

MARY STUART AT SOLWAY FIRTH

(FROM THE CHRONICLE HISTORY OF BOTHWELL; ACT V. SCENE XIII.)

Mary, about to embark for England, takes leave of her remaining friends on the shore of Solway Firth.

MAY 16, 1568

The QUEEN, MARY BEATON, HERRIES, GEORGE
DOUGLAS, *Page and Attendants*

Queen. Is not the tide yet full ?

Herries. Come half an hour,
And it will turn ; but ere that ebb begin,
Let me once more desire your pardon, though
I plead against your pleasure. Here you stand
Not yet dethroned from royal hope, not yet
Discrowned of your great name, whose natural power
Faith here forgets not, nor man's loyal love
Leaves off to honour ; but gone hence, your name
Is but a stranger's, subject to man's laws,
Alien and liable to control and chance
That are the lords of exile, and command
The days and nights of fugitives ; your hope

Dies of strange breath or lives between strange lips,
 And nor your will nor only God's beside
 Is master of your peace of life, but theirs
 Who being the lords of land that harbours you
 Give your life leave to endure their empire: what
 Can man do to you that a rebel may,
 Which fear might deem as bad as banishment?
 Not death, not bonds' are bitterer than his day
 On whom the sun looks forth of a strange sky,
 Whose thirst drinks water from strange hands, whose lips
 Eat stranger's bread for hunger; who lies down
 In a strange dark and sleeps not, and the light
 Makes his eyes weep for their own morning, seen
 On hills that helped to make him man, and fields
 Whose flowers grew round his heart's root; day like
 night

Denies him, and the stars and airs of heaven
 Are as their eyes and tongues who know him not.
 Go not to banishment; the world is great,
 But each has but his own land in the world.
 There is one bosom that gives each man milk,
 One country like one mother: none sleeps well
 Who lies between strange breasts: no lips drink life
 That seek it from strange fosters. Go not hence;
 You shall find no man's faith or love on earth
 Like theirs that here cleave to you.

Queen. I have found
 And think to find no hate of men on earth

Like theirs that here beats on me. Hath this earth
 Which sent me forth a five-years' child, and queen
 Not even of mine own sorrows, to come back
 A widowed girl out of the fair warm sun
 Into the grave's mouth of a dolorous land
 And life like death's own shadow, that began
 With three days' darkness—hath this earth of yours
 That made mine enemies, at whose iron breast
 They drank the milk of treason—this hard nurse,
 Whose rocks and storms have reared no violent thing
 So monstrous as men's angers, whose wild minds
 Were fed from hers and fashioned—this that bears
 None but such sons as being my friends are weak,
 And strong, being most my foes—hath it such grace
 As I should cling to, or such virtue found
 In some part of its evil as my heart
 Should fear, being free, to part from? Have I lived,
 Since I came here in shadow and storm, three days
 Out of the storm and shadow? Have I seen
 Such rest, such hope, such respite from despair,
 As thralls and prisoners in strong darkness may
 Before the light look on them? Hath there come
 One chance on me of comfort, one poor change,
 One possible content that was not born
 Of hope to break forth of these bonds, or made
 Of trust in foreign fortune? Here, I knew,
 Could never faith nor love nor comfort breed
 While I sat fast in prison; ye, my friends,

The few men and the true men that were mine,
 What were ye but what I was, and what help
 Hath each love had of other, yours of mine,
 Mine of your faith, but change of fight and flight,
 Fear and vain hope and ruin? Let me go,
 Who have been but grief and danger to my friends;
 It may be I shall come with power again
 To give back all their losses, and build up
 What for my sake was broken.

Herries. Did I know it,
 Yet were I loth to bid you part, and find
 What there you go to seek; but knowing it not,
 My heart sinks in me and my spirit is sick
 To think how this fair foot once parted hence
 May rest thus light on Scottish ground no more.

Queen. It shall tread heavier when it steps again
 On earth which now rejects it; I shall live
 To bruise their heads who wounded me at heel,
 When I shall set it on their necks. Come, friends,
 I think the fisher's boat hath hoised up sail
 That is to bear none but one friend and me:
 Here must my true men and their queen take leave,
 And each keep thought of other. My fair page,
 Before the man's change darken on your chin
 I may come back to ride with you at rein
 To a more fortunate field: howe'er that be,
 Ride you right on with better hap, and live
 As true to one of merrier days than mine

As on that night to Mary, once your queen.
 Douglas, I have not won a word of you ;
 What would you do to have me tarry ?

George Douglas. Die.

Queen. I lack not love it seems then at my last.
 That word was bitter ; yet I blame it not,
 Who would not have sweet words upon my lips
 Nor in mine ears at parting. I should go
 And stand not here as on a stage to play
 My last part out in Scotland ; I have been
 Too long a queen too little. By my life,
 I know not what should hold me here or turn
 My foot back from the boat-side, save the thought
 How at Lochleven I last set foot aboard,
 And with what hope, and to what end ; and now
 I pass not out of prison to my friends,
 But out of all friends' help to banishment.
 Farewell, Lord Herries.

Herries. God go with my queen,
 And bring her back with better friends than I.

Queen. Methinks the sand yet cleaving to my foot
 Should not with no more words be shaken off,
 Nor this my country from my parting eyes
 Pass unsaluted ; for who knows what year
 May see us greet hereafter ? Yet take heed,
 Ye that have ears, and hear me and take note,
 Ye that have eyes, and see with what last looks
 Mine own take leave of Scotland ; seven years since

Did I take leave of my fair land of France,
My joyous mother, mother of my joy,
Weeping; and now with many a woe between
And space of seven years' darkness, I depart
From this distempered and unnatural earth
That casts me out unmothered, and go forth
On this grey sterile bitter gleaming sea
With neither tears nor laughter, but a heart
That from the softest temper of its blood
Is turned to fire and iron. If I live,
If God pluck not all hope out of my hand,
If aught of all mine prosper, I that go
Shall come back to men's ruin, as a flame
The wind bears down, that grows against the wind,
And grasps it with great hands, and wins its way,
And wins its will, and triumphs; so shall I
Let loose the fire of all my heart to feed
On these that would have quenched it. I will make
From sea to sea one furnace of the land
Whereon the wind of war shall beat its wings
Till they wax faint with hopeless hope of rest,
And with one rain of men's rebellious blood
Extinguish the red embers. I will leave
No living soul of their blaspheming faith
Who war with monarchs; God shall see me reign
As he shall reign beside me, and his foes
Lie at my foot with mine; kingdoms and kings
Shall from my heart take spirit, and at my soul

Their souls be kindled to devour for prey
The people that would make its prey of them
And leave God's altar stripped of sacrament
As all kings' heads of sovereignty, and make
Bare as their thrones his temples; I will set
Those old things of his holiness on high
That are brought low, and break beneath my feet
These new things of men's fashion; I will sit
And see tears flow from eyes that saw me weep
And dust and ashes and the shadow of death
Cast from the block beneath the axe that falls
On heads that saw me humbled; I will do it,
Or bow mine own down to no royal end
And give my blood for theirs if God's will be,
But come back never as I now go forth
With but the hate of men to track my way
And not the face of any friend alive.

Mary Beaton. But I will never leave you till
you die.