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 fosterers. 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 ch’ın
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
MARY STUART AT SOLWAY FIRTH

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
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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.