



Mary Queen of Scots

a play in verse

by Colin John Holcombe

ocaso press 2013

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HISTORICAL NOTE

Mary Stewart became queen within a few days of her birth, when Henry V of Scotland died in December 1542, shortly after the Battle of Solway Moss. Five years later, to escape the marauding armies of Henry VIII, the young queen was spirited away to France, to be brought up in the Valois court as the intended of Henry II's eldest son. Francis did indeed become king in 1559, after his father's death in a jousting accident, but remained a sickly boy under the control of Mary's maternal uncles, the Dukes of Guise. He died a year later, and there were no children. The crown passed to the next brother, in effect to Catherine, the Queen Regent, who remained the power behind the throne in the closing years of the Valois dynasty. Mary could have remained in France—she had title and an independent income—but chose to sail for Scotland in 1561, a voyage the English queen did her best to discourage.

Elizabeth had the benefits of a settled country, a throne established by the careful policies of the Tudors, and a circle of loyal and sagacious ministers. Mary had no such advantages. She was tall, pretty, vivacious and charming, but only eighteen, a Catholic, and without an accepted consort to deal with unruly nobles. Scotland was a semi-medieval country, nominally ruled after her mother's death by a regency, but gravely divided between aristocratic and religious factions. Under John Knox the country had recently converted to Calvinism, which outlawed the old religion to which Mary firmly adhered throughout her life. The preacher was a brave patriot but also an unmitigated bigot, and no meetings with Mary would convert him to religious tolerance.

By circumstances, character and upbringing, Mary was incapable of ruling her inheritance. She had none of the political cunning, the dissimulation, or the ruthlessness needed for such difficult times. Though she could in theory count on the support of the Catholic rulers of Europe, on the Valois dynasty in France and the Hapsburgs in Spain, both had other agendas, and saw

Scotland more as an embarkation point for a possible invasion of England than as a necessary bulwark to their realms. Elizabeth was a popular monarch, and astutely kept England free of foreign domination and religious strife, but she was also a crabbed, calculating and often spiteful woman who continually meddled in Scottish affairs—because the Catholic cause threatened her throne, and because she envied the personal charms of her Scottish rival. Mary had arguably the greater claim on the English throne, through her grandmother, who was daughter to Henry VII of England, and particularly so to Catholics, as the marriage of Elizabeth's mother had not been recognized by Rome. Expecting the English throne to come to her naturally, however, Mary made no moves to threaten Elizabeth, accepting the Protestant conversion and pointedly not supporting the Catholic aristocracy—a policy of even-handedness that eventually cost her the support of the Catholic nobles and so the throne.

Mary made serious mistakes. Her first was to choose Lord Darnley: a good-looking young man with claims to the English throne whose arrogance alienated the leading families—which is no doubt why Elizabeth sent him. But Mary fell in love with the preening youth, married him and had a son before his less savoury aspects became impossible to overlook. Bothwell and other nobles murdered the offender, possibly with Mary's connivance or possibly not—scholarly opinion is much divided—though certainly opportunely as there was hardly any other way of removing the man without imperilling the status of their son. Bothwell then kidnapped Mary—with what acquiescence again isn't known, but requiring a hasty marriage to preserve Mary's honour. Yet Bothwell was no more acceptable than Darnley had been, to the nobles, the populace and probably to Mary herself in time. An uprising against the two followed, the promised support from the Hamiltons and others never appeared, and Mary was forced to surrender for Bothwell's safe passage from the battlefield. Failing to raise forces against the rebels, Bothwell eventually fled to Denmark, where he was thrown into prison for marital adventures and died, insane, some ten years later.

The rebels reneged on the terms of surrender, imprisoned Mary in the Douglas stronghold at Lochleven, and forced her to abdicate. From here, in

yet another reversal of fortune, and with the help of her gaoler's dashing young brother, Mary escaped, raised an army and seemed likely to regain her throne. But treachery once again intervened when Argyle went over to the other side. Mary fled the battlefield and took refuge with Catholic lords in southwest Scotland, where she made another of her ill-judged decisions. She crossed into England and threw herself on the good offices of its queen.

Safety lay in France, but that headstrong nature Mary inherited from the Guises prompted her to take one more gamble. An earlier planned meeting had been forestalled by the outbreak of war in the Netherlands, but a meeting now with Elizabeth would surely succeed. Besides, queens were God's elect on earth, and Mary could not conceive of harm coming to her in a Christian country. She was wrong. Elizabeth refused to meet her, illegally kept Mary a prisoner for eighteen years, and allowed her to be drawn into the treasonous Babington plot, for which Mary was executed at Fotheringhay Castle in 1587. With nothing now to lose, Philip II launched the Armada, which was destroyed by English naval tactics and a providential storm. In due course, on the death of Elizabeth in 1603, Mary and Darnley's son was crowned king of England, and that great dream of Mary's, nursed throughout the vicissitudes of a strangely unfortunate life, became a reality. The Stewarts called themselves Stuarts, and reigned till James II was deposed in 1688.

CHARACTERS

MARY: Mary Stewart, Queen of Scotland and dowager queen of France.

DARNLEY: Henry Stuart: took name Lord Darnley from his father: Mary's second and equally unsatisfactory husband: murdered by Bothwell and others.

BOTHWELL: James Hepworth, earl of Bothwell: murderer of Darnley and subsequently Mary's third husband: fled Scotland after Mary's capture by rebels and died insane after long imprisonment in Denmark.

MORAY: James Stewart, later earl of Moray: elder half-brother to Mary and effective ruler of Scotland between death of Mary's mother, Mary of Guise and Mary's return.

HERRIES: John Maxwell, Lord Herries: Catholic nobleman who held estates in Terregles in the west borders.

RUTHVEN: Patrick Ruthven, 3rd Lord Ruthven: allied by marriage to the earls of Douglas and Atholl, leader of group murdering Riccio.

ARGYLE: Archibald Campbell, 5th Lord Argyle: Catholic nobleman and intermittent supporter of Mary.

LINDSAY: Patrick Lindsay, 6th Lord Lindsay of the Byres, married to Moray's half-sister, Euphemie Douglas.

MELVILLE: Sir James Melville: page to Mary in France, her emissary to London and supporter through her English captivity.

DOUGLAS: Sir William Douglas: half-brother to Moray and laird of Lochleven.

GEORGIE: George Douglas: dashing younger brother to Sir William, who helped Mary escape when imprisoned in Lochleven.

MAITLAND: William Maitland of Lethington: A laird (i.e. given land by royal grant). Mary of Guise's envoy to London and Mary's counsellor in first part of her reign in Scotland. Politically astute, and later went over

to rebels.

KNOX: John Knox: brave, eloquent but bigoted preacher, leader of Protestant party in Scotland.

RICCIO: David Riccio: Mary's secretary and gifted musician: murdered by Darnley and others.

RANDOLPH: Thomas Randolph. Cecil's (English) agent in the Scottish court.

SETON: Mary Seton: lady-in-waiting to Mary Queen of Scots, the most devoted of the 'four Maries'.

MAID: old serving woman at Lochleven Castle.

SOLDIERS and COURT ATTENDANTS

Characters off-stage who are referred to.

Francis of Guise: uncle to Mary and effective ruler of France.

Francis, King of France after death of his father Henri II, and Mary's first husband.

Catherine de Medici: wife to Henri II and mother to Francis.

Sir Nicholas Throckmorton: English ambassador at the Scottish court.

Morton: James Douglas, 4th Earl of Morton: Lord Chancellor in 1563.

ACT ONE

Scene I

Melville, Herries, Mary: Edinburgh

MELVILLE

Our lords and countrymen have done their best
to make our new-found queen come warmly dressed
in dance and piped parading through these halls
and cannons jubilant at harbour walls.

HERRIES

What this high-born beauty comes to, all the same,
are realms that hardly know their sovereign's name,
to whom the office of a settled court
is foreign to them as a well-phrased thought.
There are no law-courts here or government
10. save what the lords can say or may relent
in punishment and so have wrongs redressed.
By wealth and family is worth assessed.

MELVILLE

She is a Guise, and that high ducal race
was never slow to claim its lofty place.
She is a queen, moreover, born to rule,
and no doubt headstrong but is not a fool
in ways of statecraft. Even Catherine will
have taught her something, no doubt teaches still
in closing France to her as though she wed
20. the least of her ill-favoured brood instead.

HERRIES

I see the Stewarts more, that dream-led race
that counts on fortune, is more apt to chase
the bubble apparitions of the hour
than plan and soberly secure its power.

MELVILLE

She was the foremost in the Valois hope
of wooing subjects for their threatened pope.
Some great flower she was to all of them,
who looked for offspring from that grafted stem.
That was her purpose; to that glorious role
30. she was committed, body, heart and soul.
No other gifts or handsome, manly guise
have ever captured Mary's topaz eyes.
She loved that poor, weak stammer, that still-
a-boy, with all the ferment of her girlish will.
He was her heart's own need for warmth and show,
and other forms our Mary does not know,
or does not seem to, though that startling prize
may fall as thunderclap to opened eyes.
Let's hope her options are presented well
40. for with epiphanies she may not tell
the good from falsehood, and so hurt the State
by choosing spinster-like, in haste and late.

HERRIES

But all this comes from what is strange and far
to us, from strained imaginings, if such they are.

MELVILLE

It was the wedding brought her out, a bloom
close cultivated in a shuttered room
that then was scattered on the genial air
of Paris that could only gasp and stare.

In that she learnt her beauty and her charm
50. could win all others over, and disarm
the most inveterate of bitter foes.

HERRIES

How odd that so much from that wedding flows:
to us in stormbound Scotland there was sent
but few particulars of that famed event.

MELVILLE

I stood by Notre Dame, whose ancient stone
had been fresh scoured, and bore a splendid throne,
with canopies and seats and twelve-foot arch
through which our august dignities would march.
First came the guards, the Swiss, in liveries
60. as near resplendent as their majesties',
rich players and then one hundred gentlemen,
the princes, abbés, and the mitred men:
the cardinals of Bourbon, Lorraine and
of Guise. The dauphin led there by the hand
of Navarre, Orléans and Angoulême,
and finally, out-dazzling all of them,
young Mary Stewart in a dress so white
and all encompassing it hurt the sight:
so young, so beautiful, that all must dote
70. on sculpted bodice, arms and swan-like throat,
round which the diamonds glittered, and each ring
on snow-white fingers was a wondrous thing.
Indeed a silence settled, a deep awe
at that rich majesty the people saw,
and when in following our royalty came
they seem but counterfeit and not the same;
as when one looks into a light and sees
a blinding nothingness that by degrees
becomes a floating, darkened spot of light
80. that will long afterwards obscure the sight.

HERRIES

I doubt so richly managed enterprise
would earn much merit in our Scottish eyes,
where all things beautiful, or made by art,
by ignorance are promptly torn apart.

MELVILLE

My lord, I understand your words, and share
some apprehension also how can fare
such heady hopes of rule by high noblesse.

HERRIES

Dissimulation wins, and ruthlessness,
which Catherine has, I think, but not our queen,
90. from what I've heard of her, or so far seen.

(Seeing Mary, who now enters. Herries bows and continues.)

But say, what journeying was better placed
to keep our lands from warfare's bloodied waste?

MARY

We thank you, gentlemen, but our own rule
will be for God and by that Attic school
that speaks for moderation, each one's lot
dependent on the prompting heart he's got.

HERRIES

I wish your majesty such true success
as comes from piety and gentleness,
but warn this is a savage land, more wed
100. to broils and upsets than by wisdom led.

MARY

We know these noblemen, how blunt they are,
uncultivated, selfish and as far
from that sweet springtime in the Loire
as is men's singing from that heavenly choir
that we can hear beneath the words of praise,
which in our mass continues through our days,
or so my white-haired, old confessor said,
by whom I would be, frankly, sooner led
than all those cardinals about the throne.

MELVILLE

110. A smaller world, perhaps, but one you own.
You're here the queen, and nothing France may hope
or plan for gives your favour lesser scope.

HERRIES

Though back and forth to Spain she runs
lest your magnificence outdo her son's.

MARY

All this young Mary Stewart understands
and takes the sceptre in her cautious hands.

Scene II

Mary, Knox, Moray: Edinburgh

MORAY

He waits upon your pleasure, madam. Be
not fearful of outspokenness but see
a man who's overzealous, too severe
120. but still the leader of the new kirk here.

MARY

He comes as welcome to us, where we'll learn
for what observances our people yearn.

MORAY

Such warm equality may not be best
for Knox, your majesty. He comes with zest
for argument, and has the rabble-rouser's skills
to turn annoyances to reigning ills.

MARY

What ills?

MORAY

He is a lawyer, pressed to win.

MARY

Well then, good brother, let us have him in.

(Exit Moray. Enter Knox.)

Be kind enough to sit, good Master Knox
130. who are the leader of our newest flocks.

KNOX

One flock, the godly, and they are not yours
to spoil or circumscribe by temporal laws

MARY

Indeed they're not. Please sit.

KNOX

I'd sooner stand.

MARY

Well, as you wish, of course. I understand
you look on women as a slighter sort.

KNOX

They are God's creatures if they do as sought.

MARY

But not to rule a kingdom, or exert
much influence on men, or their desert.

KNOX

Of all God's fallen creatures they are worst,
140. what with those sly, lascivious bodies cursed
with love of dance and dressing and parade
until the devil's compact they have made
with poor, weak, sinful man, who cannot tell
by such short ventures he is led to hell.

MARY

Be not so angry with us, master Knox.
Such wild denunciations only locks
to door to sense and careful moderation
in what we hope will be a peaceful nation.

KNOX

So speaks the devil, sure, and glib enough,
150. but all's idolatry and popish stuff.

MARY

It seems it is gloomy world we meet
with horsehair shirts and winding-sheet.
Where is the unspoiled goodness that our Lord
allowed our better natures to afford:

a natural kindness, a friend to all,
a lifelong helpmate at our beck and call—

KNOX

Nay: lusts in women's bodies bear but sin
although they ken nor care what hell they're in.

MARY

(*Exasperated.*) And you, good preacher Knox, can tell apart
160. the pure from sinful in their inmost heart?

KNOX

It's by their fruit we know them. You've not read
my prayers and pamphlets, and are led
by incense, singing and by foreign prayers
to pander to this world of lusts and tares.

MARY

I've read them all, in fact, and so can know
the various truths that our good gospels show
in Greek, in Latin, and in each sweet tongue
with which our paternosters are yet sung
across the incensed hours of Europe's courts.
170. That charity is always in our thoughts.

KNOX

What good is that to fool idolaters
who tell not properly what's his from hers?

MARY

I do not know that men of firmer creed
will act more wisely, nor the less have need
of grace and absolution—

KNOX

By faith we know,
when all of us to that far kingdom go,
that our austerities are well repaid
in souls of sinners, be they queen or maid.

MARY

And all, in following you, should not obey
180. what His appointed on the earth may say?

KNOX

The country must be guided, or as fools
will suffer shipwreck when opinion rules.
That role is mine, and made by Scottish laws,
lest there be anarchy, and many doors
will yawn a trapdoor down to popish hell.

MARY

That course is known to us, indeed too well.
It is the policy our uncle Guise
promotes by burnings and by harsh decrees.
What worlds of pain and suffering ensue
190. for those who'd wander from his narrow view.
Who knows what errors have traduced our stay
when we must take our short and faltering way
each to his own perdition, like enough.
Dear God, is this not rather paltering stuff?
I ask to worship Him in my own way
as we have always done in truth, nor lay
injunctions on what other folk may do
by custom, creed or conscience, and eschew
all acts of violence that must then impart
200. a false coercion to a sincere heart.

KNOX

We shall see, good madam, what our band of saints
will do to your thin world of sugared feints.

(Exit Knox. Enter Moray after some delay.)

MORAY

I trust your majesty gained some support
from such an enemy of Catholic thought.

(Mary looks at him but says nothing.)

At least your kindness was usefully spent.

MARY

Perhaps, my lord, but yet he upped and went.
Are these the manners then we must expect
from such a stiff and upright, certain sect?

MORAY

Much worse is common, majesty. They've torn
210. down churches, burnt the relics and withdrawn
what faith's simplicities once gave the poor.

MARY

Adversities must make us try the more
to claim our heritage.

MORAY

It is a dark
world now and dangerous: a single spark
of opposition burns long centuries down,
and with it laird and castle, court and crown.

MARY

Then that's our penance, which we now must face,
and pray for guidance under God's good grace.

(*Exit Mary.*)

MORAY

(*Aside.*) Pray all you will, good sister, but it's men
220. who soon will rule these hard-hewn realms again.

SCENE III

Mary, Maitland: Edinburgh

MAITLAND

I did, your majesty. Your cousin there—
a most solicitous and kindly air
she wore throughout the meeting, as Cecil too.
Her favourite, one Dudley, took the view
that in this vexed succession there would be
no heaven's writ or royal destiny
in this, but wait and see how things worked out,
the usual subterfuge when one's in doubt—

MARY

The findings of your visit, if you please.

MAITLAND

230. Well, madam, as you know, such things as these
are not decided on a moment's thought
and then there's Parliament, and their report. . .
but yes, encouraging: Elizabeth
between ourselves opined that, on her death,

there was no other she would want to see
succeed as your most gracious majesty.

MARY

I fear we're coming shortly to a 'but'.

MAITLAND

Well, yes. It was the treaty still that cut
the matter off, and one that she inclined
240. to think could not be left as now, unsigned.

MARY

How can I ratify what gives away my claim
to England's throne and to the Stewart name
succeeding when the Tudors breathe their last?
Who knows, when loyal government is past,
their wretched Parliament may then anoint?

MAITLAND

Indeed, your majesty. I put that point,
the very one, and said such documents
were ones most overtaken by events.
How could your majesty have signed away
250. such rights if her good people had no say.
It was the Protestant rebellion too
that left the French court worried what to do.
All facts that she concurred with graciously,
indeed most readily, though I could see
some canker lingering in your cousin's mind,
injurious to us, or so assigned.
As when a skilful cardster does not play
his strongest suite but causes, by delay,
a young opponent to disclose his hand
260. that's none too marvellous and will not stand—

MARY

Our future's not some taproom game of bluff,
or Protestant deception, like enough,
but something given us, inherent, true,
whatever those false lawyers plan to do.
She's illegitimate by God's own laws
and has but circumstances for her cause.

MAITLAND

That's why, your majesty, I thought it wise
to hint at matters only, to disguise
our thoughts on that, or even how you saw
270. their prospects in the swelling tide of war
between the rebel colonies and Spain:
the wherewithal they stood to lose or gain.

MARY

You weren't too clever there, I hope, to call
down consequences such as might befall
their standing insolent from heaven's will,
how little they had hope of, maybe still.

MAITLAND

Far from it, majesty. I stressed the need
for you to meet as sisters, talk, and heed
your common problems, face to face, agree
280. some general policy, in amity.

MARY

How spoke the queen on that?

MAITLAND

Oh, be assured
she was most keen to meet you, in accord

with various ministers, although I saw
lord Cecil hesitate, and that before
he, recollecting, sent those hooded eyes
back smiling at us in some other guise.
It is a crafty court expecting ill,
and did so previously, and could do still.

MARY

Better that we rulers meet before
290. our statesmen add more mischief to the store
that I'd believe of our good sister queen.

MAITLAND

Your majesty, that's well advanced. I've seen
to it that invitations have been sent.

MARY

Then let's hope modesty will earn its rent.

SCENE IV

Randolph, Melville: Edinburgh

RANDOLPH

So all the fortresses that Gordon saw
as his are now in Moray's hungry maw.
So goes the Catholic cause as well, a cost
she may well rue when other ways are lost.

MELVILLE

What could she do, who must be queen and see
300. the mightiest subject treated equally?
The Gordons held the north-east realms, it's true,
and held them regally, with naught in view

but be themselves, and by their force of arms
cause brawls and civil strife and wild alarms.

RANDOLPH

While equally at home prompt justice gaped,
with Bothwell tainted and Argyll escaped:
furious accusations of unstable men
that, soon as smothered, flare to life again.

MELVILLE

Yes, but tell me: who's to be believed—
310. the earl of Argyl with his wits deceived
by drink, delirium and shaking fits,
or that unbounded Bothwell who permits
no moral scruple to obstruct desires,
but woos or ravishes and rudely sires.
If anyone abducted her it would be he,
conspiring with that rough-cut gallantry.

RANDOLPHE

No doubt, but through her passage north the queen
was met by skirmishes as though had been
Sir John's intent to carry off on horse
300. the whole queen's company and all her force,
and by his dashing forwardness construe
her acquiescence where he could not woo.

MELVILLE

For that he's paid the price, and father too:
one dead, one executed. In the view
of all it is a fair and mettlesome
fine queen we have.

RANDOLPH

And headstrong also, come
to that.

MELVILLE

And in that matter vulnerable.
For fate's mercurial and goes from full
to thin again unless there's substance there.

RANDOLPH

320. She needs alliances, and one to fare
right well for her in arms and strength of will.

MELVILLE

She knows that well enough, and searches still
in what your good Elizabeth is apt to mean.

RANDOLPH

What does she mean?

MELVILLE

She's sent us Darnley, seen
as tall, accomplished, some full flower
of Tudor bloodlines if not Tudor power,
and therefore, I imagine, Cecil's choice?

RANDOLPH

Why ask of me, Sir William? I've no voice
in state affairs. I am a functionary,
330. a simple man who's tasked to look and see
how fares its ruler, and report the news.

MELVILLE

(*Laughing.*) Then why so fair a baited cast she'd use?

RANDOLPH

Your Mary has not met my queen, or would
not question such devoted sisterhood.

MELVILLE

Events prevented it, but has she grown
a shade now warmer to that foreign throne?

RANDOLPH

To Spain's? I heard that issue had regressed
a little lately, being not that blessed
by Mary or Elizabeth. Is
that not so?

MELVILLE

340. (Smiling.) Good master Randolph, quiz
the stars or ether, I don't know, but hear
lord Dudley's still a prospect, dangled near
or far, as needs a kitten with a string
be caught and fascinated till it spring.

RANDOLPH

(Angry.) I'm sure your queen is much more generous
in wit than be assayed by dolts like us.

Scene V

Mary, Maitland: Edinburgh

MARY

So who is it of whom we can approve?
We give assent and then the counters move,
when someone fairly pressed on us becomes
350. at once abhorrent to their new-rigged sums.

lord Dudley was the last, and where is he
but still a jovial catch we've yet to see.

MAITLAND

Now Earl of Leicester, majesty, and so
ennobled for the pains he'll undergo.

MARY

Pains, good Maitland, when we offer him
position, wealth and honour? No mere whim
of Parliament or ducal court. Besides
our person's not disparaged as a bride's.

MAITLAND

Indeed, your majesty. To Europe known
360. as sweet and fairest of the flowers grown
within the cynosure of proud affairs,
the first, the nonpareil that conscience shares,
except in Italy, perhaps, or countries east
where fine apparel can be counted least
for who within that smouldering foreign skin
can count the mischief or undoubted sin?
But still I rather fear our Leicester man
makes hay of good intentions while he can.
His queen is rather fond of him, they say,
370. which makes for complications, some delay.

MARY

They say much worse of him, a good deal more.
He's damaged goods, our cousin's paramour,
a traitorous father and a wife made dead
mysteriously when mistress might be wed.
Hard drafts to swallow yet, despite the shame,
still pains we suffer to advance our claim.

MAITLAND

And that's the worst of it. There is no gain:
our new-made Leicester brings no throne in train.

MARY

What?

MAITLAND

So Cecil's written us at last
380. to put these vain conjectures in the past.

MARY

So that is how, once more, they'd play with us.

MAITLAND

The court itself is most disingenuous,
as I have said, and one moreover that has thrust
its wishes on us rather, which we should not trust.
I think from England only come our griefs
in endless promises and vague beliefs.
How thinks your majesty?

MARY

We are beyond
all thought at present, though our hopes abscond
with things quite sensible that still won't be.

MAITLAND

390. So are the burdens of high destiny,
your majesty. To us you rise that star
beyond imagining, where instincts are
to snatch some body where the titles add
to lands the family at one time had:
these realms of curlew, heather, bristling rocks

that fall from mountain tops to sullen lochs.
You come from France, and those high-kirtled airs
are frank with sumptuousness and swift affairs—
vivacious warmth and life in everything
400. as was the vision of our earlier king,
but now thin grown, or turned to stumps and sores
to civil broils and constant English wars.
Your majesty, you need to look abroad
for love and comradeship and ready sword.

MARY

No Scottish nobleman would serve for throne?

MAITLAND

It is as dogs to which you throw a bone:
a furious squabbling and injured pride.
There's not a family not close allied
with such or selfsame of the other camp.

MARY

410. Then what of Darnley then? He has the stamp
of foreign lordliness and Tudor blood.

MAITLAND

If you would have the murmur turn a flood
then choose him certainly. Yes, drag him forth
for this no doubt it was they sent him north.

MARY

Good laird, you plead a shade too vehemently
for us.

MAITLAND

Indeed I do, your majesty.
I say and say again to you that these

fair prospects are but summer wind through trees
which stir the heart in us, but soon are gone.

420. My sovereign liege, I beg, look further on
or, as Elizabeth may stay instead,
much wooed and coveted, but still unwed.

MARY

Good laird, we thank you, and will give some thought
as best we can, and no doubt as we ought.

Scene VII

Seton, Darnley, Justice Clerk: Edinburgh

DARNLEY

Come, my pretty Mary, show those eyes
in some more sweet and willing guise.
This is your sovereign, or he soon will be,
the earl of Ross and duke of Albany.

SETON

Such I understand, my lord, and hope your grace
430. will see I cannot trespass on another's place.

DARNLEY

Of course, my sweet one, and my little pet,
you would be forward looking even yet,
and calculate the cost that we shall pay
in each new curtsy and demurred delay.
Come, now ask your Darnley, when he's king,
who knows? he may be yours in everything:
a little favour, choose what lord you wed,
and all for such a little turn in bed.

SETON

I trust your lordship will not take amiss
440. if I refuse the honour shown in this.
It is the queen I have to serve, and you,
I think I've heard you say, must also too.

DARNLEY

Tut, tut, dear madam, pleasure wilts
when strutting grandly on exalted stilts:
it is a little something we undo
when first of earthy pleasures we'd pursue.

SETON

Try these phrases on a taproom maid,
my lord, on whom such humours never fade.

DARNLEY

Indeed I do, and so am pleased to say
450. it's happily they kiss, divest and play.

SETON

Well I do not, my lord, and ask your leave
to end this interview, when I believe,
however untoward this here has been,
that nothing of your words need reach the queen.

DARNLEY

Dear me, how lordly are our Maries grown.
So understand me. Nearer to the throne
than you, what king desires he always gets.
So put. . .

(Knocking is heard)

that message in your little frets
and frowns

(Knocking is heard again. Seton goes to open the door.)

JUSTICE CLERK

I am justice clerk of court.

DARNLEY

460. And?

JUSTICE CLERK

Have the Privy Council titles sought.

DARNLEY

Ah, come in, and to this shrinking flower disclose
what love and royal favour with this goes.

*(Clerk hands the document to Seton, which Darnley
immediately seizes.)*

DARNLEY

As you see I am the earl of Ross
and duke of . . . where's the rest?

(draws dagger and goes for the clerk.)

JUSTICE CLERK

(Backs away.) There is no loss,
of documents, your grace, for Albany
is yet to come to privy testimony.

DARNLEY

What, you toadying little wretch! Since when
has high lord Darnley been as other men?

I'll teach you better manners yet, or you
470. will have a far more pressing grief to rue.

SETON

(Rushes to put herself between the men)

My lord, he is servant only, tasked
to do the wherewithal of what is asked.

Good clerk, be gone. (*Clerk runs out of chamber.*)

DARNLEY

No doubt the earl of Ross
should not concern himself with servile dross,
when we, my pretty Mary, I believe
were just—

SETON

About to part. I take my leave.

Scene VIII

Mary, Seton, Edinburgh

MARY

I've heard some say he's over-lordly, bold
as though with Scotland's rule already told.

SETON

So some report, your majesty.

MARY

But you,
my dearest Mary, tell me: what's your view,

and all my waiting women, who have seen
480. how prompt our good lord Darnley's love has been.

SETON

Assuredly it has, which none condemn,
but in those matters you should talk with them.
They may hold other views, your majesty.

MARY

(Vexed.) This, my dearest Mary, isn't you. I see
a tall and handsome nobleman I nursed
to health again become of sudden cursed.
I've asked my counsellors, and they've demurred:
will none in Scotland say a kindly word?

SETON

You've given your heart, your majesty, and all
490. must now look hopefully that soon will fall
abounding happiness, and then will none
deny your claim on England in a son.

MARY

That may be so in time, but as of last,
our good Elizabeth regards that past,
and like a crabbed old spinster must delight
in injuring others with her envious spite.

SETON

She sees lord Darnley as her subject still
and so beholden to her power and will.

MARY

No doubt she does, but to the present day
500. no sensible proposal's come our way.

SETON

When once, my liege, the heart is given whole
in thought, in consequence, in very soul,
there's no resisting it, or weak 'because':
it's ineluctable, and always was.

All womanhood is in those steps, and stays
within the gilding splendour of those rays.

All shadows point their leaning shapes to him
510. who is our pressing and perpetual whim.
We picture him in every smile and pose,
and visit him in every place he goes,
and would do to the very edge of doom
as rush illuminates the widest room.

We're in the paradise from which our sires
were ever exiled by our brute desires
to know the truth, the entire world that is
which now we give to him, as wholly his.

That time the gods and goddesses of old
520. as by our Greek and Roman authors told,
disported, in their fullest natures dressed,
and in their joyousness of union blest.

Some hope of which comes down to us,
no doubt diminished and more various
but like a golden summer's evening glow
that still, if fleetingly, our hearts will know.

MARY

A very pretty speech, my Mary. What
I ask is simply: is it he or not:
how is lord Darnley seen as future spouse?

SETON

530. The doors are shuttered to another's house
and none with any wisdom seeks to give
advice on places where she will not live.

MARY

Indeed my Mary. It is passing odd
that paths are by such squeamish conscience shod.
I like the man. He makes my laugh, and I
know none so glorious who wins my eye.

ACT TWO

Scene I

Melville, Seton: Edinburgh

MELVILLE

How fine lord Darnley looked, his figure tall
and elegant and overtopping all
but our most sovereign majesty's. And she
shone happily.

SETON

540. Indeed, most radiantly.

MELVILLE

But from the marriage day, when once the round
of feasts and masques and merrymaking found
itself on ordinary, flat affairs,
the queen seemed quieter, as though the airs
of consort met no just or apt accord.

SETON

He is the king, in all but name, my lord.

MELVILLE

No more than I am lord. For Scotland's crown
is based on factions and a high renown
must still be tempered with equality.

SETON

550. A prompt obedience we'll never see.
But why this rigmarole, Sir William? You
and I both know the queen will take the view
that Darnley should be at her smiling side.
Vainglorious he may be, but the bride
is still infatuated, still believes
more goodness in him as he more deceives
with drabs or tavern maids, or in his cups
is carried home, and so the more disrupts
the image that a king must have.

MELVILLE

Peace,

560. my Mary Seton. Let us not increase
too much the hazards that we have to face
from outraged noblemen or from his grace.

SETON

You mean from Moray and the Argyle clan?

MELVILLE

Where you can speak to her if any can.
She curbed the groundswell of the Catholic powers
and soon the Protestants' will not be ours

SETON

Is policy for ladies' confidents
to speak about, or what her kingdom wants?
For such she looks to counsellors, as you
570. were once, I thought, and Maitland too.

MELVILLE

I have no access to the queen these days,
and, as for Maitland, he has gone his ways
as has the earl of Moray, who acts as pleased
to have his duties forfeit and his holdings seized.
Put in a word for me, my Mary, tell
your mistress that I simply wish her well.

SETON

It's not the likes of me she listens to,
but new-made Riccio and others, who
are made dependant on her sovereign word.

MELVILLE

580. Which is the danger. Nobles see preferred
some new-plumed gentleman or floating tare
from Gascony or France or who knows where.

SETON

Sometimes it seems that royal preference
subsumes all precedent and common sense.

MAITLAND

Then Scotland's not as she supposes it,
but rough and envious, and will not fit
her gentle musings in the southern air
of Loire and chateaux and amusements there,
where there are kings who hold undoubted sway
590. as those most signally appointed may:
here all's provisional, a marriage pact,
where one must wait to see how parties act.

SETON

She is the lord's appointed, here on earth
was ever trained for it, and from her birth.

MELVILLE

No doubt, but in these unforgiving lands
the sceptre's always grasped by several hands.
She needs good friends about her, such as shake
out sails of destiny her course must take.

Scene II

Mary, Riccio: Holyrood Palace

MARY

So tell us of the south, monsieur, the blaze
600. of morning sunshine and the forward days
that speak of springtime and the fragrant earth
that gives all animals and plants their birth.
Here are but tapestries—oh, artfully done—
but know no warmth and colour of the sun.
Ah, those soft warm days that through the press
of fabric wake our bodies and caress
our ears with expectations and the strains
of music lingering as the long day wanes.

RICCIO

It is a small world, true, that must be yours:
610. dark rooms, damp cellar ways and cobbled floors.
A cold wind blows upon these castle walls
and lifts the draperies and so recalls
the pointless blood feuds and the fruitless wars
that lack a start or ending, or good cause.

MARY

Tell me, master scrivener, you place
my small words quietly, showing such a grace
and studied neatness on the vellum page
I'd swear you hear us.

RICCIO

So I do and gauge
if necessary how your every thought
620. should have its etiquette.

MARY

Then words are fraught
with sudden danger, for yourself and us:
be circumspect and not ingenuous.

RICCIO

I ask my sovereign's pardon if I've erred
in misplaced hopes or by unguarded word.

MARY

Again a little studied, sir, and vain.
You are my secretary and so remain
when these high-titled and undoubted lords
will flash their wit about like quick-drawn swords.
So be invisible, quiet dressed in grey,
630. take note and meekly of the words they say.
Please leave us now and have sir William in
whom to our shadow's been a long time twin.

(*Exit Riccio. Enter Melville.*)

MELVILLE

I thank your gracious highness for the chance
to lay some things before you that I hope enhance
my humble duty to you as before.

MARY

Sir William, tell us why you haunt the door
to our admittance constantly, although
there are no ministries we undergo.

MELVILLE

I come, your majesty, as does a humble friend
640. that knows intelligence may well offend.

MARY

I caution, Melville, on your life, to bring
no tales or tittle-tattle on the king.

MELVILLE

It's not the king I speak of, majesty,
but of his view and jealous enmity
of certain secretaries in your employ
for foreign correspondence and that enjoy
a closeness to your person that the lords
see more what their prerogative affords

MARY

All you speak of is well known to us.

MELVILLE

650. But not the mischief that good lords discuss,
and daily—

MARY

Good Sir William, take your leave,
and be advised that henceforth we perceive
a loyal follower who still won't see
that queens themselves will speak for sovereignty.

Scene III

Moray, Maitland: south Scotland

MAITLAND

The deed is done and this vain Darnley thing
is made by marriage our new lord and king.

MORAY

My sire was Scotland's king, and if beside
the lawful bed it's not within my pride
to suffer this vain, preening, turnip top
660. whose mischief she will neither see nor stop.

MAITLAND

The queen is popular, and rides through miles
of beaming aldermen and tradesmen's smiles.
She makes her kingdom so, and who are we
to curb or question what she'll choose to be?

MORAY

My sister is a pretty trifle, decked
with all the smiles and graces men expect,
but in the dance and chatter, fine address,
and frequent mention of her kindliness,
where is the firm, exacting stamp of power
670. when warfare threatens us and factions glower?

MAITLAND

My lord, we speak as friends, but words we say
may well be treason on some later day.

MORAY

Ambition is man's nature. Each one strives
to give some purview to his larger lives.
The miller seeks his oats, the farmer fields,
the usurer in gold more greasy yields:
we too, the lords of castles and estates
are not the ones to bow to wind-blown fates.

MAITLAND

My lord, she is the queen, to whom we owe
680. a pledge of fealty and loyal show.

MORAY

Who cares for that, good Maitland, when we aim
to make impregnable our rightful claim
to sovereignty within this wind-racked isle,
which knows infrequently the sunlit mile.
A hard land always, unforgiving, one
that master settles on his only son
as late inheritance, as effort, hurt and toil
upon a niggardly, thin, peaty soil,
with tares and thistles thickly sown,
690. and under it the clink of churlish stone.
Let's raise up Darnley so, and, when that fool
is ours, attaint him, and restore the rule
to what it should be—not this unkempt fate
beset by warfare and the shifting state
of Europe's families and cost they bring
in wealth and titles. Let's make everything
as our strong castles and their guarding moats,

and not the flounce and sweep of petticoats.

Scene IV

Mary, Seton, Riccio and court: Holyrood Castle

RICCIO

But yet, your majesty, the spring comes on,
700. and then these louring intervals are gone.

MARY

Some chill foreboding seems to haunt the day.
But still, enough of that: say who's to play?

RICCIO

(Takes up lute and begins to sing.)

Soon will come the blue-eyed April day
with daffodils and scented blooms of may.
With such extravagance and riotous air
how will the over-kirtled winter fare?

MARY

Too much unbuttoning undoes the heart,
and in unburdening our souls depart.

MARY

For in the chill, dark winter days repose
710. the flaunted memories of summer's rose:
so tell me why their stoppered petals keep
such wealth of perfume in their poppied sleep.

ALL

Too much unbuttoning undoes the heart,
and in unburdening our souls depart.

RICCIO

Then all that's beautiful must fade away
within the passing of a summer day.
So hear our long-sung knell and orison:
so fast is innocence of maidens gone.

(Darnley appears out of the shadows. Riccio stops playing.)

MARY

Too much unbuttoning undoes the heart,
720. and in unburdening our souls depart . . .

(Mary lays down the lute and turns to Darnley.)

So what is this, my lord? You join us late.

DARNLEY

Yes—I have urgent matters to relate.

MARY

What pressing matters at this hour would bring,
however welcome to us, Scotland's king?
My company, make space. Here sit, my lord,
and we shall hear what merry times afford
now too infrequently our husband's voice.

(Ruthven appears.)

RUTHVEN

The king fulfils his duty. Not by choice
come I and others to a fright the queen
730. or spill good blood upon this pretty scene

(Other figures appear.)

MARY

(Gets up.) What's this then, gentlemen? I sent no invitations to our small event.

RUTHVEN

No, you would not, when this paramour has no doubt other honeyed words in store.

MARY

I ask you leave us now, and we will think upon the morrow whether it be drink or madness brings attendance here.

(Addresses Ruthven.) Know, sir,
you menace one to whom you should defer.
The king will lead you out. To all: goodnight.

RUTHVEN

740. So let us see which one of you would fight against what king and the general will would say.

(Approaches Mary.)

MARY

What's this?

(To Darnley.) Have the good earl on his way.

(Darnley does nothing.)

It is the queen's own sanctity that is defiled:
they threaten us, our person and the child.

RUTHVEN

Aye, your child it is, but who's the sire
but this new Riccio in brave attire,

that night dress does for you, no doubt,. For us
its finery's not worth a tinker's cuss.
We've asked you civilly. We'll not again.

(*Goes up to Riccio.*)

RICCIO

750. Protect me, madam, from these lawless men.

MARY

Good sirs, now leave, and know that if there's aught
this man should answer for, he will to court.

DARNLEY

Give him up, your majesty, or you
will find what desperate men are apt to do.

(*Men draw daggers and approach Mary and Riccio as the candle-lights go out.*)

ACT THREE

Scene I

Darnley, Mary (who is writing a letter): Dunbar

DARNLEY

I never knew such bravery. You made
the worst of desperadoes act afraid,
and give us passage safely, as they should.

MARY

Not us, my lord, but you. My womanhood
was meant to hinder us and no doubt spill
760. the child we bear.

DARNLEY

No, no, they would not kill
so openly, my Mary. It was meant
as warning only, as from courtiers sent
to say your secretary was as a guest
best parted with.

MARY

No doubt a useful jest,
my lord. But as by night we slipped away
there comes a tariff later we must pay.
All's in appearances, and when that fails
it is the dagger's thrust that most prevails.

DARNLEY

We are survivors, Mary, free to raise
770. a force to resurrect the former days.

Indeed your scribbling on—without a pause—
will no doubt muster soldiers for our cause.

MARY

I've told our cousin what she ought to know
before more lurid stories to her go
and stir up reckonings and stoke the thought
that what we carry here is not as ought.
If latterly we both have been reviled
I trust your lordship knows it is your child,
of holy wedlock and in love conceived.

DARNLEY

780. Such calumnies I never once believed.
No, no, for see, together all this ride
I've never left—now have I?—once your side.

MARY

Then both were resolute and played the role
expected by the subjects, heart and soul.
Yet Riccio was murdered, and a priest:
the last was inoffensive, that at least.

DARNLEY

It was a sad affair, my Mary dear, that's true,
but what are we survivors now to do?

MARY

My lord: full fifty times they stabbed him through
790. and did so brutally, to our plain view:
They harmed our subjects and were like to do
foul murder on our royal person too.
Likewise to Bothwell, though that doughty arm
was gone immediately and out of harm.

Remember also that the child we bear
is Scotland's now and may be England's heir.

Scene II

Moray, Bothwell: Edinburgh

MORAY

Welcome to Edinburgh, which I see
you've helped release from brawl and tyranny.

BOTHWELL

It is our sovereign's doing. Mary rides
800. aloft with followers, and more besides.
Eight thousand travelled with her and denied
the town to surly others who defied
the queen her sovereignty, as you, my lord,
I hear were slow to render your accord.

MORAY

As one not known for subtlety, I think
my good lord Bothwell need not seem to shrink
from saying what his private thoughts aver.

BOTHWELL

That first you kept yourself away from her,
then joined the plotters, if not much in deed—
810. preferring distance, vagueness, taking heed
how England shelters and of Cecil's writ.
But with the queen's return you seem as fit
to give her what she never lost: her throne.

MORAY

The first in Scotland is a word on loan.

Besides, I am her brother, sir, not you,
and therefore more the one she listens to.
Then why make enmity where none need be,
but join in matters though we disagree?

BOTHWELL

You have a name for prudence, so weigh well
820. what dangers happen should our lords but tell
how much you urged the plotters on, to make
first Darnley king, then slight him, take
the rulership of Scotland and once more
assume the stewardship you had before.
I have their testimonies: they will make
a mockery of any course you stake
your reputation on, for such affairs
are best kept secret like the foxes' lairs.

MORAY

The wise man never stoops to threats, but heeds
830. how expeditiously come rawest deeds.
My danger is lord Darnley, as is yours,
so let's remember that, and make good cause,
for, as the queen will tire of him, she'll look
for ways to wipe his entry from the book.

BOTHWELL

And who's to do that, sir, to hazard all
on what is needed at our Scotland's call?

Scene III

Mary, Moray: Edinburgh

MARY

I see the murderous gentlemen are fled
to England, where, and by my cousin led,
they flaunt themselves inviolable to us.

MORAY

840. Yes, your majesty: not generous.
Indeed the English queen, although hard pressed,
has not acceded to a plain request
to have the fugitives returned for trial.

MARY

Experience become a bitter vial
to drink. But tell me, brother: what is due
to villainy so plain to public view
against the mild provisions of our reign.
Read this.

(Hands him letter. Moray visibly disturbed, reads.)

But still I charge you, on the pain
of banishment again to breathe no word
850. of this to anyone.

MORAY

So he concurred
with them.

MARY

Conspired to murder me, he did.

MORAY

Outrageous that your own good husband bid
to take the crown from you and be our king.

MARY

This man to whom I gave my everything.
How many times in court, outside, among
plain citizens I've suffered from that tongue,
have felt its venom and its wounding cut
as though I were some low-bred serving slut.
What is it women do when all their parts
860. are wholly given to their foolish hearts?

MORAY

That often happens, sister, so they say,
and is the reason why I stayed away,
no doubt discourteous, but I could see
the vows of fealty required of me
Many things your ministers must do
against their inclinations. Sister, you
must know that this is Scotland: no high airs
of dignitaries descending marble stairs.

MARY

Too much, my honest brother, I have doubted
870. you, and even thought your conduct flouted
proper conduct that a court must have. For that
I crave your pardon earnestly, and flat
renounce suspicions, which it's true, I had.

MORAY

My sister: only know that I am glad
to be restored into my sovereign's grace.
But now we need to think how issues trace
a wayward course to safety for your son,
if son it is, and further what is won
by lawful acts, diplomacy and feint
880. to place your husband under some constraint

MARY

My lord, but how? He brooks no laws, nor will
the least of duties properly fulfil.
Even to the Privy Council he'd not go
but turned his sulking into haughty show.
Argyle took his place, brave Bothwell too,
who knows what sovereignty at least is due—

MORAY

Beware of Bothwell, sister: his rough ways
may seem but honesty to outward gaze,
but he is just as scheming, and of me
890. I know engages in foul perjury.
So many treasonous plots are now rehearsed
that in the counsels heard I should be first.

MARY

And so you are, but now it's more release
from this our marriage, and our country's peace.

MORAY

I do not think a ban could be arranged
without the title of its offspring changed.
There could be other marriages of course
and useful offspring from so pure a source.

MARY

Perhaps some papal dispensation could be found
900. to place annulment on a safer ground.

MORAY

Yes, but at a price.

MARY

Of more conformity,
you think? It's true that here the Papal See
has not been much extended. I have sought
for toleration, that in outward thought
we worship as our heritage inclines
without great splendour or the rich divines.

MORAY

Then what, your majesty?

MARY

I do not know.

MORAY

No doubt there could be further lengths to go
to have your husband meet a sudden end,
910. but I—

MARY

Nor I, my lord. I would not send
a man for all his hurt to us and taunts
to purgatory's far distant, dismal haunts.

MORAY

Of course.

MARY

Now hear me, brother. Nothing I
would ever need or long for shall deny
the Scots due process of the law, or make
our rule be subject to a grave mistake.

MORAY

And yet he seeks to overthrow the throne
which Valois policy may yet condone.

MARY

And they would do that, set the queen at naught
920. who was the ornament of their fair court?

MORAY

I doubt it, madam, but the king still dreams
of insurrection and of violent schemes:
by all who know him he's of this accused.

MARY

Then kindness has been all too vilely used,
and very well if we were quit of him,
but legally, and not on private whim.

MORAY

Of course, your majesty, and I'd observe
that such infractions are inclined to serve
for civil unrest, vengeance, later strife
930. that puts at hazard every free man's life.

MARY

No doubt that's true, my lord, but still I sense
a relish in you for some grave offence
towards the king's own person, some high throw
against the plain legalities that we would know.

MORAY

Not so, your majesty. I merely state
what should be obvious, that I still rate

fidelity as best, and rule of law,
as is a trust in persons you restore.

Scene IV

Bothwell, Moray: Edinburgh

BOTHWELL

The queen has gained a bonny son, so why to wait
940. but now remove this object of her hate.

MORAY

And it must be done with some dispatch
to swallow up the ills that still could hatch.

BOTHWELL

I've gathered signatories: all have set
their names to ending this foul fume and fret,
indeed have put their names and pledged accord
except one notable: that's you, my lord.

MORAY

You'll need, if aught goes ill, a name those days
that no suspicion hinders or withstays,
a name untainted, unconnected, known
950. as one protective of the Scottish throne.

BOTHWELL

Aye, there's prudence there, that's true enough
but not much brave, upstanding, statesman stuff.

MORAY

So spare me details of the place or date
that I before my Maker can then state

I had no part in it, nor would have grown
acquiescent to it had I known.

BOTHWELL

Nor party therefore to the hurt or blame
that you will settle on her, or the shame.

Scene IV

Mary, Seton: Edinburgh

(A loud explosion is heard.)

MARY

Of course we did, and no doubt half the town.
960. Go find what arsenal or wall is down.

SETON

It is the Kirk o' Field, or so they say,
the place you tended, where the sick king lay.

MARY

You mean that general quarter of the town?

SETON

The place exactly, and the roof is down.

MARY

Dear God. The king there, tell me: how is he?

SETON

Reported dead.

MARY

An ending meant for me
as well, no doubt. These heretics construe
to make an end of us and Scotland too.

SETON

Our good lord Boswell's on his way to see
970. what hurt and witnesses there still may be.

(Exit Seton.)

MARY

Is this the start of what earl Moray warned
us of, our claim imperilled and suborned?
That here, between the cold dissenting north
and pageantry the Catholic kings bring forth,
our sole administration holds the sway
between the one and other bloodied way?
But let our vexing husband have his peace:
in death, if anywhere, our troubles cease.

ACT FOUR

Scene I

Mary, Moray: Edinburgh

MARY

I won't pretend, with husband buried, I
980. don't view my prospects with a kindlier eye,
but how he went, the blowing up of house
where we were reconciled as man and spouse
has got all Europe chattering, and brings
more outrage daily from its threatened kings.
They must be rounded up, my lord, and brought
to trial.

MORAY

You want the perpetrators caught—
and all of them, I take it, high and low?

MARY

Is there still something that we ought to know?

MORAY

As what, your majesty?

MARY

Perhaps their names?

990. The capital fair buzzes with the claims
that our supporters had a hand in it.

MORAY

As I have heard as well, which doesn't fit
too well with our new-ordered Scottish state.
Indeed it seems once more an awkward fate
has now befallen it. Suppose—I say suppose
because we have no firm intelligence on those
who may have engineered so gross a plot
but had no purpose in it, like as not—

MARY

Why all this courtier's talk? I made it plain
1000. that ours would be a prudent, lawful reign.
I charged you honestly to find a course
of freedom for us not by crime or force
but one that held our name in good regard.

MORAY

I think I told your majesty how hard
of resolution such a course could be
given strained relations with the Holy See.

MARY

Our nobles acted, then, on our behalf?

MORAY

I fear they did.

MARY

And in this bitter draff
that's left, who are the ones we can't afford
to hurt?

MORAY

1010. Bothwell's is the name most noised abroad.

MARY

Bothwell?

MORAY

Bothwell, yes, or so I've heard.

MARY

And so by silences I've too inferred.

MORAY

Then what, your majesty?

MARY

The noble must be brought
to trial and there a firm conviction sought
if he is guilty as I hope he's not . . .

MORAY

And then? He is the strongest arm we've got
against the turmoil of the present times.

MARY

But still a kingdom can't built on crimes.

MORAY

I have to say, your majesty, it often is,
1020. though not pertaining to a hers or his,
but for the state, that greater parenthood
that hurts the one man for the general good.

MARY

No, no, my good Lord Moray, to those goals
go all the sinful and the blighted souls

I've not imposed a Catholic sense of sin
or rites within our kingdom, yet we're in
His full protection only while we cause
obedience to just and holy laws.
I offer all my conscience can enrol
1030. to serving Scotland, not my inmost soul.

MORAY

You'd rather have the lordliest man arraigned
than with a speck your spotless soul be stained.

MARY

If that be selfishness, I trust the Lord
will show forgiveness and grace afford,
and otherwise, whatever wisdom brings
we'll pay the penalties that weigh on kings.

MORAY

I hope your majesty will let the case proceed
by catching felons and by taking heed
of what supposedly their tongues scream out.

MARY

1040. Must that be done?

MORAY

It must, without a doubt,
and names be published that the country know
from what foul depths these dangerous poisons flow.
But watch lord Bothwell, sister: he will make
a desperate hazard shortly, or must stake
his claims on loyalty now good as lost
among his countrymen.

(*Exit Moray.*)

MARY

(*Musing.*) What ways we've crossed
already from our uncle's wise precepts.
My Lord, how far are those high, distant steps.

Scene II

Mary, Bothwell: Seton Palace

MARY

In truth, our stout supporter, we are not well,
1050. a sickness even Seton's gardens can't repel.
We'd ask you come another time when we
are better placed to show you courtesy.

BOTHWELL

Nay, my bonny sovereign, what I bring
is sure to cheer the heart in everything.
I come as suitor to your royal hand.

MARY

What?

BOTHWELL

Suitor, madam.

MARY

Us?

BOTHWELL

What hopes I've fanned,
nor put behind me as your earnest slave.
Yet I would cherish you, and be as brave
as ever waters are that rise and swoon

1060. along the world's great shorelines with the moon,
be held by your great beauty and be bid
as ever Acteon on Diana did—

MARY

By all the saints, my lord, is this some taunt
upon our current weakness that you'd vaunt
your brute attraction on a woman lost
to strange adversities, and daily tossed
by faints and illnesses, her wits half gone
with all these treacheries to brood upon.

BOTHWELL

Your majesty, my gentle Mary, come,
1070. it's not the time to play so new-wed dumb.
I bring you power, security, a love
unbounded as the spangled sky above.
They'll be no more of ill-hatched plots
against your liberty, or lawyer's knots.

MARY

We are astonished, sir, and take as bluff
this fine parade of jovial, slighting stuff.
Where are the nobles that would bend the knee
to you affiliated, wed to me?

BOTHWELL

I have the list here with me, majesty,
1080. each one with signature, so you may see
how much nobility would see me fit
to be with majesty so nobly knit.

(Gives her the document.)

MARY

(Reads.) I see no Maitland, Moray, Melville here,
nor any nobleman that I need fear.

BOTHWELL

You see no traitors, majesty, for all
who once advised you also planned your fall,
have turned your mind, and had this Bothwell brought
to defamation and the privy court.

I hated strutting Darnley, yes, that's true
1090. but also latterly the same did you,
and had I wanted him to die I would
have settled it with swords as nobles should.

MARY

We give no answer but will keep this head
long brooding on the forward words you've said.
Our present illness and the gloomy straits
would caution prudence and more lengthy waits:
who married fast and then repented long
will learn how hard it is to undo wrong.

BOTHWELL

There is no wrong to undo, majesty,
1100. for what I am is plainly what you see.
A man who'll wait a while, of course, but trust
the present times will view me as it must.

Scene III

Seton, Melville: Edinburgh

SETON

So tell me: what remains for her to do?

MELVILLE

Be energetic, and the more pursue
the murderers, and never pause until
our country's free of those intending ill.

SETON

I think she's acted properly, indeed
perhaps too much has let things intercede
for her: two months in mourning and distressed
1110. by these wild calumnies around her pressed.

MELVILLE

But where's the outrage, or the speedy trials
with men imprisoned, executed, piles
of bodies showing to the multitude
how much this villainy is rightly viewed.

SEATON

What can she do when further trials disclose
more villainy beneath the splendid shows
of protestation that she brought it on.

MELVILLE

They all connived to have that man be gone,
that's true, but Scotland only sees the queen
1120. to profit from and act the libertine
with that high strutting Bothwell, who's become
as bad as Darnley was, and worse to some.

SEATON

Bothwell has been tried for murder, seen
to be acquitted, innocent and clean
of all involvement in the plot or acts.

MELVILLE

Indictment failed, but not by weighing facts
or even vague suspicions. None appeared
because his father, Lennox, grew afeared
of Bothwell's bully boys, withdrew the case.
1130. All Scotland sees it as a plain disgrace.

SETON

What can I say, dear William? True, the queen
has not her sunny confidence, more keen
to be retired, withdrawn, and to her bed
confined for lengthy intervals instead.
She has a fainting sickness that besets
her most when faced with daily growing threats
to reputation, when an absence must condemn
the more the love she truly feels for them.
She has if anything too soft a heart
1140. to play imperially the woman's part.

MELVILLE

But yet she has to, with the land aflame
at hearing her conjoined with Bothwell's name.
There are placards, broadsheets, bawdy songs—

SETON

It's taverns where such envious spite belongs.

MELVILLE

But that is frankly what the people say
who hurt her name by telling day by day
how much she leans to upstart Bothwell, who,
emboldened by such gossip, may well do
some act of violence on her person, snatch
1150. the crown of Scotland by some royal match.

SETON

She's innocent, and folk can surely tell
she ruled them wisely, and will do well.

MELVILLE

But now the issue smoulders, tinder dry
the indignation that a spark may try.
Pray God it will not and the queen acquires
propriety to soon snuff out those fires.
But Bothwell only mounts towards a throne
his very villainy sees overthrown.

SETON

The queen's exhausted and every message sends
1160. alarm to someone near to her wit's ends.

Scene IV

Mary, Bothwell, Seton, Melville, soldiers and supporters: return
from Stirling castle

MARY

What's this we find, my lord, that by your say
a queen may go or not her lawful way?
What is this ugly company we see?

BOTHWELL

Your humble servant trusts she will agree
to come with him to Dunbar castle where
she'll find sound lodging and a goodly fare.
as is appropriate to a royal guest.

I beg the queen concede to what is best
for friends and her small company at arms.

MELVILLE

1170. I beg, my sovereign, you resist. This only harms
a reputation sullied by offence
at wilful murder and at like events.

BOTHWELL

You have but thirty men, your majesty
and I have hundreds horsed, as you can see.

MELVILLE

Prompt step aside, my lord. It is your queen
you meet, and her high title contravene.

BOTHWELL

I think her majesty can find a voice
and reason rationally to make a choice.

MELVILLE

What choice is that, my lord, when each man here
1180. is set on purposes we rightly fear?

MARY

Let's not, good Melville, talk of why or when
for these are desperate and defiant men
who know the penalties they conducts brings
upon the sanctity of God's own kings.

My good Lord Bothwell, we will go with you
but ask some messenger be sent in lieu
of our arrival, so that all may hear
of our detention when we don't appear.

BOTHWELL

Such messengers can go the morrow. Wend
1190. your way, my officers, so all may spend
a pleasant evening in our company.

(Exeunt Bothwell, Mary and soldiers.)

MELVILLE

I do not like this, Mary, and can see
more consequences for our sovereign yet.
Does she really mean to put at threat
her name by this imprisonment or worse?

SETON

All actions taken only seem to curse
her further with dishonour and disgrace.

MELVILLE

But why so calm and with a modest face?

SETON

She grows accustomed to these taunts and slurs
1200. within a kingdom that is hardly hers.
Of course she should resist, but where's gain
of having good retainers hurt or slain?

MELVILLE

But think what acquiesce still may do.

SEWARD

All's here appearances, and not what's true.
It is a pit of fighting cocks she's in
where each is freshly spurred. She cannot win
by stratagem or force. But Bothwell's hand
may yet bring order to this desperate land.

MELVILLE

I doubt it very much, dear Mary. He
1210. is last to foster Scotland's needed unity.
No man is hated more or grown more proud
to have his ruffian ways fresh breathed aloud.
She needs a Moray but that lord is gone
abroad, conveniently.

SETON

And so anon
there will be no one whom the queen may call
upon. They have traduced her, one and all.

Scene V

Seton, Melville: Edinburgh

SETON

Of that, dear William I cannot say
but idle tongues believe she with him lay.
If willingly or not, her title's shamed
1220. however you may have the action named.

MELVILLE

A ravishment it was, the usual source
of Bothwell's sordid victories, of course—

of terrorizing till that brutish lust
contaminated everyone, as foulness must.

SETON

What could she do but add the marriage oath
to time's unwisdom that belongs to both
our people and these strutting lords
as fast to falsehood as their unsheathed swords?

MELVILLE

Well, what is done is done, and we must trust
1230. some sweetness flowers from the grimy lust
for power and overlords' supremacy.
At least she married him, and legally.

SETON

It was a wretched, hurried, forced affair
with few attendants, gowns, and on her hair
and neck there glittered nothing, nor were rings
exchanged as is the custom of our kings.

MELVILLE

She may still manage if that lord has sense
enough to show her seemly deference,
be courteous to nobles, keep his airs
1240. of brute authority for backroom stairs,
nor turn their stomachs into angry knots
of bile.

SETON

When does the leopard change its spots?
She hoped, as women do as soon as wed,
she'd make another man of him instead.

MELVILLE

I've never heard of any union had
with that foul ruffian but tends to bad.

SETON

But then her nature now is more of dreams.
Beset by nobles and their new-hatched schemes
she's like a shuttlecock tossed to and fro:
1250. as new advantage beckons, off they go.
No doubt she sees that, but inured to grief
she travels hopefully, where her belief
must travel salt-stained distances as did
the Ark in destiny, for it was bid
to land upon a place refreshed and whole:
so seems the passage of her threatened soul.

MELVILLE

Then we must help and hope these wild assays
do not breed danger out of Bothwell's ways.

Scene VI

Mary, Bothwell, Seton: Edinburgh

MARY

How carelessly those early years were led
1260. but now, with secretary and husband dead,
we must with new-found tyrants take a stand
against adversities that fire this land.

SETON

True, your majesty, but nobles here
may change again as seasons do the year.

Besides, the king's a warrior and may prevail
against the tide-swell in this sorry tale.

(Enter Bothwell.)

BOTHWELL

Have faith, my queen: our men are stout and more
than enemy or battles won before.
And in the Hamiltons not yet appeared
1270. we have the promises that make us feared.

MARY

We go then, husband, and expect the day
to turn in justice, which is Heaven's way.

Scene VII

Melville, Seaton: Edinburgh

MELVILLE

Aye, both long and bravely Bothwell talked
and his plumed and flashing gestures hawked
about his leadership and burly might,
challenging if any dared to single fight.

SETON

And did they?

MELVILLE

Few indeed. Yes, Murray tried
but by the queen was strenuously denied
as being much inferior to Bothwell's rank.
1280. So Murray called out Morton, who then sank
to asking Lindsay take his place. A trial
of patience it became as all the while

their followers began to drift away,
a steady haemorrhage that none could stay.
So much for loyalty, for none adhered
to that high blusterer.

SETON

So there appeared
no Hamilton or other clan's support?

MELVILLE

None. As hours grew on you would have thought
the rebel force would close the circle round
1290. the lonely Bothwell and his queen. They found
no course but send the French ambassador
to make what terms he could, and offer her
safe conduct from the field. And Bothwell too
could ride away unharmed: they would pursue
their grievances no further, still the queen
would be their sovereign of her lands and mien.

SETON

And she believed them?

MELVILLE

No, she prompt refused
and not by ill-veiled threats would be abused,
but Bothwell seeing here his fortune crossed,
1300. and more resistance came at deadly cost,
embraced the queen, and in her hand he put
the deed that showed the conspiracy afoot,
a list of all who had her Darnley killed,
with names and signatures of those that willed
the deed.

SETON

Was Bothwell there?

MELVILLE

Assuredly.

But worse than that. The tearful queen could see
why all so scorned her, though for Scotland's sake
she'd made that fatal and much forced mistake.
By marrying one who planned her husband's death
1310. she made her protestations empty breath.

SETON

So where's she now? Two days of rumour here
with facts to follow soon, but none appear.

MELVILLE

False Bothwell cantered off to friendlier lands.
Our majesty is in the rebels' hands.

SETON

A captive?

MELVILLE

In effect, in all but name,
by men who planned her downfall and her shame.
With bridle held, they led her, street by street,
where cries of whore and harlot rose to meet
the most commendable of Europe's queens.
1320. It was deplorable, such brutal scenes
of rabid fury as the whipped-up mob,
that formerly would curtsy, smile and bob
now filled the airs with raucous shrieks and cries
that tears ran freely from those gentle eyes.

SETON

Dear God.

MELVILLE

So pleased they were by her disgrace
that radiant cunning filled each smooth-lined face.
The very ones who had her husband killed,
those mean in spirit and in falsehood skilled,
who planned, connived and plotted, made the pact
1330. that well nigh actually performed the act.

SETON

We have to go to her. At once. But where?

MELVILLE

She's deep, they say, within the rebel's lair,
not far from here, perhaps, but under guard
where succour is denied and accessed barred.

SETON

How much has changed, and she in turn has been
a mark of this now dangerous scene.
The generous countenance of regal smiles
has ebbed away to yet more fearful wiles,
and Bothwell, greedy of his husband's right,
1340. has kept her waked and active night on night,
until at last she cries herself to sleep,
her cradled thoughts as in some castle keep.

Scene VIII

Mary, guards: Edinburgh

GUARD

This way your majesty, be good enough
to see life as it is, hard, plain and rough.

MARY

Where are my waiting women? Where undress?
Why all the menace in this coarse address?
I am the Lord's appointed on this earth.

GUARD

Your majesty must keep a trimmer berth.

MARY

Then leave us now, good sir. We need to rest.

GUARD

(Stays watching over her.)

1350. Has not my sovereign got a sumptuous nest?

MARY

Your queen demands you call lord Morton in,
or Maitland, Ruthven, anyone who's been
a party to the contract promised us.

GUARD

For what? If there is matter you'd discuss
then try the good folks yonder.

(Goes and opens window.)

Go on, shout
to all the populace now ranged about.
Some I'm sure will gladly bend the knee
at this new flower of sovereignty they see.

MARY

(Goes to window.)

I'm still the ruler of these Scottish realms,
1360. your queen, for all that trouble overwhelms
her constancy to you and to her God.

(*Shouts and jeers.*)

But think you, citizens, I ever trod
the path to perjury and wickedness,
the wantonings and base licentiousness?
I wedded Darnley—me—my gentle folk
because, like spouse to you, his person spoke
of goodly qualities: his chatter made
me wear his honour like a bright cockade.
In this I erred no doubt, or was deceived
1370. but where's the woman born who's not received
a soft entitlement whose only aim
has been entanglement and then her shame?

(*Shouts and jeers.*)

I wanted rid of him at last, that's true,
but done so legally, because it's you
who merited a king as much in sight
of power and goodness as is good and right.

(*Shouts and jeers.*)

Yes, I wanted marriage put aside,
but sensibly, that all retain their pride
in Scotland's fair and law-abiding ways.

(*Shouts and jeers grow louder.*)

1380. So see—this undone creature loosens stays.
I bid you look on me—aye, ogle, stare:
It is the body of a queen I bare,
the highest, who in grief and gentleness,

would make you explication, full redress
for every furlough of your outraged thought.

(Jeers diminish.)

These warm embodiments of womanhood
on which no startled day had leave to peep,
these breasts of mine that nurse the child asleep
I offer that the basest man alive
1390. can see the entity in which there thrive
no intrigues, calumnies or base intent,
but only sorrows by misfortune sent.

(Crowd falls silent.)

You see a woman standing shamed and scourged
by calumnies her actions never urged
upon the nobles or the common folk.
My rule for peace and moderation broke
no laws, for each could choose the path he trod
and make his own way to his chosen God.

(Odd cheers.)

However troublesome these months have been,
1400. what mutilated corpses have you seen?
What hangings, tortures, wild decrees
that fashion Christendoms beyond the seas?
No, none. A moderation and a quiet belief
that each in inwardness must show his grief.

(More cheers.)

I did not hurt my husband, nor have willed
the wild conspiracies that had him killed.
I had no part in it, nor did I send
soft messages to lure him to his end.
Must queens by loyal subjects' duties blest
1410. know not their husbands' arms about them pressed?

I married Bothwell as I had to, am
for Scotland sacrifice by which the lamb
must pay for others—

GUARD

Get that woman in—

MARY

And I will name them too, and where they sin.

(Mary is manhandled inside against protests of onlookers.)

ACT FIVE

Scene I

Mary, Maitland: Holyrood Palace

MARY

The terms were clear enough, good sir. I was
to rule all Scotland still, but now, because
of some foul calumny about the king
I am to be deprived of everything
that makes fair show of governance—

MAITLAND

Events

1420. move on, and every foreigner assents
to putting Scotland on a sounder keel
away from flightiness or heart's appeal.
For Bothwell's crime was never his to make
but you would help him with it: a mistake
for which you, madam, stand the most at fault.

MARY

The title's majesty, good sir. Assault
us not with barbarous lawyer's words, nor breed
new checks and waivers to the terms agreed.
We ask for ladies and require our court
1430. be fresh convened about us, as we ought.

MAITLAND

I have not come to bandy words, but say
what happens hastens on without delay.
You'll leave this thickly vermined city air
for rest and contemplation. Mark me: there

you'll find it wise to build up some defence
against these late and ruinous events.

MARY

I parleyed with you freely, and agreed
to leave my husband, Bothwell, and concede
to various nobles overship of state—
1440. but for the present only, to abate
the present turmoils and restore the hand
of steady government to our poor land.
Is this what government's descended to:
base lies and temporizings, and from you,
a laird we gave good office to, and fought
against high nobles in our fledgling court?

MAITLAND

It was your duty to protect the crown
from every upstart hand who'd pluck it down.
In that you failed, my lady, and must pace
1450. out leisurely the paths to your disgrace.

Scene II

Mary, Douglas, Lindsay: Lochleven Castle

MARY

Remind us why your sovereign must abide
sequestered by Lochleven's waters' side,
oppressed by endlessness of days and nights
of dour companionship, no other sights
but stone and water and the shade that fills
the all-surrounding bare and friendless hills.
I lodged here earlier, in your great hall
enjoyed the frolic of a hunting ball.
Why is it all such mark of due respect
1460. have been withdrawn and we must now expect

rough treatment, slights and impropriety?

DOUGLAS

Why all this petulance, when you can see
how ill you've been, or can at least hear tell
how wandering that mind has been, not well
in cast or substance to have slept away
its pestilence throughout the full long day?

Though flow of blood has now been staunched, I see
no reason to applaud that pregnancy.

Two bastards born of his infected gore
1470. are now despatched, and will not hurt us more.
We'll have a regency until your son
attains majority and has begun
to cast a kingdom with its nobles placed
in apt ascendancy your rule disgraced.

MARY

Yes, for such are regencies, where all devise
to gain new honours in that infant's eyes.

DOUGLAS

Remember, madam, you have kept your life
when much was threatened with the rope and knife.
You have two maids and one well-furnished room
1480. that might have been as such that serves for tomb
had not the English emissary placed
some curbs on what the nobles reached in haste.

MARY

Throckmorton? He was here?

DOUGLAS

Good madam, no.

But he has sent you messages to show
Elizabeth still thinks you one of hers,

with which our timid government concurs.
A little gratitude is not misplaced
beside indignities you might have faced.

MARY

How easily you threaten one distraught
1490. with whispered tidings from her former court:
her jewels made over, and her silver plate
reduced to coinage or its native state.
Who gave the order to disperse our clothes?
Who passed that order on, to whom behoves
it now appropriately to garner things
awarded us and not to Scotland's kings?
It's ours to gift them on to Scotland's heirs
that came from princes out of great affairs
within the commonwealth of splendid courts,
1500. and not the nobles', which their greed assaults.

DOUGLAS

Less now, madam, of these puffed-up airs
when you are visited with graver cares.
Here is my cousin Lindsay come, in fine
to make you contrite and your crown resign.

(Enter Lindsay.)

MARY

From whence can come such brash authority?

LINDSAY

The Privy Council, and conferred on me
by action of the nobles. You are placed
beneath a ban that's absolute, and faced
straightway with sentencing should you refuse
1510. to take the needful course your betters chose.
Abdicate your title, lands and power

and stay a woman living from this hour.

MARY

And you would threaten us, a queen from birth
and given the government of this fair earth?

LINDSAY

(Draws sword and advances on Mary.)

I do not threaten, madam, but will do
and promptly all that is required on you.
You see this sword no doubt, can feel its blade:
one blow from it and all my charge is paid.

MARY

Duress itself invalidates the deed.

LINDSAY

1520. Oh, as you wish, good madam. Let us heed
what rope or lingering poison spells the end
that death in wandering yet may send,
what night the hangman comes and leaves no trace
but waters glittering round a little space.
The end is all the same. Young James is king.
So let's be done with words: I'll do the thing.

MARY

(Mary stands up in defiance.)

And if I abdicate, what rights remain
to very queenliness this act must stain?

LINDSAY

I warn you: sign the thing, or I withstay
1530. no more the blow that answers all delay.

(Mary sits and reluctantly signs abdication.)

Scene III

Mary, Chambermaid, Georgie: Lochleven Castle

MAID

Let me bring you some clear broth or bread,
or should I set up here a makeshift bed?

MARY

In God's good faith just leave me to myself.
The queen you see has gained a commonwealth
of slights and miseries that numb the soul:
this we is I, and plays a walk-on role.

MAID

That, your majesty, I cannot do.
My orders are to keep you plain in view.

MARY

Must she who thrones of France and Scotland graced
1540. beneath the meanest servants now be placed?

MAID

It seems it must be so, though I would give
my own soul gladly, madam, that you live
in full regard and duty still a queen.
however mean and closed-in seems this scene
of moat and curfew and of prison walls.

MARY

(*Musing.*) It is to honesty that duty calls.
For love and comradeship and simple trust
I sought, and honesty, as women must:
a gentle-weaned and open, loving thing
1550. of which our inner natures ever sing:
and yet there's canker in the softest rose.

MAID

From love to loathing marriage often goes.

MARY

They called you stammerer, a timid boy,
who were my falconer and only joy.

MAID

Is that the French king, madam, you address?

MARY

So golden fealties come to less and less.

MAID

None of us, I think, can ever know
what fortune holds within its heartless throw.
Yet he's at peace with God, and it may be
1560. will see more brightly such pale things as we
must sense but distantly: the forest chase,
the swoop and falconry in that far place:
the play continually of kestrel wings,
which mark companionship that hunting brings.
But let me ask the warder's brother sit
awhile with you: he has a courtier's wit.

(Exit maid.)

MARY

I am your deer and rabbit out of doors:
my willing hands and body, all were yours.

(Enter Georgie.)

GEORGIE

Your majesty is one I hope to find
1570. of surer prospects now and quieter mind.

MARY

And soon, my Georgie, at her liberty?

GEORGIE

That they promised you I heard. But be
a little patient now, for I expect
improvements cautiously to take effect.

MARY

(Picks up lute and begins to sing.)

We light the candle, take the stair
to that sweet and holy lair,
bid whatever is today
continually be pleased to stay.

GEORGIE

Madam?

MARY

All night long the dark bird sings:
1580. how evil burgeons from the blood of kings.

GEORGIE

Perhaps it's better, madam, I now leave
than hear misfortunes hurt you and deceive.

MARY

And so think I, who am a headstrong child,
and thoughtless sometimes, who is given to wild
extravagances in dress and jewels
and love of hunting just where danger schools.
A very queenly profile you have got
my pretty Mary Stewart, is it not?

GEORGIE

Be pleased to listen, madam. You have the friends
1590. to most assuredly achieve your ends.

MARY

What friends?

GEORGIE

As sure as daybreak follows night.
Your majesty: inviolably, despite
the foul indignities you've undergone
will be a queen again, and that anon.

Scene IV

Georgie, Maid: Lochleven Castle

GEORGIE

How is the queen today? Those fainting fits
and illnesses not gone?

MAID

It is her wits
that leave. She often through her chamber walks
whole nights together, seeming pauses, talks
to things inanimate, and by some chair
1600. or bed will sing a sad and halting air.
She needs her court, my lord, not serving maids.

GEORGIE

She is alive, and that surviving aids
the promise she'll recover former friends.
They wait for her, and so that prospect sends
a need for patience and continued cheer.

MAID

There should be one of her four Maries here.

GEORGIE

They wait for her as I have said. Indeed
all Scotland waits for her return.

MAID

But heed

me well, my lord. I am a serving maid,
1610. the lowest even, one who's old and paid
in snubs and kitchen scraps, but I have met
more courtesy in one disgraced than yet
in lords who stride on richly slippered heel,
much prate on justice and such commonweal
of Scotland's destiny and splendid stuff
but fill their velvet purses like enough.
In her is movement of our Lord's good grace
in every smiling office of her face.
If that has licence, or there's wantonness
1620. in one so rich in right and sure address,
who sees the world in fealty, and whose eye
is gentle modesty, then truly I
confess to ignorance of what appears
to long experience of fifty years.
She must be freed, and soon: as days progress
she bleeds out inwardly to less and less.

GEORGIE

The lords, in principle, have set her free,
which they will honour, as in time we'll see.
But meanwhile keep her safe and far from falls
1630. that could be from these treacherous loch-side walls.

Scene V

Mary, Herries, Georgie, Argyle, Seton, Melville: near Lochleven

MARY

To all now loyally gathered here, to you
brave Argyle, Melville and such others too:
we bid you welcome and salute the man
who placed our freedom in the foremost van
of courage, enterprise and steadied skill.
We are indebted to you, always will
be. Listen: this young Douglas here has shown
conspicuous loyalty to his queen and throne.
He it was who planned and oversaw
1640. our perilous escape to this far shore—
the keys purloined, the boat obtained, the flight
across Lochleven's water in full sight
of laird and guards when every deep-drawn stroke
that brought us safely from that unjust yoke
yet threatened more reprisals on his head.
To all such men that sturdy Scotland bred
we show our heartfelt gratitude and hope
our thanks may soon display more royal scope.

GEORGIE

Our enemies are round us in the field,
1650. their standards fly before us, unconcealed
in strength, in purposes and steeled intent.
As all who once their rightful hopes forwent,
beneath Argyle and Hamiltons we must
attend to orders now and earn their trust.

ARGYLE

My liege, my lords and all good serving men,
we have the larger army and can then
observe what numbers our fair queen will draw
of Scotland's loyalty as was before.
You Hamiltons will lead and through the ranks
1660. of Moray's regulars so earn our thanks.
Those not committed to such headlong charge

will wait here quietly, their strength at large.

(*Turns to Mary.*)

From here your majesty will see the course
of battle, and the actions of our force.

(*Exeunt with troops.*)

HERRIES

I rather think, Sir William, there is something here
not promising with so much in the rear.

MELVILLE

Argyl does not attend the charge, but still
has much experience and hardy skill.

HERRIES

Let us hope so, lest these turncoat lords
1670. take new advantage as the time affords.

MELVILLE

(*Addressing Seton.*)

Attend the queen then, Mary: be her eyes
should folly ever be what men advise.
I must leave you now as men to horse
go bravely headlong on their loyal course.

(*Exit Melville.*)

SETON

Yes, see: they've broken through that bristling pen
of arms to make short work of Moray's men.

MARY

Brave men, the Hamiltons, when boldly led
and soon it will be Argyll's turn instead.

HERRIES

He doesn't charge, but falls as though he's hit.

MARY

1680. How adverse comes this sudden fainting fit.
Give us the standard now, and let us ride
to Argyle's party, rouse them, by their side
we'll take the issue by the throat, that I
will win our victory or with them die.

HERRIES

Not so, your majesty: I must forbid . . .

(Exit Mary.)

SETON

She's gone, my lord, and even now amid
the worst of dangers, see: her standard flies
as here then there, continually she tries
to urge her followers to act as men

HERRIES

1690. Which should be Argyle's part, but once again
by fear or bribery he is delayed.
Who cares for loyalties if they be paid
in gold, for all it leave a souring taste?

SETON

My lord, the queen has paused, returns post-haste.

(Enter Mary.)

MARY

The cause is lost when they themselves must fight
and, leaderless, know not their left from right.

HERRIES

In this we leave the troops that should have won
but have again by falsehood been undone.

(*Exit Mary.*)

(*Aside.*) Saddest of all mortals is this Scottish queen,
1700. where fortune comes as would some go-between
with flighty promises that life will meet,
which in the action prove a bare-faced cheat.
How endlessly the Lord with heavy loads
will burden innocence on these hard roads.

Scene VI

Mary, Seton, Melville and others: Terregles in south-west Scotland

MARY

Three days of ceaseless, headlong flight we've kept
in which we've starved or fasted, barely slept.
Your queen accustomed to her down and silk
has fed on oatmeal and sour asses's milk.
But, my lords, we are alive and face
1710. the foremost prospect of what lands to grace.
South lies England, and the English queen,
ambivalent and meddling, ever keen
to stir up troubles and spoil the hope
of that inheritance of which we often spoke.
What say you Melville: shall we hazard all
and on the court of England make our call?

MELVILLE

No, not Elizabeth. Forebear all thought
of succour there. Continually she's taught
this rough nobility to seek our end
1720. in strife and bloodshed that ambitions send.

HERRIES

The Tudors measure things by wealth and state,
and not concerns to which our hearts relate.

MARY

So should we make a stand of it and wait
for this rough storm around us to abate?
What think you now, my lords, should we take pause
where lands around us hold the Catholic cause?

HERRIES

Morton, Murray, they are fighting men
who value impetus, the how and when
adventure is most ably forced along.
1730. We'll not be suffered here, or not for long.
France or further, madam: there is cost
however fortune wills, or die be tossed.

MARY

But has the regent Catherine been for us
but envious and short of generous?

HERRIES

No doubt that's true, but for each new-crowned son
in turn her realms are ordered and so run.

MARY

So let us cast around and in this guise,
as God is merciful, as He is wise,
accept He cannot let our faith be wrecked,
1740. not one so serving Him, and one elect.

HERRIES

The Lord would teach us prudence, madam, yearn
however much we would that fortune turn.

MARY

But surely through the world's vast, checkered scenes
there stays a probity in upright queens?
They are the Lord's anointed. He on earth
will not desert them as He gave them birth.
We are betrayed, diminished and no doubt
will be the more so till our breath be out,
but in life's winding, trap-set path we've found
1750. much kindness and counsel, wise and sound,
and likewise honesty that we conceive
it is no purpose of our maker to deceive.
True, a thousand terrors seize our mind
to think of that small son we leave behind,
bred up on heresies and everything
that's most injurious as England's king,
or will be when that worn-out Tudor line
must thin to shadows and to dust decline.
Till then, across the water lies a shore,
1760. at least not hostile to us, and the more
acquainted with the south and realms of France
where this first springtime body learnt to dance.
Come, my followers, be brave, and we
may yet achieve our rightful destiny.

(End of Play.)