons programme and halted Saddam's medium and long-range missiles programmes. Iraq's military strength is now less than half its size than at the time of the last Gulf war. It is only because Iraq's military forces are so weak that we can even contemplate its invasion. Some advocates of conflict claim that Saddam's forces are so weak, so demoralised and so badly equipped that the war will be over in a few days. We cannot base our military strategy on the assumption that Saddam is weak and at the same time justify pre-emptive action on the claim that he is a threat.

The longer that I have served in this place, the greater the respect I have for the good sense and collective wisdom of the British people. On Iraq, I believe that the prevailing mood of the British people is sound. They do not doubt that Saddam is a brutal dictator, but they are not persuaded that he is a clear and present danger to Britain. They want inspections to be given a chance, and they suspect that they are being pushed too quickly into conflict by a US Administration with an agenda of its own. Above all, they are uneasy at Britain going out on a limb on a military adventure without a broader international coalition and against the hostility of many of our traditional allies.

From the start of the present crisis, I have insisted, as Leader of the House, on the right of this place to vote on whether Britain should go to war. It has been a favourite theme of commentators that this House no longer occupies a central role in British politics. Nothing could better demonstrate that they are wrong than for this House to stop the commitment of troops in a war that has neither international agreement nor domestic support. I intend to join those tomorrow night who will vote against military action now. It is for that reason, and for that reason alone, and with a heavy heart, that I resign from the government.