

# *King's Yellow*

*By Craig S. Barnes*

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*DRAMATIS PERSONÆ*

ELIZABETH	Queen of England
WILLIAM HERBERT, 2 <sup>nd</sup> EARL OF PEMBROKE	Member of Queen's privy council
ROBERT DUDLEY, EARL OF LEICESTER	Intimate companion of the Queen
PHILIP SIDNEY	Poet, a nobleman
MARY SIDNEY	a Maid of Honor, Philip's sister
VISCOUNT JEAN PAUL de SIMIER	Emissary from the <i>Duc d'Anjou</i> , heir to the throne of France
SALADIN	A scholar, bookseller, a Moor
LETTICE DEVEREUX	a Lady in Waiting
DUCHESS OF WESTMORELAND	a Lady in Waiting, Catholic
BISHOP OF WINCHESTER	Confidant of Duchess, Catholic

The late 1500s, in England.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING     Whitehall Palace, London, a summer's night.

AT RISE:     An empty balcony.

[A lone church bell is heard from afar.

[Mary Sidney appears on the balcony.

[The lone bell is heard again followed by distant voices of monks singing a Gregorian chant.]

MUSIC

'Oh, Emanuel, Emanuel, ransom captive Israel....'

MARY

Within yonder chapel candles drip fire, pouring out a golden glow to fill a village street while solemn voices carry on a tradition older than I will ever understand. The Latin they sing is older than their tradition; their search for God older than their Latin; the peace of the roofless night older than any search. On such an eve filled with wide-eyed wonder song surely is the vessel, carries the story within which civil people may forever find hope. Who knows what 'God' means? Who knows what 'Christ' means? The bells know. The music knows. And I, a woman, with a breeze in my hair and stars in my sky am as akin to that Gregorian chant as wind in the leaves, as natural, as fully right to sing my song as any man. And my song shall be this, that in the long current of human stories, in the flood and tragedy of clashing arms not all that Christ stands for is war.

[MARY retreats indoors. Voices below.]

PEMBROKE

Do you not think, my Lord, that queen Mary of Scotland is reason enough to start a very decent war?

LECEISTER

Treachery is indeed, my Lord, a fair basis for war.

DUCHESS OF WESTMORELAND     [Across the chamber]

Is it not clear, my Lord, that Protestants by their insufferable pomposity are sufficient cause to justify war, or if not war, at least a little murder?

BISHOP OF WINCHESTER

Pompous is evil and since all Protestants are pompous, all Protestants are evil. Since all are evil, one or two might be murdered, yes. That is the Pope's position.

PEMBROKE

Prepare for war, sir, to insure the peace. Vetruius, said that. I think.

LEICESTER

One must forego his present ease incurring some disease or have no future ... ease.  
Cicero, said that, I think, though perhaps not as well.

SIDNEY

Is it not solemn truth that here in England alone,  
Richard II was murdered by Henry IV;  
Henry VI murdered by Richard III, himself murdered by Henry VII  
so that his son Henry VIII might raze the monasteries,  
so that his daughter Mary might raise them up again  
so that Mary's sister Elizabeth might once more bring them down?  
Listen:

Wave upon wave  
the clanging sounds of swords,  
the roar of flames, cries of children  
washing over the crown of England.

Those who do conquest  
are conquered in return.

Richard, Henry; Henry, Richard. Flip flop,

MARY

Shh! There are great lords below!  
[MARY and SIDNEY exit.]

LEICESTER

War is good for civilization, I should think, on the whole.

PEMBROKE

War is good for civilization but books are bad for war. Therefore let us disturb a few  
writers, begin a trend of general distrust; narrow the circle around the Queen until we  
discover some source of this rumored Scottish conspiracy.

DUCHESS

Young Mary Sidney glides like a swan about the court, looking beautiful but more  
Protestant than John Calvin and could somehow be bent by her own arrogance to  
the Scottish queen's ends.

BISHOP

Being a woman and therefore passionate, might be tempted to overplay her hand.  
That, my lady, is the story of history.

Scene 2

SETTING Whitehall Palace, London, later the same night.

AT RISE: QUEEN ELIZABETH is at the window in her bed chamber. Enter MARY SIDNEY and LETTICE DEVEREUX with the Queen's wine on a tray.

MARY [Raising the cup high, playfully.]  
With this cup I thee wed!

DEVEREUX  
Just one cup for me in *bed*?

MARY  
Wed or dead!

DEVEREUX  
I'll not in bed; I'd sooner dead than save my head!

ELIZABETH  
Oh, ho! Foolish girl! Take the bed! Do Juliet!  
[The two maids of honor assist the Queen to prepare for bed]

MARY  
'Soft, I hear a lark!'

DEVEREUX  
'Tis *not* the lark, it is the *nightingale* that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear...'

ELIZABETH  
Stop. Stop. There was a time, once, for love, I do recall, but no more. Do something else.

MARY  
The extraordinary wicked and intelligent Queen Margaret?

ELIZABETH  
As in Henry VI? The cuckolding beauty who wed but wed not! Not ever! No more histories! When we find that man Shakespeare we'll let him have a long rest in the Tower. He is illusive, that one.  
[MARY and DEVEREUX both sip from the cup.]

DEVEREUX  
War scenes are the best. Titus. Henry V. Glorious war!

[Offers cup to ELIZABETH.]

Mary knows them better than anyone.

MARY

'Once more unto the breach, dear friends!'

DEVEREUX

Horses leaping, walls falling, men crying out for their wives! What could be grander?

ELIZABETH

Everyone loves war.

DEVEREUX

Oh! I love it! And Robert does too! And... Oh! I mean, I think Lord Leicester and Lord Pembroke and many others see war as quite useful some times.

MARY

Madam, would it not be shocking wonderful if Shakespeare were someone about the court? Someone quite unexpected to write these histories? Say a woman, or a Moor, some imposter, no man of Stratford at all?

ELIZABETH

A woman or a Moor? Making royal death a common spectacle? Picking off my ancestors like ticks on a dog? I'd hang the Moor for insolence and the woman for acting beneath her station. You may go.

MARY and DEVEREUX

Good night, your Majesty.

[Exit DEVEREUX and MARY.]

### Scene 3

SETTING      Whitehall Palace, London, that same night.

AT RISE        The BISHOP and DUCHESS are in quiet conversation. MARY and DEVEREUX usher out from the Queen's chambers and pass by.

BISHOP

Is not one of these the very woman of whom we only now just spoke? She does not look the least fearful!

DUCHESS

Nor is any swan as gentle as she seems. Mary and Lettice act innocent but watch them. Devereux is apt at night to creep toward Lord Leicester's bed and by day the graceful

bird is apt to drift from the palace toward a certain dark Moor in Cheapside. Keep an eye out; their disgrace would be to Christ's advantage.

Scene 4

SETTING     Whitehall Palace, London, that same night.

AT RISE:     MARY SIDNEY and PHILIP SIDNEY are in  
                  private rooms.

MARY

Philip, I serve wine to the Queen! I, read Greek, speak Italian, Spanish, and French and am by order of Her Majesty mute while great lords roar in honor of glorious war.

I serve wine.

This emerald isle, this green paradise where law was born, where parliament meets in ancient affection for monarchy restrained, where courts hold sway, where the sword is sheathed in respect of the word, this home, this castle of civilization, rots.

Power like a whining wind at the eves trains the ear of England's every earl and lord, every treasurer, tax collector and tradesman, holds rapt the Privy Council and silent the wise. Like some evil magnet power straightens up courtiers like steel shavings in a metal row, paralyzed and mute. Who shall break this spell? Who shall tell the Queen that her flinty advisors are more lead than gold?

I serve wine.

SIDNEY

You could publish under my name.

MARY

I do write, already, Philip, and not under your name. More than you know.

SIDNEY

In truth? Tell it me!

MARY

If the Queen were aware she says she would hang me. If you also knew, you too would hang. You won't like hangings very much, especially not your own.

SIDNEY

In all England no woman braver or more alive than you, Mary. And you can write! You could embody in rhyme and verse the frailty of power, sing it indirect in metaphor and song! Tell the Queen she is human!

MARY  
I could.

SIDNEY  
A stage play about a king and the limits of power...?

MARY  
... and pomp and piss ant soldiers!

SIDNEY  
Pembroke pushes this very hour to gain the Queen's consent to war with Spain.

MARY  
Philip, I know a scholar, poses as a bookseller, who also writes could help.

Scene 5

SETTING: Next morning. Cheapside, a market street before a shop in which SALADIN is holding forth. Above the shop is a sign offering "BOOKS! ... EXCURSIONS!...PARDONS!... HERBS NATUREL"

AT RISE LETTICE DEVEREUX brings a letter to SALADIN who is within the shop, hands it to him.

DEVEREUX  
Saladin? The great scholar? For you, sir.

SALADIN  
What is this?

DEVEREUX  
I believe the sword is mightier than the pen.

SALADIN  
Excuse me? The pen is mightier than the sword, I think.

DEVEREUX  
Well, if you love the lady, read her letter.

SALADIN [Reading.]  
From the Lady Sidney? 'Dearest sir, we must write a new play!'



DEVEREUX

Read on.

SALADIN

'I beseech you, sir, in the rising heat of war-bent summer  
there is a flame burning in our land....'  
She writes well, don't you think?

DEVEREUX

I think she is very serious and serious is better than serious does.

SALADIN

'Elizabeth, Queen, 25 years on the throne and still no husband  
would, at last, marry royal France as if only royal will breed royal  
while the Earl of Pembroke will—to secure France—  
to arms 'gainst Spain and,  
adopting one debauchéd Catholic monarch  
fend off yet another debauchéd Catholic monarch  
thereby to make our green island safe from Catholics, kings and debauchery.

'No man there is in all England to cry out  
"Did I hear aright? Am I daft?"  
'Tis our time, sir, to stir the ages with verse  
overwhelm our monarch with passion and curse!

'Think of a king, sir, would serve our end;  
I will to your shop this business to tend!'

Allah be praised. She rhymes her treason. Send her to me then, forthwith. We will talk.  
[Enter LEICESTER and PEMBROKE.]

DEVEREUX

Good day, Lord Robert. The weather is fine and you are fine and fine is the time for ... I  
forget how it ends.

LEICESTER

So fine I can taste it, my lady.  
[Exit DEVEREUX.]

PEMBROKE

Scholar, have you a war play?

SALADIN

Henry V, sir. Blood in the fields, blood on the walls. Glorious war.

PEMBROKE

Nay, not in France. A play, if you please, to exhort our own good queen. Find some script portrays a wicked Scottish monarch. Thereby set the stage to execute Mary the Scottish queen.

LEICESTER

Whose execution will therefore cause an uproar in Catholic Spain, which will then fire upon England....

PEMBROKE

Whereupon poor England being unjustly attacked may at last to war ... in self defense.

SALADIN

Self defense against an invasion England herself hath invited? 'Tis the unmatched brilliance of a soldier's mind.

LEICESTER

English youth are not what they once were, sir, and will not easily rally to glorious death. These days of softness and sloth there needs must be some queen to save or avenge. Queens are superb at being fought for.

SALADIN

The Queen will not object to being seduced by a playwright?

PEMBROKE

Elizabeth is apt to anger 'tis true. If she were to suspect that we toy with her one of us might swing. Therefore, with discretion, when asked, say that this play is not that of some known author but give it rather a false playwright's name, say some man none of us has ever seen. Pretend, good man, that 'tis Shakespeare wrote it, but let it be quietly noised about that the true author is a certain independent woman.

SALADIN

A woman, my Lord?

PEMBROKE

Slyly, sir, and most delicately, if pressed, say that the play which encourages killing the Scottish queen is likely from the pen of that hugely vainglorious Mary Sidney. She writes a good deal in secret I have heard. I will have the play performed under the false name of one of my players, but let it be known 'tis not truly he who's sedition 'tis.

LEICESTER

If she approves the plot, mayhap 'twill encourage Elizabeth to take the Scottish queen to the axe. If Elizabeth disapproves, breaks out in a fit of anger over the idea of beheading a royal, why we shall say it was from the pen of a certain woman broke the law. Either we rid the world of one Catholic queen or one independent woman.

SALADIN

Thank you, sir. A play about a bad Scottish king. Yes sir.  
[Exit LEICESTER and PEMBROKE. MARY SIDNEY enters, disguised.]

MARY  
You received my letter?

SALADIN  
Oh, we are to become a fraud within a fraud! Pembroke just now bid me produce some play and intends that it be noised about that *you* are the author. Meanwhile you *already* intend a play but that you will *conceal* your authorship. Pembroke is therefore to think that he is falsely accusing you while you will falsely deny his false accusation, it being in truth truth, in order to prove the truth about a false queen! Allah be praised!

Only he will not hang for his fraud and you might for yours.

But why does the good earl name you? What has he 'gainst you?

MARY  
He loves me.

SALADIN  
Pembroke loves you? He contrives for you to swing by the neck!

MARY  
I am young; he is unmarried; I am noble and sufficient literate to show off to the court. He did these months back speak his intention to make me his wife.

SALADIN  
And?

MARY  
I rejected him.

SALADIN  
Oh, oh.

MARY  
He was sorely angry.

SALADIN  
And therefore now would as well see you hang.

Maybe we should go to France or Spain. I have family in Gibraltar. You could marry me.

MARY

Sneak out of town? Oh ho! We'd swing before we reached Dover's shore!

SALADIN

You're going to swing anyway for writing plays in the name of a man, which upon allegation, will be shown to be those of a woman, who, upon examination will deny that she is any man because to be a man is illegal unless you are one naturally. We might as well marry first and then die. 'Twould be better than just dying.

MARY

The Moor and his noble, white English lady would to the gallows quicker than a fish down a duck's gullet! Here or Gibraltar!

SALADIN

Is there no blood in those beautiful veins? No love?

MARY

Love is about as relevant as a prayer to a dead chicken. If you want love, sir, help me put the love of decency in our drama. The Queen abused poor Mrs. Stodamire for marrying for love and will chop off the printer John Stubbs' right hand for opposing a royal marriage without love. Stubbs' whole right hand! He will write no more of love! The crown sir of England is gilded on the outside only and there is no power on earth to serve you, dark man, or me, a woman, save language.

SALADIN

Damn. I thought love was everything.

MARY

Were I to say I love you, too, what *then*? Were I to confess some trembling in my chest, some tightness, you would say, 'Ah, yes, and me as well; I tremble all over.' And I, looking into your dark eyes would say, 'Are you *sure* of this?' And you gazing into mine would say, 'I am *sure*!' And I, all scared and blurry minded: 'How will we *know*?' And then the trembling would turn an earthquake! We must not start an earthquake if it can be helped.

You will assist me with the play?

SALADIN

Wherefore?

MARY

To make a monarch human.

SALADIN

When mountains are made low and rivers run uphill.

MARY

We could, you know. Think on't.

I must away, now, please sir. Sometimes the trembling begins when even I don't mean it should.

[Exit MARY.]

SALADIN

Adieu, sweet breathless wonder.

[Enter JEAN PAUL SIMIER.]

SIMIER

*La belle femme!*

SALADIN

God help us.

SIMIER

*Exactement!* God help us all! Ah, *Monsieur*. You 'ave *les livres*?

SALADIN

*Les livres? Les livres? .... Mais oui!* Wise man! *Naturellement!* We 'ave *les livres en Français*, Italian, Spanish *peut etre en Rus*, although Russian is in our French *accoutrement* and will take two months to ship.

SIMIER

Ah ... I see you have 'erbs?

SALADIN

Pardon me?

SIMIER

'erbs?

SALADIN

Wise man! 'erbs! What sort of ... 'erbs?

SIMIER

'erbs that cause a stomach ache?

SALADIN

We have *herbs*! To cure *les ailment de belly!* *Oui, Monsieur!*

SIMIER [Whispers.]

*Non.* Not to cure. To cause a very bad stomach ache. Maybe so bad someone does not recover?

SALADIN

Ah, *Monsieur!* What 'erbs? Do you wish to cause a fever, seizure, contagion, cough, gag or delirium?

SIMIER

Perhaps all together. *Very seriouise!* A certain awful witch in Paris is —how do you say?— *frigidly-ing* my wife. *Vous comprenez?* One must do something *abnormal*.

SALADIN

King's Yellow, sir. King's Yellow will gag the witch so quick 'twill scare the assassin! Let him depart *tout suite*, *Monsieur*, or the victim will wiggle at his feet before he is escaped!

Scene 6

SETTING: Whitehall Palace, a month later. The Privy Council is meeting with the Queen

AT RISE: PEMBROKE and LEICESTER, and PHILIP SIDNEY await the Queen.

[Flourish.] [Enter ELIZABETH with LETTICE DEVEREUX and MARY SIDNEY]

SIDNEY

Your Highness.

PEMBROKE

Your Highness.

LEICESTER

Your Highness.

ELIZABETH

My lords.

LEICESTER

Your Highness.

SIDNEY

Your Highness.

PEMBROKE

Lay on the arms Madam, we prepare this day for war.

ELIZABETH

Everyone likes war. Well, we cannot afford it.

LEICESTER

Your Highness, can it be expensive to put one grand captain in the field? Is more needed for a European ass than to see the glint of one true English spur? Should a captain not be handsome? Should a captain not be natural in the saddle? Can there be any doubt who England's one true captain might be? And if all such allure resides in one man, is one man so expensive?

SIDNEY

He is natural in the saddle, that is true.

LEICESTER

Say but the word, I charge! With Pembroke alongside, of course.

SIDNEY

They want you to pretend to love the Duke D'Anjou in France, who will, if you pay with your body also ask you to pay 20,000 francs for those of his wars not conducted in bed.

ELIZABETH

We are to appear to love France, thereby to anger Spain.

SIDNEY

Whereby France will not object to your beheading their sweet kin Mary of Scotland whom you have imprisoned at Fotheringhay.

ELIZABETH

Well, everyone knows I love Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester. At a distance.

LEICESTER

Who loves your Majesty more even than your Majesty loves him and who with all his heart would abolish such distance, given the invitation!

ELIZABETH

It is sad you are not brother to a king.

LEICESTER

If an earl could match a monarch's sadness he would, but he is only an earl.

ELIZABETH

I give my body to the French Duke. Queen Mary gives her head to us. Our subjects applaud the beheading because brutality unites us all. Pembroke marches. Leicester unfurls his banners—the more to look grand than to march—and civilization advances.

PEMBROKE

England is beset with Jesuits who even now seek to do the will of Mary of Scotland! Let us at least take the Scottish queen to the executioner! Then on to Glasgow, Paris, and Castille! Let the Duke of Alba taste steel 'tween his ribs and watch how quick to an English queen the Dutch will kneel!

ELIZABETH

We do not like beheading queens. We do not like death, sir, nor much talk thereof and certainly not the deaths of queens. Horrid thought.

SIDNEY

May it please your Highness, *any* beheading demeans your throne. Executions are civil war against Her Majesty's own subjects, one person at a time.

PEMBROKE [Aside to LEICESTER.]

Now then, my Lord, I shall cut the first of these craven sheep from the bleating flock.

Your Majesty, this youth is a whimpering *poet* ... and a flatterer, a sycophant, a courtier, hollow at the core, and ... and....

SIDNEY

... *that* lord a simpering idiot! Is it poetry, sirrah, or fact that war is time out of mind a summons to the witless?

MARY

Philip....

PEMBROKE

Witless, sir? Do you call the Earl of Pembroke witless? Your Majesty our English isle is beset with pussy willows posing as poets!

ELIZABETH

Philip Sidney, it is not wise to call the great Lord Pembroke witless!

PEMBROKE

Thank you, your Majesty. The man is a coward.

SIDNEY

War is the excess of power, the corruption of good sense! War is *inevitable* when power is absolute!

ELIZABETH

Corruption? Of good sense? Of *whom*?

MARY

Philip!



ELIZABETH  
Of *whom*, sir?

SIDNEY  
Of ... of... of my own, Madam. My lord earl is correct. I am a coward.

MARY  
Ahhh, Philip!

Your Majesty.           [Bows and leads SIDNEY out.]

Scene 7

SETTING:     Whitehall Palace, a week later, a reception is in progress

AT RISE:     PEMBROKE, LEICESTER in conversation on right. LADY JANE, DUCHESS OF WESTMORELAND and BISHOP OF WINCHESTER are in a third group, apart down stage. SIMIER enters.

DUCHESS:  
*Ah, Monsieur le Viscount! Bon soir.*

SIMIER  
*Bon soir, Madame, Your Grace.*

BISHOP  
Queen Mary of Scotland sends to us messages encoded and says you are come to do the Pope's business.

DUCHESS  
Lethal business.

SIMIER  
What a Frenchman must do for women! *Criminal!* They kill us and we kill for them.

BISHOP  
Killing Protestants is rewarded, my son, in heaven.

SIMIER  
The Scottish queen promises heaven to me here on earth which is more than my French duke offers. *Oui*; I have agreed.

BISHOP

All that you see here, save us, are heretics. On your left, Sidney the Calvinist coward and his sister, Mary. She looks the swan but is crafty. The group to the right are war mongers. The queen teeters between, forever and always the illegitimate daughter of a whore, fearing ultimately that she, too, will die under the axe.

DUCHESS

Leicester the handsome woos the lady Lettice Devereux who is at his side. He beds one wife of his own, one wife of someone else, and would bed the Queen were he not sorely unable to remember what corridor leads to which mattress.

BISHOP

If you hint that you know of his secret liaison with Lettice Devereux he will perchance support your duke's case.

DUCHESS

Especially if it offers him a cause to go to war, which he has never done but imagines is sufficient grand to carry his reputation back to all three bedrooms at once.

SIMIER

Mastery! To please three women with one deed, offending none and preparing each for the pillow! Is he French?

DUCHESS

My Lord Leicester would breed French sheep given the chance. You are welcome to him.

SIMIER

Would he, threatened with disclosure, pass poison to the Queen?

DUCHESS

She loves him, it is true, and would not suspect, but he is a breeder, not an assassin. He would not have courage.

SIMIER

One of you, then, to pass the poison rather than a Frenchman?

DUCHESS

My lord Bishop is, indeed, trusted but seldom near the Queen. My husband was Catholic and the Queen killed him therefore I, too, am usually at a distance. You, as Anjou's delegate shall have the best chance. We shall, therefore, send you claret if you have some dangerous substance to mix therein.

SIMIER

*Oui*, I have been to the city and have obtained that yellow stuff from some dark bookseller. *Mon dieu*, I will mourn when the great Queen is dead! The claret is dark red, very dark?

DUCHESS

*Oui, Monsieur*. We will send the glass by one of the Protestant Sidneys. They are of all most opposed to your master's cause and 'twill be sweet irony to stamp them with the deed! Shh! Leave us then before we are remarked!

[Exit DUCHESS and BISHOP. PEMBROKE approaches, bows to SIMIER.  
Trumpets. Enter ELIZABETH, followed by MARY SIDNEY.]

PEMBROKE

Majesty, may I introduce *Monsieur le Viscount* Jean Paul de Simier?

SIMIER

Majestee!

[Bows.]

*Mon dieu!* Standing in the light? Madam, I am *Viscount* Jean Paul de Simier, personal messenger of his honorable grace the most righteous brother to the King of France, the *Duc d' Anjou!*

ELIZABETH

And we sir, are Elizabeth, Queen of the Welsh, Irish, and English, protector of the faith, supreme sovereign of the isles, maid, and virgin. And for the time being, still alive.

SIMIER

Alive? *Mon dieu*, each progress of this description builds value to my suit! *La belle femme!* And yet—*est que c'est possible?*—there is nothing in England—how do you say?—more *extraordinaire* than the beauty of England's queen.

SIDNEY

Some fever dissolves French tongues even when their brains are below freezing.

ELIZABETH

This is our poet, Philip Sidney. He is a hothead but for the moment remains in our favor.

SIMIER

*Le mariage c'est fait* in heaven do you not agree, *madame?*

ELIZABETH

Marriage made in heaven? How would a woman not agree to that?

SIMIER

May I therefore propose that Her Majesty and I visit *entre nous en jardin*, explore those farther ranges of Plutarch and Homer, probe the depths of a possible Arcadian union. Drink wine. Claret, perhaps? Our business is only *l' amour*.

ELIZABETH

Sidney, it is not flattery if it is true. When they say I am beautiful they are correct, are they not?

SIDNEY

Correct and also wise, your Majesty.

SIMIER

*Alors*, we do not need extras in the garden. Let this young scowler remain behind.

ELIZABETH

*Monsieur*, we are warned to beware of flatterers and Jesuits and therefore he must follow, but at a distance. Being a poet, he is unable to see clearly but thinks only of love. My Lord *Viscount*, shall we explore *l' amour au jardin*?

[Exit ELIZABETH and SIMIER. Enter the DUCHESS bearing a tray of wine goblets followed by MARY SIDNEY.]

DUCHESS

Thank you, Mary. Be a good child and be sure that the Queen and Viscount Simier are served. They are in the garden.

SIDNEY

I was intending that way, I shall take it myself. [Takes the tray and exits.]

[Enter ELIZABETH and SIMIER.]

ELIZABETH

*Voici tout les roses; voici tout l'oiseaux au jardin.*

SIMIER

*Fantastique!*

My lord D'Anjou has great love for your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

And we have great love for him.

SIMIER

He sits for hours looking first out the window then back to the picture of your glorious self which he keeps beside him at all times.

ELIZABETH

And we never part with his fond letters. They are more than gold to us.

SIMIER

He wants to be your prince.

ELIZABETH

And I his princess. How much will this cost me?

SIMIER

It will be a short war. Not so very much. The Spanish are cowards.

ELIZABETH

Our lord Pembroke urges war in Castille, our gentle friend Sidney opposes war anywhere, including France, and says that we shall have to eliminate half the people of Flanders.

SIMIER

Not so *tragique, madame*, to eliminate half of Flanders. They are merely Boshe.

ELIZABETH

The Boshe die more happily than the English?

SIMIER

A dead Boshe is not much different than a live one, *Madame*. Send us an army, you will hear nothing.

[Enter SIDNEY, bearing wine tray.]

SIDNEY

Wine, your Highness?

ELIZABETH

Sidney, *Monsieur le Viscount*, assures me that war in France will be short.

SIDNEY

The last short war we fought in France was 150 years ago. We are still in Calais.

SIMIER

Young man, I thought I heard a cuckoo at garden's end. Be a good chap and investigate. I should very much like to see a cuckoo.

SIDNEY

A cuckoo?

SIMIER

Didn't you hear it? If you please, leave me the claret and go find it; Her Majesty and I will follow forthwith. [Takes the cup from Sidney.] Do you care for claret, your Majesty?

ELIZABETH

I should like to see the cuckoo myself. Sidney, bring it here, sir.

SIDNEY

Bring the cuckoo, here?

ELIZABETH

Why not? It must be very small.

SIDNEY

Cuckoos fly about free, Madam.

ELIZABETH

A cuckoo is relative to the Guinea, we are sure, which is often domesticated; do you not think so, *Monsieur*?

SIMIER

*Mais absolument!*

SIDNEY

Madam?

ELIZABETH

Oh never mind! Take your wine, Sidney, we have lost interest in claret and cuckoos.  
[Exit ELIZABETH and SIMIER.] [Enter MARY.]

SIDNEY [Sets tray aside.]

She flies about like a banner in the wind! Catch a cuckoo! Next she will bring a Catholic cuckoo to be crowned king in Westminster!

MARY

The Duke's brother murdered a thousand Protestants in Paris! Philip, the Queen seems not only to toy with Simier but to warm to him. I shall put an evil French king in our play.

SIDNEY

Alongside your evil Scottish king. How many evil kings can you put in one play? Think on't. I must back to the garden.

MARY

Careful. She is dangerous when in heat.

[Exit SIDNEY.] [Enter SALADIN.]

What are you doing *here*?

SALADIN

I have progress! When the Queen comes abed tonight let her find you alone reading. Say this scrap of drama has your attention and wonder what might be her opinion! Begin to persuade her against France, even now. I brought a little more, for you, as well Mary, that you might reconsider your hard-hearted rejection of your Moor.

MARY

I did not reject him. I rejected us. I rejected certain death or certain exile for you and me and certain banishment from this court for my brother. I did not reject you.

SALADIN

'When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes  
I all alone bewep my outcast state'  
[DUCHESS passing.]

DUCHESS

Sir? That woman is noble, English and white. You had better be peddling your wares elsewhere.

SALADIN

Ah, my Lady! A bookseller needs a reader, a noble woman to assay the noble market...  
[Passes the paper to MARY.]

MARY

Or an editor! To apprise a couplet:  
[Reading.]  
'For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings  
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.'

Oh!

DUCHESS

Pretty.  
[Exit DUCHESS.]

MARY

Oh, sir, the trembling is so easy to start.

SALADIN

My lady, let the Queen hear how the lark sings before you tell her his plumage is dark!  
[Exit SALADIN. Enter DUCHESS and BISHOP, opposite.]

BISHOP

How does she measure Simier?

DUCHESS

Oh! She is taken. Already she asks—among those ladies who might know—what sort of lovers Frenchmen be. Then she begins laughing softly to herself. I have never, in 20 years, seen Elizabeth so heated. As if this were her last chance! Perfect for Simier!

BISHOP

Do you find a way to bring her claret?

DUCHESS

I do. I even found an innocent Sidney to pass it to Simier.

[Enter PEMBROKE and LEICESTER.]

PEMBROKE

Oh, dear God! A serving maid has been poisoned down below!

MARY

Oh, dear God!

[Enter SIMIER and LEICESTER.]

LEICESTER

A serving maid was drinking from the cups in the kitchen suddenly turned purple, gagged and gave up the ghost!

PEMBROKE

Ha! Here is a crime for which someone will hang!

MARY

Yes, sir, but which someone?

SIMIER

*Quelle horror!* A maid!

[Exit all but MARY.]

MARY

Of a sudden 'tis become a night most dangerous. If the Queen is not immediate led to some gentler thought, she will as monarchs are pleased to do leap upon some nearby suspect nor will it be the strongest upon whom the royal wrath falls but rather some weaker person, easier to dispose. Saladin's play, this night received from him, might with poetry lead her to a finer, more civil resolution. Or I might find Philip and run away. Or I could, more true, go in now to the Queen, attempt with Saladin's poetry to soften her ire.

## Scene 8

SETTING: Whitehall Palace



AT RISE: ELIZABETH is alone in her chambers.

ELIZABETH

Some lawyer might opine this merely a squalid love quarrel in the kitchen. Oh ho! Who other than the Queen to warrant murder within the palace? My subjects love me. And where there is love is there not certainly its opposite? Jealousy manufactured this poison. Oh, does the daughter of Anne Boleyn not know about jealousy? Heads are lost for jealousy and we'll not have jealousy poison this court!

[Enter MARY SIDNEY and LETTICE DEVEREUX]

MARY

Your Majesty, is there ought I can do for you? A reading from some scrap of poetry I found? It is quite lovely.

DEVEREUX

This wine is tested Madame. I am still alive!

ELIZABETH

Do you and your brother love us a great deal, Mary?

MARY

Oh, yes, madam, ... and France also a little ... sometimes. Were it not so barbarous ... sometimes.

ELIZABETH

You were seen this evening with a dark man. Who is he?

MARY

He sells plays from that man Shakespeare and I have in my hand a play he ... has written about Scotland.... Your Highness, I could leave it about for some day when Her Majesty has interest in history....

ELIZABETH

What is a man like that doing here?

MARY

Lord Pembroke is said to have interest in a play about Scotland.... Saladin is his name. He ....

ELIZABETH

.... does poison?

MARY

Oh, no!

ELIZABETH

Why, oh no?

MARY  
Because ....

ELIZABETH  
God's death. Are you attracted to that man, Mary?

MARY  
Well he writes and is not so full of pomp and piss that he is invisible. He is black but he is real black.

ELIZABETH  
Sweet Jesus. Mary Sidney you shall marry! Lettice call them all in. Summon Simier, and Robert the Earl of Leicester, and whoever else is out there, at once!  
[Exit DEVEREUX.]

MARY  
Madam, is your Highness familiar with the history of Scotland....?

ELIZABETH  
Old Lord Pembroke is twice widowed and when alone becomes mad for war. If he marries he will calm down again. He shall be yours, Mary, and you shall have the finest soldier in all England! But keep him in bed, if you please, until we need him. We must be separate, Mary, from all those men who were close to us this evening.

MARY  
Oh, no! I ... I...Oh, no!

Your Majesty, I ... I ...  
[DEVEREUX returns with SIMIER, SIDNEY, LEICESTER and PEMBROKE.]

ELIZABETH  
My lord Viscount, take this ring and give it to your French master *Anjou*! It is my troth. They say he is ugly. But he has a mind. They say we are old, but we have a mind. So we are matched! Join these minds and join these kingdoms and let there be less of war. Pembroke you shall be too busy with your new bride to make war. Here. I give you Mary Sidney. Now, every wretched one of you who was near to me this evening shall be off. Sidney you and Leicester march to the Netherlands to join Anjou and scare off the Spanish. Pembroke, you and Mary to your estates in Wilton and stay there until I call. Simier, you to France to take my ring to D' Anjou. Tell him I will marry!

SIDNEY, LEICESTER, PEMBROKE  
Nay! Not ever! No!

LEICESTER

Does the Queen entirely, completely and totally forget those who over the years were of her most enraptured, most becharmed, most heartsmiten? Our years, our rides in the forest, the hunts, the wine....?

SIDNEY

Within Leicester's brave affection lies some wisdom, your Majesty! A hasty decision to marry a French Catholic does not dignify our Queen!

ELIZABETH

You, sirrah, shall be charged to hold Leicester from the life of the sword in the Netherlands; see to it that he proclaims this or that but does not march anywhere. Stop war, if it is your desire, but do it some place away from our royal person.

SIDNEY

Your English subjects tremble at the massacres of Protestants in Paris and will think it madness to bring the Catholic Dauphin here! Anjou will turn your subjects against Your Majesty!

ELIZABETH

Sidney, who was gliding about with poisoned wine this evening? Who? Have done and be glad you go to Flanders and not the Tower!

LEICESTER

But Sidney is correct! England does not want a French king!

SIMIÉR

My lord, might I speak with you a moment?

ELIZABETH

Go! Get acquainted and decide who shall bed the queen. Pick someone! Every woman in the kingdom has someone to wrap around at night, save one. The one is tired of waiting!

LEICESTER

Your Majesty. [Walks aside with SIMIÉR.]

SIMIÉR [Aside to LEICESTER.]

There is the matter, Sir, of your close relation to the lady Lettice Devereux, of which the Queen knows nothing but we in France know everything. Would it not be wiser for my lord earl to agree with our suit somewhat more?

LEICESTER [Returning to the circle.]

Marry whom you will! I go to Flanders to shed my blood on your behalf and will not ever seek thanks for my sacrifice. It is my pleasure to die now alone, unloved, and unattended. Never mind. Forget old loves. I leave!

[Bows to SIMIÉR. Exits.]

ELIZABETH

Done then! As for you, Mary Sidney, Lord Herbert is honorable. Sir, we shall honor your union with a wedding at Wilton House within the month!

MARY

But I must not! I must translate *Psalms of David* and *Dante* for Her Majesty! And, and  
....

ELIZABETH

Mary, you have won the first soldier in all England! Take a moment to visit, to exchange personals. He is not so old as he looks. See to it you don't die as quick as his other wives did.

[Turning as if to leave.]

Now, will someone find that man Saladin and put him on a boat to wherever he came from?

SIMIER

*Madame*, I will see to it myself. Give me the ring and the boat and I will take *Monsieur Saladin avec moi* to France! The ring I will give to my duke, the traitor to my duke's warders, may he rot in hell!

MARY

Oh, no, he is a poet and playmaker and ... speaks truth when others flatter only and he discourses on Caesar, the Greeks, all manner of things good for England to know!

SIMIER

The man may even be a dealer in poisons. We will find the truth in a French dungeon soon enough!

MARY

Philip!

SIDNEY

Your Highness, let him come with me, I know him well and he will be of service in Flanders.

ELIZABETH

Oh, this is bold! It will be the first test of your warrior's judgment, Sidney. Take him then! But just don't bring any more dark people in here.

MARY

Oh! Oh! Oh!

[Exit ELIZABETH and all except PEMBROKE and MARY.]

PEMBROKE

God's death! Here I go again.

Madam, I shall provide you with lands in Dorset, Wiltshire, Devon, Glamorgan and Monmouth and with an annual income of more than one thousand pounds. You shall also have properties in Sussex, Kent and Surrey. You will be their mistress. I am afraid there will not be much time for *Dante*.

MARY

My lord I would ... be someone's Beatrice, a light for some ... one... a candle... a muse...? Do you understand?

PEMBROKE

We shall, if you like, arrange for your poetic brother Philip to join us from time to time so that you will have someone to talk with about Bernadette.

MARY

Beatrice! Oh, dear Jesus. Philip cannot come! She is sending him to the Netherlands!  
[Exit MARY in haste.]

PEMBROKE

This is rich. Conspiracy comes in a damnéd circle! I try to launch the Sidneys and one comes home to my bed! I try to prepare the way for war and the other one is sent to the front and charged to halt war.

Well, the one I got will probably give me a little war of her own, just to prove me illiterate. I did love her once. If she really is a writer, 'tis dangerous; with the Queen in her mood; 'twould not be prudent just now for Pembrokes to be complaining.

## ACT II

### Scene 1

SETTING: A private chapel at Whitehall

AT RISE: DUCHESS is making confession to the BISHOP

BISHOP

You failed your God.

DUCHESS

I succeeded in ridding London of the Sidneys.

BISHOP

The Queen is now more alert than ever; Simier is on his way to France and we have no poisoner. The Pope has personal love for you but warns that if Elizabeth lives long enough to war 'gainst Spain he will change his mind.

DUCHESS

Yes, of course, I have sinned.

BISHOP

Explain to Simier before he sails that Lettice Devereux has an eye for a French leg, and that the *Monsieur* has many other sweet friends here who will miss him. They will ease his return. He should take the ring to his Duke and hasten back to London. God awaits his servant.

## Scene 2

SETTING:     Saladin's bookshop, in a back room.

AT RISE:     SALADIN and MARY are dancing a circle in the center of the room, each holding a script in hand, reading from it. Outside the door SIMIER approaches, hears voices and stops to overhear.

MARY

I call in the bats and toads and owls the clamor and attack of falcons, the wolf, the serpents, scorpions, beetles, the crow and the rook!

SALADIN

And I the darkness, the eclipse, the rain, Poseidon the Earthshaker, Hades his brother and Zeus the thunderer! Murder on the heath, murder in the wind, murder in the minds of Scottish men!

MARY

Toil and trouble, boil and bubble, cauldron boil, cauldron bubble!

SALADIN

I can see it!

MARY

May all the wickedness of royal power be recompensed, may all the gods be watchful, and sin remembered!

[SALADIN stops dancing.]

SALADIN

A Scottish witch would say that? Do witches call in the gods?

[MARY stops.]

MARY

Well, they might. Someone is always watching us here on earth. How else could I have hope save with God's help?

SALADIN

With every man on earth, with every courtier, with every noble lord, there were always for me words like a river. Always, save with you, Mary. I fall silent and think to myself, oh that I could with some solid thing, some sword, or lawyer's contract, or farmer's plough woo this maid!

MARY

England has no pool so deep, Mr. Saladin, as your hunger. I know that.

SALADIN

I am overtaken with Mary Sidney and so leave her.

MARY

Watch over Philip please, sir. All he knows is words, too.

SALADIN

I shall, but ...

MARY

You must leave, my love, to save us both.

SALADIN

How can you say 'my love' and think of marrying that awful soldier?

MARY

What is this body? Baby-making flesh that dies. Some spark is here is more than this. Some fire is here spreads through every finger touched, every child I shall ever hold, every succor to a friend, every kindness on earth and so never rests. 'Tis no mere flame so much as a conflagration, Mr. Saladin, will therefore spread to every corner of Wilton, to every corner of England, and forever. Love is not by one life measured.

SALADIN

You will have to have the Scottish play delivered to Pembroke and Leicester.

MARY

I know. They still think Shakespeare is a man living in Stratford. The railing in this script about royal power is strong. Could do the poor man in if the Queen holds 'tis too much like treason.

SALADIN

Killing kings is the work of the blessed! I could do it myself now.

MARY

I will instruct the witches to cry out 'Die Macbeth!' with gusto.

SALADIN

You will need to save *you* if they find out your part.

MARY

Nay. Your danger now is greater than mine! Elizabeth thinks the poison was from you intended for her!

SALADIN

So we are done.

MARY

Only on this earth.

SALADIN

I will watch over Philip.

MARY

He never held a sword in anger.

SALADIN

Goodbye?

[SIMIER enters the room.]

SIMIER

Well, what 'ave we 'ere? Very interesting. Nothing wrong with love, of course, we all approve of love, naturally. Very touching. Pardon, the interruption, *Monsieur*, but I must take you now with me to France!

MARY

No! He is to go with my brother! The Queen said he should!

SIMIER

Queens are apt to forget little details and there is poisonous business to—how do you say—finalize, between this man and myself.

[Enter PHILIP SIDNEY.]

SIDNEY

Sirrah, the Queen may forget but I do not and Saladin is to be my bodyguard, protector and companion, so unhand him and now, Saladin, sir, to the wharf with me at once!

SALADIN

Yes sir. Yes, sir. [Exit all.]



ACT III

Scene 1

SETTING: Two separate desks apart in a room in the Netherlands, two separate desks apart at Wilton House

AT RISE: LEICESTER is in an exchange of letters with PEMBROKE; MARY with LETTICE DEVEREUX.

LEICESTER

My dear sir, we might as well be poets. I sit. I wait. The Queen freezes me. Poor Sidney in great fear does nothing but train his men. Lettice Devereux has secretly crossed the channel to unfreeze me. She is lovely.

PEMBROKE

My dear sir. A band of yeoman raised a terrible row in Cheapside last night. They object to the Queen's proposed marriage to France. I have had them all arrested and will send them to you. Put them in the front. Very glad you enjoy Lettice. My new countess is also quite wonderful. She does not love me but is dutiful and manages property most exquisitely.

MARY

Secret friend Lettice: How is your lusty love? And how is my brother? And how is Saladin? I survive on writing and pretend abject obedience. But the old man is not as bad as I thought he would be.

DEVEREUX

Saladin is always writing. Like you. When I ask him what about, he says, 'the tragic romance of a jealous Moor!' You know what that means.

LEICESTER

I have placed Sidney on a wide-exposed flank near Zutphen, to draw the Spanish Duke of Alba into a trap. We will lose some commoners but 'twiill be grand excuse to attack Spain direct!

DEVEREUX

The more I try to calm my Lord Leicester the more morose and depressed he becomes. Calm only makes him angry. He will to war now, I fear, on any excuse.

MARY

Tell Saladin to stop writing about lovesick Moors. We must sharpen the message beyond the Scottish plague or else the royal claque will without a thought or caution plunge into war. Quickly! But take care! The Queen does not live easy these days and is sore dangerous to all about her, including me.

LEICESTER

Your rowdy band from the streets arrived. Not a true sword among them. I have sent them to surround Sidney. Alba approaches. We may at last be rid of the London rabble in a stroke.

PEMBROKE

Sir! Sidney's sister is a jewel, has become a light to my life. She pleads to have her brother back and I have promised to save him!

LEICESTER

My Lord, the Queen in a fury has summoned me to London to explain why I have provoked Alba! I must leave at once and entrust all to the poet!

PEMBROKE

Come quick! Queen Mary of Scotland is plotting rebellion and spreading the plan by means of messages secreted within beer casks. She identifies her conspirators! Return at once and together we will present the evidence to Her Majesty.

## Scene 2

SETTING: Elizabeth's sitting room in Whitehall

AT RISE: ELIZABETH is alone.

ELIZABETH

This court is so hollow with Leicester gone and Sidney away and no Pembroke thunder. Bats will soon be roosting on our bedposts! My lords should not have deserted me thus! I shall no longer pretend but actually marry France! Why *not* risk all in aged childbirth or Protestant rebellion or hopeless clash of arms? Screaming bloody cries are more near to life than Privy Councilors. Have at it then! War and marriage. Hail France! Harken Spain! England will to arms after all!

[Enter DUCHESS and BISHOP.]

Well, thank God, someone's still here.

DUCHESS

Your Majesty.

BISHOP

Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

Grand that you are arrived and that we have someone to talk to. But first send word, my lord Bishop, if you would please, that Leicester is to war after all! He is not to come home. He is to make war!

[Enter LEICESTER and PEMBROKE.]

LEICESTER

Your Majesty!

ELIZABETH

God's death! What are you doing here? We are ordering you to war!

LEICESTER:

Your Majesty, Mary Sidney has married Pembroke and is safe in Wilton, near the Avon. Her brother Philip and that man Saladin are protecting Flanders. Simier has been to France and returned and I myself am forever exiled in the Netherlands, cast upon the shores of fate, for crimes and favors unremembered.

ELIZABETH

Poor man.

LEICESTER

All those who were about Your Majesty on the night of the attempted poisoning are gone and there is still no safety. Mary of Scotland conceals her intent to murder Her Grace in coded messages hidden within certain casks of beer which were carried to and from her cell.

ELIZABETH

Queen Mary, sending messages in a beer cask? To her conspirators? Who are they then?

LEICESTER

Madam, with the greatest reluctance I must report that ....

[Enter SIMIER.]

ELIZABETH

Yes? Someone is the poisoner? Who?

SIMIER

Madam, we came by happenstance this very moment to reveal to you, if you please, the secret lover of Lettice Devereux! That man, the Earl of Leicester!

ELIZABETH

Loyal Leicester, friend and companion Leicester who would bargain with France for the right to take me to bed!? Loyal Leicester, Master of the Queen's horse and—you always knew, Sir, you always knew—of her *heart*? *What!*? You and Lettice!

SIMIER

It is true, Madam, as I am God's servant.

ELIZABETH

Deny it, Robin!

LEICESTER

Her Grace is planning wars and the like and would not have had time to consider our request, given her own importunities and adumbulations, mixed with trembling and tenderness.

ELIZABETH

'Adumbulations and tremblings'? Holy Mary Mother of God! What are you talking about!?

LEICESTER

Transfigurations, mogrofifications, that sort of thing, have kept Her Majesty busy.

ELIZABETH

While we have been transfiguring and mogrofying, you have been stealing about with our own sweet Lettice Devereux!? You don't *deny* it?

LEICESTER

Send me back to the Netherlands. I will serve you there until I die!

ELIZABETH

Oh, sweet Jesu! Leave yesterday! Be gone, sir!  
[Exit LEICESTER.]

SIMIER

Madam, there is more. With the greatest regret and sadness I am forced to report to you that Philip Sidney, that poet of doubtful courage whom you have loved is, well, probably not the poisoner. That is true. But his sister most likely is. I myself was present when she said farewell to her accomplice that black Saladin and before he sailed they danced and sang the songs of witches and brews, crows and rooks, snakes and scorpions. Then I heard her cry out, "death to Miss Bess!" I swear it.

PEMBROKE

Not ever!

DUCHESS

Oh, ho! Madam, she is the author of seditious *writing*, as well!

BISHOP

Worse than seditious; regicidal, I should think.

PEMBROKE

Your Majesty, 'tis rumor I did myself invent before the woman became my wife and which rumor I now freely confess was baseless!

ELIZABETH

This is bad news. Marriage can turn a good soldier to stand on his head. But which way is upright? Was he telling the truth before or is he telling the truth now?

PEMBROKE

Now!

DUCHESS

The earl fears for his new countess, as well he should, for he married a viper with a deadly tongue. There is no William Shakespeare, madam, and the author of all those plays which kill kings and queens is Mary Sidney! There is no wool merchant in Stratford with the education to write of Italy and Greece and this court! There is no Shakespeare that you, your Majesty, have seen, nor any script of his and yet he writes as if this court were his second home! It is not his writing; it is Mary Sidney's, lo these many years your familiar and confidant!

ELIZABETH

You are saying that a woman writes dramas of history? And is the Pope a woman? And who else? Charlemagne?

DUCHESS

It is she who approvingly killed off Henry the Sixth, Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, crowned or noble heads, all.

SIMIER

I, *Madame*, saw her in the dark of night dancing the witches dance, crying out, 'kill Miss Bess!' She was present as well on the night of the maid's poisoning and no doubt handed to her brother the noxious goblet intended for Her Grace!

ELIZABETH

'Tis true her brother furiously opposes our marriage to France and Mary with her brother translates *Psalms of David* to warn 'tyrants' that God is watching! Is Elizabeth a tyrant then? Does any of you hold Elizabeth of England a tyrant?

BISHOP

Scurrilous insinuation! Not ever, Your Highness.

DUCHESS

Before she was the Countess Pembroke, Mary Sidney oft kept company with that dark stranger Saladin who certainly looks a Jesuit. And if a Jesuit, was he not sent here by the Pope to murder Her Majesty? No doubt Mary loves him and not the earl. When dark people gather, they seduce. Lust is their mark.

BISHOP

If she is a witch—many independent women are—'tis likely she seduced him. Witches seduce almost as much as Moors. Either way there's a Satanic energy in these two.

ELIZABETH

It could be so.

DUCHESS

Madam, I did myself speak with her on the very night of the poisoning and she was then trading verses with that dark man. I saw them whispering. There was no good intent but some conspiracy between them.

BISHOP

I did as well—I recall it now—accuse her then of writing seditious plays! She seemed uncertain how to respond, as if bethinking the consequences, as criminals are wont to do.

SIMIER

That man Saladin had King's Yellow to his case, I'll swear it. This could be passed to Mary to put within the claret to pass to her brother and then to the Queen. I was there on the evil night, your Majesty, I saw Sidney bring such like to us while we spoke of cuckoos in the garden!

ELIZABETH

My lord Pembroke, your young countess does not truly give consent to queens at all, does she? Nor ever quite thinks anyone as intelligent as she; nor as beautiful; nor as interested in our poor subjects. Well, we think there are others, indeed.

BISHOP

Including our sovereign.

ELIZABETH

Including, thank you sir, her sovereign .... as we are sure those here assembled do concur. Thinking thus above herself 'tis no wonder she would go where women should not and are by nature unsuited. 'Kill Miss Bess!' indeed! And Coriolanus and Henry VI. I rather liked Henry and would rather not have been reminded that his wife cuckolded him.

SIMIER

If your Majesty sends me to the premises of that certain bookshop which was owned by Saladin I will discover, I am sure of it, traces of King's Yellow, that poison which killed the maid.

PEMBROKE

God Almighty.

ELIZABETH

It appears that Mary Sidney, the new Countess of Pembroke, must to the Tower. Go get your wife sir, yourself. We owe you that. Take her there and leave her. We gave her to you, we will take her away.

DUCHESS

Your Highness, many were the times when witches and heretics hiding behind the quill and page were put to death.

PEMBROKE

Is there no place to attack? We should attack somewhere!

## ACT IV

### Scene 1

SETTING: A field in Flanders two months later.

AT RISE: SALADIN, PEMBROKE and SIDNEY are huddled about a camp fire.

SIDNEY

We are out here to die for a queen who thinks my sister, your wife, is a witch. Do you believe she is a witch, sir?

PEMBROKE

It is two months nigh since I left her to languish in the Tower. She was the bravest of women. I walked away and left her there alone, a brilliant white rose surrounded by dank and cold stone walls.

SIDNEY

You have seen her truly then?

PEMBROKE

Sir, I thought to keep her if I could, no matter what the charge and since it is all I know, to fight somewhere. If you are a coward, then I will try to protect you for her, for she had great interest in all that transpired here in Flanders and for your safety and that of your companions.

SIDNEY

If your cause, sir, be for her honor  
then we are tight together this night  
and had best muster to honor's side  
all the strong arms 'tis honor's hope to command.  
Take my hand, sir.

We are, my lord, surrounded by the Duke of Alba this very hour  
which could be our last.

Side by side, I ask your forgiveness for all those harsh words I  
did proclaim when last we argued before the Queen.

PEMBROKE

I, on that same day told the Queen you were a coward  
and yet there is about you and your sister  
something of England more solid than estate.

A soldier, sir, cannot escape seeing the bone within the flesh  
and I never saw stronger.

Forgiveness given, sir, and I hope taken from me by you,  
and may God be with you.

[Sounds of battle are heard in the distance. Shouting. Swords clanging.]

SIDNEY

God, what can I say to these men? You were right, sir, I am a coward!

PEMBROKE

Quickly, sir!

SIDNEY

To arms, boys, and to your comrades!

[All three rush off. From the darkness off stage: Swords clanging.]

For England, sirs, for the Queen!

PEMBROKE

Over here!

SALADIN

I am surrounded!

SIDNEY

Where? Where? [Swords are heard clanging.]

SALADIN

Pembroke is down! Over here!

[SIDNEY rushes in.]

SIDNEY

Once more, the charge, my lads!

He who fights with me this day  
will sing to village bells when he is home  
and he who falls with me this day  
will be more hero than even he who lives,



for he who bleeds for England bleeds for  
poetry and music and song and ... and God! ...

Where is everybody?!  
Remember the green and the commons  
and your wives, my lads!

SALADIN

I am down!

[SIDNEY rushes off.]

SIDNEY [From off stage.]

Belay, you bastards and know the taste of English steel! Where? Here! Ah, Saladin and  
Pembroke, in a heap! Ah! [Falls back within view on stage.]

SALADIN [Rousing and appearing on stage.]

Mine is not so much, sir! Look to Pembroke and yourself!

SIDNEY

Staunch your leg, man! Here! Take my shirt! Wrap it quick! Oh, God! That I were  
stronger!

SALADIN

Nay, take the shirt yourself, my lord! You are bleeding hugely!

[SIDNEY falls.]

Ah, he falls! Oh, dear god, he falls.

[Battle fades away.]

SIDNEY

I would have been stronger if I could....

SALADIN

You told the Queen full truth, sir, and that was courage!

Sir, do you hear me? .... Speaking truth is courage, too, sir!

Ah, he goes.

Courage before God, Philip! Tell Him the truth too, ... about war!

## Scene 2

SETTING: The Tower of London, two weeks later

AT RISE: PEMBROKE enters MARY's cell

MARY

How now, my lord? What news from ... where ever there should be news?

PEMBROKE

My lady, England has suffered a great loss.

MARY

In God's name, what or whom have we lost?

PEMBROKE

Philip is fallen, Mary, at Zutphen, trying to save the lives of Saladin and myself. He was not a coward. Not at all.

MARY

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh, no!

[PEMBROKE moves to her, cradles her gently while she sobs. Slowly, she breaks away.]

Wave upon wave  
the clanging sounds of swords,  
the roar of flames, cries of children  
washing over the crown of England.

Those who do conquest  
are conquered in return.

And Saladin?

PEMBROKE

All three of us had at once been wounded. Your brother died trying to staunch the Moor's bleeding while the Moor in return rose to care for him. He ministered furiously to your brother and cried to the heavens when Philip fell silent. But he lives now.

MARY

My brother, my dear friend and my new husband in one bloody lump upon a field in Flanders. All this so that the Queen might marry, or not marry, or marry later rather than sooner, or sooner rather than later, or pretend to marry or pretend to marry not. One forgets just what war is for, sometimes.

PEMBROKE

It is noised about that Saladin was your friend.

MARY

Yes.

PEMBROKE

A man of Islam?

MARY

And of language, and of humor, and of grace.

PEMBROKE

He never left Philip's side.

MARY

Yes, he cared for me.

PEMBROKE

And you for him?

MARY

I did, yes.

PEMBROKE

Were you lovers?

MARY

My lord, truly we might have been had we the chance. But we were not.

PEMBROKE

And now, by Queen's command, are married to me, a marred and pompous warrior.

MARY

It's not your fault.

PEMBROKE

We shall have to start very slowly.

MARY

Thank you, sir. If at all. Now I am accused of writing seditious plays, about to stand trial for my life.

PEMBROKE

If Saladin were here I think he would say something to make you laugh! Oh, that I could do that!

MARY

If I admit to being Shakespeare, I will hang, more even for a woman's impudence than for the content of the plays. If I deny it, then the blame will fall somewhere else, perhaps on Saladin himself, and as a black Mussulman, 'twould count as intended broadside 'gainst the Queen, and therefore guarantee his permanent banishment. Either I shall die by the Queen's command or in my heart because I betray a friend.

PEMBROKE

If the matter were the same to you, my Lady, would you—for my sake—deny that you are Shakespeare?

MARY

I would not deny the glory of language for any man's sake, nor ever set it second to the power of war.

PEMBROKE

No. No. To live only. To live, madam, for my sake.

MARY

Why then? What good is a woman to a man who is forever off fighting?

PEMBROKE

Because even an old oak may cast a kindly shade. Is age, Mary, worse to love than Islam and foreign ways?

MARY

So that you, too, could go off to war and die?

PEMBROKE

I do not ask thee to love a warrior, my Lady, but rather one who, while he lay in Flanders bleeding, realized his true case.

MARY

Were you hurt so much it made you think?

PEMBROKE

You had been of a sudden a gift in my life, Mary, little expected nor less deserved and that can make a man wonder, yes.

MARY

Marriage is not so extraordinary.

PEMBROKE

You bring a glow and grace, intelligence and verse, so much heat as would melt a soldier's armor, and what could be the source of that? I could not but surrender, Mary. This is a melting more from God than a queen.

MARY

You were married before.

PEMBROKE

I was and they died. I'd not have it happen again.

[PEMBROKE bends over, head in his hands.]

MARY

You are weeping, sir?

PEMBROKE

I would give my whole estate, my bounty of whatever kind, my arms, my swords, my every last measure were it enough to make me young in your eyes.

MARY

There is in your words some gift more than kindness, I confess, some grace disturbs me. I had hoped to wall Pembroke out, sir, but instead hear a lark outside the ramparts. You are gentle, and I will not pretend I did not hear.

PEMBROKE

You could not know, my Lady, how I have awaited these weeks since our marriage to hear only that. It is enough.

MARY

Still, would'st my Lord, forgive me if on such a day as this I at first mourn my dear brother and second prepare to defend my life?

PEMBROKE

Ah! M'lady clings to a tree in a rising flood and hears some man crying out as if from a far cliff that he loves her. In such moment 'tis not love that is required but aid and I, muddy minded, accustomed more to bluster than succor, watch her clinging helpless, having no more effect than the promise of some future change in the seasons.

MARY

It is a sweet unexpected promise, sir, and I thank you for it.

### Scene 3

SETTING: Tower of London

AT RISE: MARY is alone in the Tower. LETTICE DEVEREUX enters.

MARY

Lettice!

DEVEREUX

The Queen rails against war and blames Leicester and Pembroke and all except D' Anjou himself. At night she puts all her hopes into the basket of love and in the morning there is nothing there. She chopped off the right hand of that man Stubbs for protesting her

proposed marriage. She is dangerous, especially for you who are so alike her in learning and skill. Still I say, all is not done, 'til done is all!

MARY

Oh, what madness is this? For a woman to write is a crime. To love is a crime. To marry my love is a crime. To love and not marry is a crime. How could the queen of such madness not be herself mad? Either we are mad because of her or she is mad because of us but all England is still mad.

DEVEREUX

Would that Saladin would come!

MARY

To find me another man's wife. I might as well burn.

DEVEREUX

He might kill the earl.

MARY

Oh. Oh. I would that he did not.

DEVEREUX

What?

MARY

The earl is my husband.

DEVEREUX

Yes, but so old!

MARY

He leans in my direction, slowly, as an oak toward sun; not as the owner of some property but as one who might give it shade. There was in his speech when he returned from war a humility not oft to be found in brittler, younger men....

DEVEREUX

My Robert is humble when it leads to bed and if it leadeth not thereto he forthwith reverses his sheets and turns bold. Beware all humility.

MARY

.... as if some angel had brought him young again.

DEVEREUX

Silly is as silly does but no queen is silly enough to kill you!

MARY

How then? Prove that I cannot write? By speaking poorly? Prove that there is no script in my hand? Prove that there is no cabinet somewhere with a script of mine within? How then, prove empty all the cabinets of England?

DEVEREUX

With emotion and passion. All things are decided by love and by when love is won or lost. Simier knows that. That is why he woos the Queen with words and not estates.

MARY

Simier would see me burn because I am Protestant.

DEVEREUX

But Simier himself has something that burns.... Mary? Oh, Mary, are we blind? 'Tis Simier! Oh, ho! Farewell, sister, we'll save you yet!

[Exit DEVEREUX.]

#### Scene 4

SETTING: The Bishop's residence. Late at night.

AT RISE: BISHOP OF WINCHESTER, DUCHESS OF WESTMORELAND, and SIMIER are sharing a glass of wine.

SIMIER

She will be convicted?

BISHOP

Of course. Neither she nor anyone else can produce a script in a man's hand. Have you ever seen one? Her defense will come to the fact that she is not capable. There is, unfortunately for her, no one in England more capable than she and the more therefore she protests her womanly innocence the more clear it will become that she is literate, bold, and independent. Mary Sidney is quietly and secretly the most formidable Protestant in all England.

SIMIER

And who now will remove Elizabeth?

DUCHESS

When the trial is done, a little King's Yellow, *Monsieur*, between the fingers as you pour the wine, toasting the Lord's Cross on the altar or some dark sun out the window. Find some excuse to turn away, turn back, give the Queen her glass and soon depart.

SIMIER

There must be someone who has a motive, a suspect, close beside me.

DUCHESS

Lady Devereux. Have her beside you at all times. Have her as close as you want.

SIMIER

Well, she is attractive. This could be worth something.

DUCHESS

So, you will be doing your true work as a lover. When you do the wine, be sure that Devereux is nearby and can therefore later be identified. The queen is jealous because she has bedded Leicester. The Queen will easily suspect her.

SIMIER

But the Queen will be dead!

BISHOP

Ah. Yes. But we, informed by God, will point the finger at Leicester's little siren! Jealous Devereux, we'll cry, ridding the world of her royal rival!

Scene 5

SETTING: Saladin's bookshop

AT RISE: LETTICE DEVEREUX is looking along shelves of bottles and hears footsteps. Seeing a certain bottle, she reaches for it quickly and puts it into her pocket.

DEVEREUX [Enter SIMIER]

Aha! *Monsieur le Viscount!* How well you look! How is the Queen and how is your kind master and how are things in France and how did you get *here*?

SIMIER

Madame, the beautiful, the wicked, the wondrous Devereux, a woman of many charms so I have heard. *Bon soir! Mon dieu!* I think at this moment that I am in a land that has produced a most beautiful and extraordinary young woman!

DEVEREUX

Oh. Were you looking for someone? Handsome men always are.

SIMIER

More or less, yes. Someone or something. A bottle, I am sure I do not know the name *en Anglais*, with a more or less yellow look. 'ave you seen such a thing?

DEVEREUX [Putting her hand to her pocket.]



Oh, no. I don't know about bottles, only men. Do you like women, Monsieur?

SIMIER  
Am I French?

DEVEREUX  
English women, too?

SIMIER  
A union of opposites! A religious principle.

DEVEREUX  
You look more or less religious. Simple. No airs.

SIMIER  
Oh! I 'ave 'air!

DEVEREUX  
I mean, so *here*. Natural!

SIMIER  
The union of opposites should be *au naturel*. May I 'ave your coat?

DEVEREUX  
*Oui Monsieur and non. Oui to au naturel in principle, non to my coat in practice.*

SIMIER  
The practice of *Revelations* begins with your coat in my hands. New Testament!

DEVEREUX  
I am so sad! The principle of *Exodus* requires my coat still on. Old Testament.

SIMIER  
Ah, sweet joy, the *Pentateuch* says you must ... remove... five impedimenta!

DEVEREUX  
My heart is broken. *Genesis* says I must not remove them in the presence of a snake.

SIMIER  
In principle, there is no snake!

DEVEREUX            [Kissing him.]  
In practice, I detect a small one! *Au revoir, Monsieur!*            [Exits.]

## Scene 7

SETTING: Star Chamber, Westminster Abby

AT RISE: ELIZABETH, PEMBROKE, BISHOP,  
SIMIER, DUCHESS OF  
WESTMORELAND, DEVEREUX and  
MARY are prepared for court proceedings  
to begin

BISHOP

Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, is charged as the seditious author of *Titus Andronicus*, *Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Henry VI*, in all of which reigning monarchs are killed. All this under the false name of William Shakespeare. She is charged, further, with uttering the rebellious incantation "kill Miss Bess" intending to incite murder of your glorious Majesty. She did finally, maliciously and treasonously attempt the death of the Queen by poison.

BISHOP

Countess you disappoint us.

MARY

I am a woman trained in needlework and pouring wine for the Queen.

BISHOP

If the playwright Shakespeare is someone other than you, show us a script in his hand! Show us, indeed, that he writes! A diary? A letter? Or that he reads! A single book with his name therein? Does any such exist? Anywhere in England? One script only in the scrawl of Wm. Shakespeare himself would prove you innocent!

MARY

It is a playwright's caution to trust his script only to his players' minds. To leave a script lying about is to invite theft. Perhaps. So I'm told.

BISHOP

So you're told.

MARY

So I'm told.

PEMBROKE

Sir, there is no way to search every mind in England!

ELIZABETH

Be quiet, sir.

BISHOP

How does a man who lives in a pig pit in a village, know of palaces and kings?

PEMBROKE

Majesty, how could a needle-working woman know about harness, glorious war and Caesar and Brutus?

ELIZABETH

Oh, harness thy *tongue* sir, or I'll have it extracted!

BISHOP

The countess learned from reading! Does a leatherworker of Stratford read?

MARY

Every one in Stratford must have gone to a common school and learned to read English very well.

BISHOP

And after leaving school, imagines also by great strength of mind, the syntax, context, rules and order of Latin and Greek?

MARY

Mayhap he learned later. To my knowledge, your Majesty, of all the fine professions, only priests and lawyers are excused from learning after they grow up.

PEMBROKE

Oh, ho!

BISHOP

The wives, daughters of Stratford are all illiterate! Would illiterate women inspire a man? Your family, madam, is far from illiterate. Philip Sidney wrote the finest poetry in the English language. Together you versified the *Psalms of David*. It is not necessary to inquire who inspires you.

MARY

Decency inspires me. Morning sun inspires me. Still, every inspired woman is not Wm. Shakespeare.

BISHOP

My lady, you are educated, surrounded by education, weaned on education, steeped in education, speak French, Spanish, Italian and read Latin. You would have Her Majesty believe that a commoner might do that?

MARY

Did your mother, your Grace, believe that you, a small boy with a runny nose, would become a bishop?

DEVEREUX [Aside to PEMBROKE.]  
And if God could make a bishop of that black stuffing 'twere not near so great a leap to make a poet out of a commoner! Ha!

ELIZABETH  
Silence!

MARY  
Silence? When was a woman not ever silent? When in the course of history since Helen of Troy, when since Sappho, was last we heard a woman's voice? Why then order silence? Who but a woman to speak of that other wealth bred, born and raised up in silence? Who but the mute of history to know what riches lie in dumb retreat? Oh, do not fear, your Highness we will be silent! We have always been silent. Like a mark on our gentle brows we carry silence as our birthright. Therefore, how could this woman be anything but silent and if silent, how then Shakespeare?

BISHOP  
Majesty, her artistry, her sheer craft is itself our proof! Who else but she is intimate with the very walls within this court.?

DEVEREUX  
Judging by the number of flatterers and sycophants who constantly gaze at the walls around here, there could be several hundred.

ELIZABETH  
Damnation! We'll not have so many geese cackling all at once!

BISHOP  
Several hundred poets, dear Miss Devereux, also from a river called Avon? Several hundred women so alike the lovely Rosalind or the fair Ophelia? Is such likeness in the Countess to the women of Shakespeare's plays mere happenstance?

DEVEREUX  
Women are not all the same, not even Rosalind and Ophelia and the Countess. Under our lovely robes, your Grace, might be some remarkable difference. Did thee ever check?

BISHOP  
Calumny! Does your considerable reading, Countess, include poisons?

MARY  
I would not know a poison until I swallowed it.

BISHOP  
Which of these bottles here in this row, Madam, would you say contains King's Yellow, the most vile poison known to man?

MARY

There is only one bottle there which holds anything yellow.

BISHOP

So, you recognize it!

MARY

Yellow? Yes, I recognize yellow. Don't you? You just pointed to it. Maybe you are the assassin.

ELIZABETH

Oh, that's a thought. Try again, sir.

BISHOP

Majesty, she puts off the righteous fury of the law with clever language, quick retorts, silver phrases and yet 'tis all these are the very proof that she yields nothing to God! There is witchcraft here.

Countess, you danced and sang incantations to snakes and toads and howled like a witch in the bookshop of one Saladin on the night he was exiled to Flanders!

MARY

We were reciting from a play written for Lords Leicester and Pembroke about a Scottish king, and it has witches in it. The witches do not say 'kill Miss Bess;' they say 'kill Macbeth!' It is the name of the Scottish king, a murderer himself. 'Snakes and toads, hawks and rooks, cauldron boil, cauldron bubble!'

ELIZABETH

Countess? Where did this come from?  
'Once more unto the breach, noble English....'...?

MARY

Nay, your Majesty, ....'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more....'

ELIZABETH

A great king said that. My ancestor said that.

MARY

He also said: "... for I think the king is but a man, as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions...."

BISHOP

Henry V, and how quick to her tongue! Without a script! And how then but that she authored these lines! She is as false as a female Leicester!

ELIZABETH

Leicester at least did not pretend to know how violet smells to a queen. How, then does a violet smell to us, Countess?

MARY  
Sweet, I suppose.

ELIZABETH  
You suppose.

MARY  
I suppose.

ELIZABETH  
We do not smell violets at all!

Countess, who else in all of England speaks as you have only now spoken of Helen and Sappho? And if you are not using this man Shakespeare as your disguise, then there must be two of you and is it credible that there should be two such wits in England at once? We do not see how such facility could come from a commoner in Stratford. We do not. How does a commoner know about this court? A woman, in addition, who boldly opposes France and our few small, well-chosen wars! A woman who was near, at the very least, the poison intended for us. A woman who is forever writing warnings of tyranny. Well, how can a queen govern with such interruptions and accusations? Too much intelligence is neither useful nor pretty.

MARY  
'Tis, certainly, your Majesty, more useful and more pretty to feign ignorance. So 'twas ever that bloody arms, not happy consent, nor failure ever of wit, nor absence of language, have bent centuries of women to kneel silent at the foot of every throne....

PEMBROKE  
Mary!

MARY  
... and were I to have the ease, I confess, 'twould be a story of absolute, dangerous, all-consuming royal power that I would write!

ELIZABETH  
Ah! God save us. Show us one Shakespeare script in the bold scrawl of a man.

MARY  
Were I that man, were I a soldier, were I a husband, 'twould not be asked of me. Power, seeing its equal in a man, bends to decency, but power, seeing weakness, seeing the rose only, or the swan, bends not at all and would as well destroy what it does not understand. 'Tis thereof that I would write. Were I able to write.

ELIZABETH

Oh, you are able! [Rising.] Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, we find you guilty. Advancing the cause, urging the case of resistance to your rightful, lawful, most peaceful and tolerant queen by metaphor and indirection. Putting regicidal plays before the public as incitement to rebellion. Serving wine to the queen, indeed. With King's Yellow admixed! Treason! Well, we will not have it. The penalty is by hanging, the garrote or the axe.

PEMBROKE

Nay! Nay!

ELIZABETH

My lord earl, thinking herself of queenly stuff she pretends to know how violets smell to a queen. She would, mayhap, be royal herself. We are not amused, madam, at your deposing on England's stage Richard II, or Richard III, or Henry VI and we will staunch this flow of seditious ink before it turns to blood!

[Bells heard in the distance.]

MARY

Why then, Majesty, I do confess. 'Twas I wrote these plays. 'Twas I thought these thoughts. 'Twas I sought above my station, for to be a playwright is above any station.

I choose the axe and leave behind the sword of truth.

ELIZABETH

The woman has as yet a paper scrap in her hand. What is that? Mayhap 'tis instruction on how to poison a queen. Bishop, have her read the damnéd thing aloud!

BISHOP

Read, madam!

MARY

I wrote this for my brother, your Majesty, my brother Philip who died for you.

“Shall ever civil bait gnaw and devour our state?  
Shall never we this blade,  
Our blood hath bloodie made  
Lay down?  
But as from age to age,  
So pass from rage to rage?”

[Bells are heard again.]

BISHOP

Incomprehensible, your Highness. A witch's incantation. Quickly, take her back to the Tower. Majesty, her preference is the axe, but I for one, for the church and in the name of common Christian, English decency, recommend public hanging. An example of women's sedition repaid shall keep the sex in its place.

ACT V

Scene 1

SETTING: A bookshop in Calais. Two weeks later.

AT RISE: The Earl of PEMBROKE is walking along a bank of shops; SALADIN is within.

PEMBROKE

I say, sir, do you sell any plays about the great Julius Caesar?

SALADIN

Wise Lord! Julius in the Capitol, in the rotunda, at the Rubicon or with Brutus! Only, forgive us sir, those books are stored in our warehouse in London and will take at least three weeks to cross the waters! *Deux franc aujourdoui et deux encore* upon arrival!

PEMBROKE

Shakespeare?

SALADIN

Ah, the great Shakespeare. Could be Ben Jonson posing as Robert Marlowe posing as the Earl of Oxford, or could be a Stratford leatherworker turned actor; could be maid of honor to the Queen turned to an unhappy countess, all these things we have heard.

PEMBROKE

The Queen has decided that it is the countess.

SALADIN

Winds off the bay make it hard to talk. Good day, sir.

PEMBROKE

Saladin!

SALADIN

You are the right honorable Earl of Pembroke and I owe you a Scottish play from my days in London. Sir, ask the Countess, if you please, as she is the author of such things. She will give it you.



PEMBROKE

She cannot! She is in the Tower awaiting the axe for writing sedition and trying to poison the Queen! The Queen says there is no true script from Wm. Shakespeare and therefore it must be that the Countess is the playmaker and because of the way she murdered assorted monarchs—thereby breeding a lust for rebellion—the Queen will have her neck!

SALADIN

The Countess convicted? The Queen will have her head? For lack of a true script?

PEMBROKE

Aye, sir, it is therefore I who seek a kindness of you! Is it possible you know some other source for such plays?

SALADIN [Reaching beneath the counter.]

Here, sir! Tell the Queen to pronounce the name slowly, 'O-the-llo.'

PEMBROKE

O-the-llo. What is here?

SALADIN

The Queen wanted a script in Shakespeare's hand.

PEMBROKE

From Shakespeare, not from you.

SALADIN

Tell the Queen that a certain bookseller in Calais who gives you this script knows how Juliet wooed Romeo, how a shrew was tamed! Can recite the lines: "Soft I hear a lark...!"

PEMBROKE

And ...?

SALADIN

And how all the others died! Caesar by Brutus, Henry VI by evil Richard the hunchback!

Oh! Say this, then to her highness: 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more!'—and say that there is more of that self-same language in the script for this Othello I hold in my hand! Tell her it comes from Calais direct by you and could not therefore have come from the Tower. Show her that 'tis unmistakably in a man's hand. Quickly, sir!

PEMBROKE

This is Shakespeare the man or Shakespeare the woman?

SALADIN

The murder of Henry VI, the perfidy of Richard II, the murder of Caesar, the betrayal of Coriolanus? What would England's nobles think of such disclosures were they to attribute them to a black man of Islam?

PEMBROKE

Hang him, I suppose.

SALADIN

And if they thought—in a former time, begging your pardon, sir—that the self same black man had loved a pure and white Christian English countess? A flower of England half his age? And loved her not for estate, nor commerce, nor aid in war, no such things as to the English sanctify marriage, but loved her merely for her beauty, her grace, her wit and her language?

PEMBROKE

I know a lord knows exact why the man of Islam loved her, an Englishman.

SALADIN

Why then, sir, you have not island big enough to hold bed for such a love and tell that lord to seize his chance! Would that it were mine, such chance, but I am not the man. If you know that lord who loves this countess you can tell him he has a clear path to her heart and Saladin will not in his way.

PEMBROKE

Could give me a script could set her free, the lady whose laughter makes me slave?

SALADIN

This is it, my Lord! Tell the Queen that we together were with Philip at his end and that I immediate began to write, as soon as I recovered my wounds. [PEMBROKE turns to leave. SALADIN touches him on the shoulder.] Whisper to the Countess I could not resist a tale about a Moor and his jealousy. [The two clasp hands. PEMBROKE leaves.]

## Scene 2

SETTING: A small intimate chamber in Whitehall Palace, two weeks later, late in the evening, before midnight.

AT RISE: A reception is under way. Present are ELIZABETH, LETTICE DEVEREUX, SIMIER, BISHOP OF WINCHESTER, DUCHESS OF WESTMORELAND, PEMBROKE.

ELIZABETH

A monarch is forever surrounded by deceit, conceit, conspiracy and confusion and now my Lord Pembroke has brought to us this night a manuscript clearly in the style of Wm. Shakespeare and in the hand of a man! What insult is this? The case of Mary Sidney is decided!

PEMBROKE

Your Majesty decided, if it please your Highness, that the countess was learned, intemperate and disrespectful. I pray thee assign her to an Earl to tame, rather than to God.

ELIZABETH

She did not know her station.

PEMBROKE

None in all of England, your Majesty, does not know his station is below thine. 'Twas more likely a willingness to fly with God's inspiration than intended disrespect for God's earthly servant.

ELIZABETH

God's death! The Bishop said we needed a script and now we have one. We are left with a common countess who complains that we are a tyrant. Well, if we turn her free we shall prove her wrong! Tyrants do not have such courage and grace as we. We shall prove her quite wrong. Indeed. Indeed. Did I not always say that axing noble women was evil treachery and we of all people abhor axings?

PEMBROKE

You did say that, I am sure.

ELIZABETH

Good. Good. Get her out then!

BISHOP

But Your Majesty, the woman confessed!

ELIZABETH

My Lord Bishop to err toward ambition is natural in females. What woman would not wish to be Shakespeare? Don't worry, no one in history will ever believe her. Pembroke, off your knees! Fetch us a claret, if you please. My lord does not really suppose the Queen ever intended the lady harm, does he?

PEMBROKE

No Majesty. Certainly not, Majesty.  
[Exit Pembroke]

DEVEREUX

[To SIMIER.]

A walk, Monsieur, in the garden to study the book of ... Revelations?

SIMIER

Oui, *Madame!* The Book of Revelations!

DEVEREUX

May I take your arm sir, 'tis chilly unto cold outside. Oooh! Your pockets are warm!

[Exit SIMIER with DEVEREUX on his arm.]

Oooh!

[Pembroke returns with wine.]

ELIZABETH

Pembroke, you may retrieve your countess. Instruct her to cease opposing our marriage to France or we will most certainly string her lengthwise from a high tree! Until then, let us, in magnanimity and tolerance, drink to a free Mary, Countess of Pembroke returned to her husband, and to a wedding between France and England!

[Enter the earl of LEICESTER]

Well, well. It must be the day of universal forgiveness. Sir, your little trollop has found a French coat. No matter, so have I. You have lost all.

LEICESTER

In service to God and my Queen, I offer all to all and none to no one who has no need ... of none.

ELIZABETH

Yes of course. Quite.

[Return SIMIER and DEVEREUX, looking flustered.]

A drink, friends, glasses to you all! Damn we hate executions! Simier, master of my true master's true heart, pour for us truly!

[SIMIER pours wine.]

LEICESTER

There is some madness here!

[Takes a glass.]

PEMBROKE

To the Queen!

SIMIER

To the Queen! I offer my cup to Her Majesty as symbol of the highest esteem from his Highness the royal Duke D' Anjou, soon to be your husband, lover and companion in the *histoire* of Europe. For now and forevermore France and England will drink from the same glass!

DUCHESS

Oh! Oh, yes! To the Queen!

BISHOP

Unhuh! To the Queen!

DEVEREUX

Madam! Do not taste that! Do not! Hold!

ELIZABETH

Woman? Do not toast the Queen? You, the illicit lover of my Lord Leicester, or Simier or both, speak against our marriage?

DEVEREUX

Madam this is not your night to be the first to drink. I am your taster!

[Speeds to Queen, grasps the cup and throws contents on the floor.]

[Pointing to SIMIER.]

Seize him! Robert, my lord, seize him! Check his pocket! The right one! There you will find a yellow-filled bottle! It is King's Yellow! Your cup was poisoned madam!

SIMIER

*Nonsense!*

ELIZABETH

Are we all mad drunk *before* we drink?

DEVEREUX

My Lord Leicester, if you please!

[LEICESTER moves rapidly to SIMIER and extracts bottle of yellow dust from his pocket.]

Aha! *That*, your Majesty, is what King's Yellow looks like! If Mary Sidney does not know, *that* man does! And was he not the last to be with you on the night when the maid was poisoned!

SIMIER

This was your little Revelation!?! Your Majestee! Her hands were in my pockets!

DEVEREUX

Oh, Monsieur, English women are so careless!

SIMIER

Her hands were all over me!

ELIZABETH

You are saying sir that you, a Frenchman, in the arms of Lettice Devereux, were not touching her? If England and France marry are we to produce dolts!?

LEICESTER

Your Majesty, it *is* King's Yellow and would have killed you upon the spot!

ELIZABETH

Go home, Monsieur, tell your master that England's Queen has lost interest.

[Exit Simier.]

Now, dear God, we shall be forced to attack France!

PEMBROKE

Majesty, treason there is here today, oh yes!

But Philip Sidney died and I

and that man Saladin nearly saw our last in Holland.

And for what? For dreams of ours or Simier's or

D'Anjou's, or in some heart as yet undisclosed?

Wherefore and with what English galleon

shall we attack dreams borne upon the invisible sea of the mind?

For what purpose lay fire to imaginations

when it is fired imaginations which at first themselves turn men disloyal?

Dreams denied wage contest on their own desperate field

untouched by the clang of spears and pompous claims of arms!

Wherefore then war against dreams?

ELIZABETH

God's death! The eagle has turned a sparrow! But my lords Leicester and Pembroke you once came to this chamber to reveal a conspiracy of Mary of Scotland backed by France?

This was it!?

LEICESTER

Yes, your Majesty. 'Twas said to include a cleric and a noble lady.

ELIZABETH

Well. Well. Duchess and my Lord Bishop, on your knees.

DUCHESS

Your Majesty, all about us are rogues and liars! We hold fast together, we women of integrity!

BISHOP

Majesty, your favor means more to me than any opinion on earth. You have no more loyal servant than I!

ELIZABETH

Good, good. Let these two servants to the Tower to dwell on integrity and loyalty.

Pembroke, take them in and take your wife quickly out, before we change our mind. That woman of yours is fiendish independent and we have been toyed with. We will not be toyed with. Out! Out! All of you!

[Exit all but Queen.]

Fleas get more respect than queens. We shall we think, be forced to pray to God to have a conversation between equals!

Scene 3

SETTING     The Tower of London, late that same night

AT RISE:     SALADIN enters MARY'S cell, disguised

MARY  
Saladin!

SALADIN  
Mary.

MARY  
How did you get here?

SALADIN  
Your husband came to me in Calais. He said you must have a true script in the playmaker's hand. I gave him one. You will be freed, perhaps.

MARY  
Freed? How ever free again when imprisoned to memories of our fond work together? I do not forget that you offered to marry me.

SALADIN  
I have come because 'twas not honorable to leave to another to say what must be said.

MARY  
Don't say it.

SALADIN  
I am older than you.

MARY  
So is he.

SALADIN  
Taller.

MARY  
And a Moor. That's not it, either, I don't suppose. Some truth more deep.

SALADIN

You must not interrupt me because if you do I will never get it said.

MARY

Say it then.

SALADIN

Marriage is a common work, Mary, a shouldering, a distribution of labor, a sharing of joys so small that none other than those wedded two might think them fine. It is standing for a moment beside a clear stream between chores, a tear before drifting off to sleep, an understanding who will mend the child and who will use the rod. It is Herculean, Mary, to make one's own generation, made the richer by its lack of illusion, its bedrock trust, its indissolubility. That is what marriage is and not what I would have been.

MARY

What I feel for you is indissoluble.

SALADIN

But marriage is a different thing.

MARY

I know. I always knew. I said so, too. I know.

SALADIN

What this is, between us, between scribes, is the stuff of stars and moons and larks before dawn and ribbons and stolen kisses, dreams of Rosalind or Ophelia. I would always love you in that moonlit way, Mary, because I am a poet only and not a laborer, nor will my shoulder ever push the cart of common work, nor my day be made as a teacher to children. I am the wind and you were my leaves, my song. But I was not what I said I would be. I was not, and am not now a husband, Mary.

MARY

'Twas love alike to a passing moon, a day in the sunlit forest, a ripple on a quiet country pond. Love remembered is one thing and life another and so I to become a wife and you a gift to the ages. It is not the poem I hoped.

SALADIN

Let some memory of us be your star, Mary, if 'twill be possible to remember, bye and bye. But the star, that silver light, would not have been better than the harvest of generations and you could not put moonlight in your hand or take it to school. The Queen will free you soon, and I free you, too. Your soldier husband, gentled now, is neither a willow, nor a bush, nor a hedge only, but a great oak.

MARY

Our last and only dawn. ... Farewell, then. I do not get a single night in bed, nor even the parting of our Juliet from her Romeo. I liked Rosalind better than Ophelia. She lived a



light brighter than the sun and I would have liked to be that. Now I shall have to be mortal. Sweet poet, let me down easy; I shall have to learn to walk.

SALADIN

Farewell.

[Exit SALADIN]

[Enter PEMBROKE.]

PEMBROKE

You are free, Mary!

MARY

To go as I will? I could go, then, to France, as I choose?

PEMBROKE

As you will. Go, if you must, and take the whole heart of a soldier who learned love too late, but stay, if you might to help him learn it more.

MARY

Why then, my Lord, you shall have me for no greater love hath a woman than that of a man would go to war for her, hold her when her brother dies, worship her and then after all set her free. It is enough. It is more than enough. In truth, I denied 'twas I wrote those plays because you in the Tower had pleaded for my life and in that plea a woman felt a stirring. My Lord, the soil warms, the flower blooms, and you shall have it all. .