

MARY STUART AT CHARTLEY

(FROM THE TRAGEDY OF *MARY STUART*; ACT I. SCENE II.)

Mary, while awaiting the result of Babington's conspiracy against the life of Queen Elizabeth, anticipates at once the promised pleasure of a deer-hunt in Tixall Park and the successful issue of the last design on behalf of her cause.

AUGUST 14, 1586

MARY STUART *and* MARY BEATON

Mary Stuart. We shall not need keep house for
fear today;

The skies are fair and hot; the wind sits well
For hound and horn to chime with. I will go.

Mary Beaton. How far from this to Tixall?

Mary Stuart. Nine or ten

Or what miles more I care not; we shall find
Fair field and goodly quarry, or he lies,
The gospeller that bade us to the sport,
r'otesting yesternight the shire had none
To shame Sir Walter Aston's. God be praised,

I take such pleasure yet to back my steed
 And bear my crossbow for a deer's death well,
 I am almost half content—and yet I lie—
 To ride no harder nor more dangerous heat
 And hunt no beast of game less gallant.

Mary Beaton.

Nay,

You grew long since more patient.

Mary Stuart.

Ah, God help!

What should I do but learn the word of him
 These years and years, the last word learnt but one,
 That ever I loved least of all sad words?
 The last is death for any soul to learn,
 The last save death is patience.

Mary Beaton.

Time enough

We have had ere death of life to learn it in
 Since you rode last on wilder ways than theirs
 That drive the dun deer to his death.

Mary Stuart.

Eighteen—

How many more years yet shall God mete out
 For thee and me to wait upon their will
 And hope or hope not, watch or sleep, and dream
 Awake or sleeping? surely fewer, I think,
 Than half these years that all have less of life
 Than one of those more fleet that flew before.
 I am yet some ten years younger than this queen,
 Some nine or ten; but if I die this year
 And she some score years longer than I think
 Be royal-titled, in one year of mine

I shall have lived the longer life, and die
The fuller-fortuned woman.

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Mary Beaton. Have you hope
The chase today may serve our further ends
Than to renew your spirit and bid time speed ?

Mary Stuart. I see not but I may ; the hour is full
Which I was bidden expect of them to bear
More fruit than grows of promise ; Babington
Should tarry now not long ; from France our friends
Lift up their heads to usward, and await
What comfort may confirm them from our part
Who sent us comfort ; Ballard's secret tongue
Has kindled England, striking from men's hearts
As from a flint the fire that slept, and made
Their dark dumb thoughts and dim disfigured hopes
Take form from his and feature, aim and strength,
Speech and desire toward action ; all the shires
Wherein the force lies hidden of our faith
Are stirred and set on edge of present deed
And hope more imminent now of help to come
And work to do than ever ; not this time
We hang on trust in succour that comes short
By Philip's fault from Austrian John, whose death
Put widow's weeds on mine unwedded hope,
Late trothplight to his enterprise in vain
That was to set me free, but might not seal
The faith it pledged, nor on the hand of hope

Make fast the ring that weds desire with deed
And promise with performance ; Parma stands
More fast now for us in his uncle's stead,
Albeit the lesser warrior, yet in place
More like to avail us, and in happier time
To do like service ; for my cousin of Guise,
His hand and league hold fast our kinsman king,
If not to bend and shape him for our use,
Yet so to govern as he may not thwart
Our forward undertaking till its force
Discharge itself on England : from no side
I see the shade of any fear to fail
As those before so baffled ; heart and hand
Our hope is armed with trust more strong than steel
And spirit to strike more helpful than a sword
In hands that lack the spirit ; and here today
It may be I shall look this hope in the eyes
And see her face transfigured. God is good ;
He will not fail his faith for ever. O,
That I were now in saddle ! Yet an hour,
And I shall be as young again as May
Whose life was come to August ; like this year,
I had grown past midway of my life, and sat
Heartsick of summer ; but new-mounted now
I shall ride right through shine and shade of spring
With heart and habit of a bridle, and bear
A brow more bright than fortune. Truth it is,
Those words of bride and May should on my tongue

Sound now not merry, ring no joy-bells out
 In ears of hope or memory ; not for me
 Have they been joyous words ; but this fair day
 All sounds that ring delight in fortunate ears
 And words that make men thankful, even to me
 Seem thankworthy for joy they have given me not
 And hope which now they should not.

Mary Beaton. Nay, who knows ?
 The less they have given of joy, the more they may ;
 And they who have had their happiness before
 Have hope not in the future ; time o'erpast
 And time to be have several ends, nor wear
 One forward face and backward.

Mary Stuart. God, I pray,
 Turn thy good words to gospel, and make truth
 Of their kind presage ! but our Scotswomen
 Would say, to be so joyous as I am,
 Though I had cause, as surely cause I have,
 Were no good warrant of good hope for me.
 I never took such comfort of my trust
 In Norfolk or Northumberland, nor looked
 For such good end as now of all my fears
 From all devices past of policy
 To join my name with my misnated son's
 In handfast pledge with England's, ere my foes
 His counsellors had flawed his craven faith
 And moved my natural blood to cast me off
 Who bore him in my body, to come forth

Less childlike than a changeling. But not long
 Shall they find means by him to work their will,
 Nor he bear head against me; hope was his
 To reign forsooth without my fellowship,
 And he that with me would not shall not now
 Without or with me wield not or divide
 Or part or all of empire.

Mary Beaton. Dear my queen,
 Vex not your mood with sudden change of thoughts;
 Your mind but now was merrier than the sun
 Half rid by this through morning: we by noon
 Should blithely mount and meet him.

Mary Stuart. So I said.
 My spirit is fallen again from that glad strength
 Which even but now arrayed it; yet what cause
 Should dull the dancing measure in my blood
 For doubt or wrath, I know not. Being once forth
 My heart again will quicken. [Sings.

And ye maun braid your yellow hair
 And busk ye like a bride;
 Wi' sevenscore men to bring ye hame,
 And ae true love beside;
 Between the birk and the green rowan
 Fu' blithely shall ye ride.

O ye maun braid my yellow hair,
 But braid it like nae bride;
 And I maun gang my ways, lither,
 Wi' nae true love beside;
 Between the kirk and the kirkyard
 Fu' sadly shall I ride.

How long since,
 How long since was it last I heard or sang
 Such light lost ends of old faint rhyme worn thin
 With use of country songsters? When we twain
 Were maidens but some twice a span's length high,
 Thou hadst the happier memory to hold rhyme,
 But not for songs the merrier.

Mary Beaton. This was one
 That I would sing after my nurse, I think,
 And weep upon in France at six years old
 To think of Scotland.

Mary Stuart. Would I weep for that,
 Woman or child, I have had now years enough
 To weep in; thou wast never French in heart,
 Serving the queen of France. Poor queen that was,
 Poor boy that played her bridegroom! now they see
 In these mine eyes that were her eyes as far
 Beyond the reach and range of oldworld time
 As their first fathers' graves.