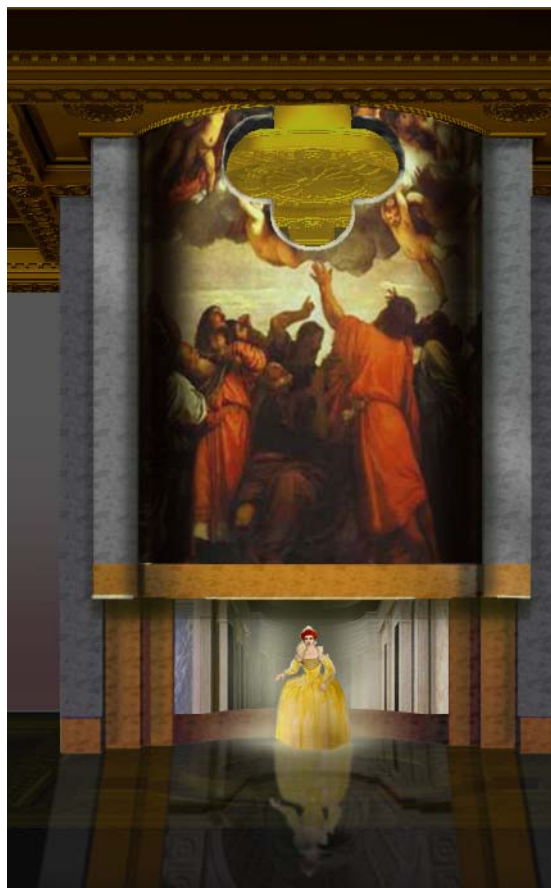


MARY STUART – SYNOPSIS



Elizabeth has observed their exchange from a distance and spitefully corners Leicester. She demands to see the letter, which he gives to her after some hesitation. The earl pleads for Elizabeth to grant Mary an audience. The queen accuses Leicester of loving Mary, but he claims that those feelings are in the past and now he only pities her. Deceptively, Elizabeth agrees to the meeting, only to exact her revenge.

Scene two – Fotheringhay Park Mary is overjoyed at a brief release in the open air of the park. Horns announce a royal hunt, and she is suddenly filled with fear at facing her adversary. Leicester arrives first and encourages her to be calm and submissive as he believes Elizabeth will be clement – if not, she will face the earl’s reprisal.

ACT I

A gallery in the Palace of Westminster Lords and ladies enter following a tournament given in honor of the French Ambassador. Queen Elizabeth is considering a marriage proposal from Prince François, Duke of Anjou, which would forge a political alliance with the King of France. She does not relish yielding her liberty to a man, nor does she wish to pardon her political enemy and cousin, Mary Stuart, deposed Queen of Scotland. Mary has been imprisoned by Elizabeth, accused of devising treasonous plots. The courtiers plead for her life, but Elizabeth cannot make up her mind.

Leicester arrives belatedly and Elizabeth chides him for his tardiness. When she instructs her favorite to inform the French envoy that she will marry François, the queen looks for signs of jealousy in his eyes, but finds none. She fears she has a rival for his affection.

Alone with Talbot, Leicester learns he has just been to Fotheringhay Castle, where Mary is imprisoned, and asks of any news. Talbot produces a letter and a miniature from Mary, and Leicester regards it with devotion as it reminds him of their past love affair. He vows to free her from captivity or die trying.



Mary is brought before the queen. Both inwardly express their disdain for one another. Talbot, Leicester, Cecil and Anne sense the tension. Mary kneels before the queen and begs for forgiveness. Cecil urges Elizabeth not to trust her, and she affirms that in dust and shame is exactly where Mary belongs. The queen details the list of misdeeds Mary has committed, and the Queen of Scots can no longer hold her tongue – Elizabeth, the vile bastard child of Anne Boleyn, has defiled the English crown. Elizabeth swears vengeance and storms away. Her deadly fate forever sealed, Mary relishes her final, proud moment.

ACT II

Scene one – Elizabeth's apartments in Westminster Palace Elizabeth ponders the sheet of paper before her which Cecil urges her to sign – Mary's death warrant. The queen hesitates, fearing public opinion and Mary's ghost. But when she sees Leicester enter, she jealously signs the document. In one ear, Leicester begs her to stay the execution while in the other, Cecil insists she enforce the law. An implacable Elizabeth will not be swayed – Mary has betrayed both her throne and her heart.

Scene two – Mary's apartments in Fotheringhay Castle Mary is still furious at Elizabeth's behavior in the park and weeps over her fate. Cecil enters and delivers the sentence of death. Alone with Talbot, Mary bemoans her fate, recalling her past transgressions and the men that have vainly died in her name. Talbot gives her absolution, and she prepares to go to her death cleansed of any sin.

Members of Mary's household gather for the grim task at hand as she bids them farewell. As a final request, Mary asks Cecil if she may be accompanied to the chopping block by Anne, her closest companion. Ordered by the queen to attend the bloody event, Leicester shares a final moment with his former lover before she begins her ascent to the scaffold.

