

EL
CONDE DE ESSEX;

UNA TRAGEDIA,
EN CINCO ACTOS;

POR HENRY JONES.

COMO SE REPRESENTA EN EL
TEATRO ROYAL, COVENT
GARDEN.

IMPRESO BAJO LA
AUTORIDAD DE
LOS GERENTES DEL LIBRO DE
AVISO.

CON COMENTARIOS
DE LA SEÑORA INCHBALD.

LONDRES:
IMPRESO PARA LONGMAN,
HURST, REES, ORME, Y
BROWN, PATERNOSTER ROW.

EDIMBURGO:
Impreso por James Ballantyne and
Co.

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Observaciones.

Esta tragedia fue dedicada al conde de Chesterfield, que era el mecenas del autor, y que, se supone, le ayudó en la composición de la obra.

Hay dos tragedias bajo el título de "El conde de Essex;" pero lo siguiente, por Henry Jones, llevado al escenario en 1753, fue recibido más favorablemente, y se convirtió en muy atractivo.

El dramaturgo, que funda su trama e incidentes en la historia, generalmente añade, de su invención, esas escenas, que mejor describen el poder del amor. Aquí ha sido de otra manera, al menos en el carácter de la reina; a quien cada distinguido historiador ha retratado como más enamorada de su Favorita Essex, que incluso esta obra exhibirá.

El carácter de Essex se sostiene con mayor precisión: — la calidad ardiente de su temperamento; su orgullo alternativo y humildad, atrevido y servilismo, en presencia de su amante real; con todos sus votos bulliciosos de lealtad a ella; y tiernos juramentos de amor a otro.

Los pocos personajes que componen este drama, todos reclaman un interés por el lector, si no fuera sino por sus meros nombres. El gran Sir Walter Raleigh es [Pg 4] de la menor importancia entre el grupo dramático; y sin embargo, su apariencia causa una asociación de ideas, que hace que cada línea que pronuncia sea valiosa, por el bien de su reputación, y sus inminentes desgracias.

Los admiradores de Shakspeare también sentirán una doble preocupación en el destino del Señor Southampton, mientras recuerdan, que este celoso amigo de Essex era el noble protector y benefactor del bardo más ilustre de Inglaterra.

El nombre de Burleigh suena alto como el de Isabel, ya que su gloria era igual, pero el nombre por sí solo se une al personaje actual; para el gran Cecil, por cuyas medidas Inglaterra era, en el período de esta obra, en su mayor prosperidad, murió unos dos años antes de la muerte de Essex; y esto, su hijo, se convirtió en el enemigo más amargo del conde infeliz.

Ni siquiera un personaje femenino se introduce aquí a partir de la ficción.— Rutland y Nottingham son bien conocidos en la historia; y aunque el cruel incidente del anillo no es atestiguado por ningún historiador, es minucioso relatado por todos ellos.

Pero si su majestad le dio un anillo al desafortunado héroe de esta tragedia, es muy seguro que ella le dio un golpe; y de todas las pruebas de amor que ella le otorgó, esto seguramente no puede ser contado entre los más mínimos.

Es extraordinario, que la obra actual, después de haber introducido este acontecimiento singular, omita la frase particular que Essex pronunció en la ocasión memorable.—La historia dice, que puso su mano [Pg 5] en su espada, y le dijo a Elizabeth, "no habría tomado tal tratamiento de su padre, Enrique el Octavo." —Pero, como hombre de verdadera gallardía, el conde no debería haberse sentido ofendido por la ira de una mujer; que la experiencia debe haberle dicho, era la marca cierta de la ternura oculta. Su respuesta había sido muy excelente si hubiera sido entregado con sonrisas en lugar de ceño fruncido; pero

recurrir a su espada, estaba actuando como un novato en el arte del amor; y resentirse de una afrenta, cuando debería haber reconocido un favor.

Como ese amor que se expresa por medios indirectos, a menudo tiene la mayor atención y simpatía del espectador; por lo tanto, muchos auditores y lectores sentirán más interés en el afecto restringido de Elizabeth por su amor por su amor, que en la afición desenfrenada de Rutland por su marido.—La escena, donde la reina otorga el anillo, como una promesa de su más amable respeto por su seguridad, está particularmente afectando, porque la fuerza de su pasión está allí detectable, bajo una depretación debidamente digna; y toda propensión violenta, ya sea a la estima o al resentimiento, se rige estrictamente por la consideración de su propio rango exaltado.

Al representar la aflicción, que la reina soportó en la ejecución de Essex, y más especialmente en la noticia de que había implorado su misericordia en vano, el dramaturgo ha caído infinitamente por debajo del historiador. Hume relata, que cuando Nottingham, teniendo en su última enfermedad pidió ver a la reina, reveló su[Pg 6] secreto fatal, y supió el perdón de su majestad, la reina sacudió a la condesa moribunda en su cama, y exclamó: "Dios puede perdonarte, pero yo nunca lo haré". La melancolía más triste, como se alega, sucedió a esta rabia.—Pero, por cualquier causa, es cierto que un abatimiento casi inaudible concluyó el reinado de esta gran princesa, cuya mente era masculina; y que, a lo largo de su larga carrera de gobierno, nunca evidenció una debilidad femenina, que no fue el efecto del amor, o de esa vanidad, que esperaba inspirar la pasión.

En esta época, en el corto espacio de dos años, la mano de la muerte arrebató de la corte de Gran Bretaña, todos estos sus personajes más notables: Essex, Nottingham y la reina. Es probable, que el fallecimiento del primero, se apresuró a la del segundo, así como del último carácter; porque se informa que el remordimiento de la condesa por la estratagema política ha sido terriblemente grave.

El conde murió en su trigésimo cuarto, y la reina en su setenta años.—En un tema, el amor inestadable de su majestad podría haber formado un cómic, en lugar de un trágico drama.

PERSONA DRAMATIS.

CONDE DE ESSEX
SOUTHAMPTON

Sr. Holman
Señor Betterton.

BURLEIGH	<i>Señor Murray.</i>
RALEIGH	<i>Señor Claremont.</i>
TENIENTE	<i>Señor Thompson.</i>
REINA ISABEL	<i>Señora Pope.</i>
LADY RUTLAND	<i>Señora Esten.</i>
LADY NOTTINGHAM	<i>Señora Litchfield.</i>

SCENE,—Londres.

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EL
CONDE DE ESSEX.
ACTÚA EL PRIMERO.

ESCENA I.

Una Anticumber en el Palacio.

Ingrese BURLEIGH y RALEIGH.

Bur. El proyecto de ley, al fin, ha pasado números opuestos,
Mientras que las multitudes, sedicioso, clamor alrededor del senado,
Y la facción de cabeza instó a su fuerza dentro.

Ral. ¡Lo ha hecho, mi señor!—El deseo del día ha llegado,
Cuando este orgulloso ídolo del corazón de la gente
Ahora ya no será adorado.—Essex cae.
Mi señor, el minuto está cerca, que se desmoronará
Los planes místicos de este aspirante.
Ahora la fortuna, con mano oficiosa, nos invita
A ella, y abre de par en par las puertas de la grandeza,
The way to power. My heart exults; I see,
I see, my lord, our utmost wish accomplish'd!
I see great Cecil shine without a rival,
[Pg 10]And England bless him, as her guardian saint.
Such potent instruments I have prepared,

As shall, with speed, o'erturn this hated man,
And dash him down, by proof invincible.

Bur. His day of glory now is set in night;
And all my anxious hopes, at last, are crown'd.
Those proofs against him, Raleigh—

Ral. All arrived.

Bur. Arrived! how? when?

Ral. This very hour, my lord:
Nay more, a person comes, of high distinction,
To prove some secret treaties made by Essex,
With Scotland's monarch, and the proud Tyrone.

Bur. How say'st? to prove them?

Ral. Ay, my lord, and back'd
With circumstances of a stronger nature.
It now appears, his secretary, Cuff,
With Blunt and Lee, were deep concern'd in this
Destructive scheme contrived to raise this lord,
And ruin Cecil. Oh, it is a subtle,
A deep-laid mischief, by the earl contrived
In hour malignant, to o'erturn the state,
And, horror to conceive! dethrone the queen!

Bur. These gladsome tidings fly beyond my hopes!
The queen will listen now, will now believe,
And trust the counsel of her faithful Burleigh.
Dispose them well, till kind occasion calls
Their office forth; lest prying craft meanwhile
May tamper with their thoughts and change their minds:
Let them, like batteries conceal'd, appear
At once, both to surprise and to destroy.

Ral. His headstrong friend, the bold Southampton, too,
Now finds his rash endeavours all defeated,
And storms at thee, and the impeaching commons.

Bur. Let him rave on, and rage. The lion, in
[Pg 11]The toils entangled, wastes his strength, and roars
In vain; his efforts but amuse me now.—

Enter GENTLEMAN.

Gent. My lord, the Lady Nottingham desires,
With much impatience, to attend your lordship.

Bur. What may the purport of her business be?
Her tender wishes are to Essex tied
In love's soft fetters, and endearing bands.—
Conduct her in.

[*Exit GENTLEMAN.*

And you, my Raleigh, watch Southampton's steps;
With care observe each movement of his friends;
That no advantage on that side be lost.—

[*Exit RALEIGH.*

Southampton's Essex' second self;
His daring heart, and bold, ungovern'd tongue,
Are both enlisted in the rash designs
Of this proud lord, nor knows a will but his:
A limb so fix'd, must with the body fall.

Enter LADY NOTTINGHAM.

Not. Thrice hail to rescued England's guiding genius!
His country's guardian, and his queen's defence!
Great Burleigh, thou whose patriot bosom beats
With Albion's glory, and Eliza's fame;
Who shield'st her person, and support'st her throne;
For thee, what fervent thanks, what offer'd vows,
Do prostrate millions pay!

Bur. Bright excellence,
This fair applause too highly over-rates,
Too much extols, the low deserts of Cecil.

Not. What praises are too high for patriot worth;
Or what applause exceeds the price of virtue?
My lord, conviction has at last subdued me,
And I am honour's proselyte:—Too long
My erring heart pursued the ways of faction;
I own myself t' have been your bitt'rest foe,
[Pg 12]And join'd with Essex in each foul attempt
To blast your honour and traduce your fame.

Bur. Though ne'er my wishing heart could call you friend,
Yet honour and esteem I always bore you;
And never meant, but with respect to serve you.

Not. It is enough, my lord, I know it well,
And feel rekindling virtue warm my breast;
Honour and gratitude their force resume
Within my heart, and every wish is yours.
O Cecil, Cecil, what a foe hast thou!
A deadly foe, whilst hated Essex lives!

Bur. I know it well—but can assign no cause.

Not. Ambition's restless hand has wound his thoughts
Too high for England's welfare; nay, the queen
Scarce sits in safety on her throne, while he,
Th' audacious Essex, freely treads at large,
And breathes the common air. Ambition is
The only god he serves; to whom he'd sacrifice
His honour, country, friends, and every tie
Of truth and bond of nature; nay, his love.

Bur. The man, that in his public duty fails,
On private virtue will disdainful tread;
And mighty love, who rules all nature else,
Must follow here in proud ambition's train.

Not. Pronounce it not! my soul abhors the sound
Like death——O, Cecil, will you kindly lend
Some pity to a wretch like me?

Bur. Command,
Madam; my power and will are yours.

Not. Will Cecil's friendly ear vouchsafe to bend
Its great attention to a woman's wrongs;
Whose pride and shame, resentment and despair,
Rise up in raging anarchy at once,
To tear, with ceaseless pangs, my tortured soul?
Words are unequal to the woes I feel;
And language lessens what my heart endures.

[Pg 13]

Bur. Madam, your wrongs, I must confess, are great;
Yet still, I fear, you know not half his falsehood.
Who, that had eyes to look on beauty;
Who, but the false, perfidious Essex, could
Prefer to Nottingham a Rutland's charms?
Start not!—By Heaven, I tell you naught but truth,
What I can prove, past doubt; that he received
The lady Rutland's hand, in sacred wedlock,
The very night before his setting out
For Ireland.

Not. Oh! may quick destruction seize them!
May furies blast, and hell destroy their peace!
May all their nights——

Bur. I pray, have patience, madam!
Restrain a while your rage; curses are vain.
But there's a surer method to destroy him;
And, if you'll join with me, 'tis done—he falls.

Not. Ha! say'st thou, Burleigh! Speak, my genius, speak!
Be quick as vengeance' self to tell me how!

Bur. You must have heard, the commons have impeached him,
And we have proofs sufficient for his ruin.
But then the queen—you know how fair he stands
In her esteem; and Rutland, too, his wife,
Hath full possession of the royal ear.
Here then, my Nottingham, begins thy task:
Try every art t' incense the queen against him,
Then step between her and the Lady Rutland:
Observe Southampton, too, with jealous eye;
Prevent, as much as possible, his suit:
For, well I know, he will not fail to try
His eloquence on the behalf of Essex.

Not. It shall be done; his doom is fix'd: he dies.
Oh 'twas a precious thought! I never knew
Such heartfelt satisfaction.—Essex dies!
And Rutland, in her turn, shall learn to weep.
[Pg 14]The time is precious; I'll about it straight.
Come, vengeance, come! assist me now to breathe

Thy venom'd spirit in the royal ear!

[*Exit.*

Bur. There spoke the very genius of the sex!
A disappointed woman sets no bounds
To her revenge.—Her temper's form'd to serve me.

Enter RALEIGH.

Ral. The Lord Southampton, with ungovern'd rage,
Resents aloud his disappointed measures.
I met him in the outward court; he seeks,
In haste, your lordship; and, forgetting forms,
Pursues me hither, and demands to see you.

Bur. Raleigh, 'tis well! Withdraw—attend the queen—
Leave me to deal with this o'erbearing man.
[*Exit* RALEIGH.

Enter SOUTHAMPTON.

South. Where is the man, whom virtue calls her friend?—
I give you joy, my lord!—Your quenchless fury
At length prevails,—and now your malice triumphs.
You've hunted honour to the toil of faction,
And view his struggles with malicious joy.

Bur. What means my lord?

South. O fraud! shall valiant Essex
Be made a sacrifice to your ambition?
Oh, it smells foul, indeed, of rankest malice,
And the vile statesman's craft. You dare not, sure,
Thus bid defiance to each show of worth,
Each claim of honour: dare not injure thus
Your suffering country, in her bravest son!

Bur. But why should stern reproach her angry brow
Let fall on me? Am I alone the cause
That gives this working humour strength? Do I
Instruct the public voice to warp his actions?
[Pg 15]Justice, untaught, shall poise the impartial scales,
And every curious eye may mark the beam.

South. The specious shield, which private malice bears,
Is ever blazon'd with some public good;
Behind that artful fence, skulk low, conceal'd,
The bloody purpose, and the poison'd shaft;
Ambition there, and envy, nestle close;
From whence they take their fatal aim unseen;
And honest merit is their destined mark.

Bur. My country's welfare, and my queen's command,
Have ever been my guiding stars through life,
My sure direction still.—To these I now
Appeal;—from these, no doubt, this lord's misconduct
Hath widely stray'd; and reason, not reviling,
Must now befriend his cause.

South. How ill had Providence
Disposed the suffering world's oppressed affairs,
Had sacred right's eternal rule been left
To crafty politicians' partial sway!
Then power and pride would stretch the enormous grasp,
And call their arbitrary portion, justice:
Ambition's arm, by avarice urged, would pluck
The core of honesty from virtue's heart,
And plant deceit and rancour in its stead:
Falsehood would trample then on truth and honour,
And envy poison sweet benevolence.
Oh, 'tis a goodly group of attributes,
And well befits some statesman's righteous rule!
Out, out upon such bloody doings!
The term of being is not worth the sin;
No human bosom can endure its dart.
Then put this cruel purpose from thee far,
Nor let the blood of Essex overwhelm thy soul.
[Pg 16]

Bur. 'Tis well, my lord! your words no comment need;
No doubt, they've well explained your honest meaning;
'Tis clear and full. To parts, like yours, discretion
Would be a clog, and caution but incumbrance.
Yet mark me well, my lord; the clinging ivy
With the oak may rise, but with it too must fall.

South. Thy empty threats, ambitious man, hurt not
The breast of truth. Fair innocence, and faith,
Those strangers to thy practised heart, shall shield
My honour, and preserve my friend. In vain,
Thy malice, with unequal arm, shall strive
To tear the applauded wreath from Essex' brow;
His honest laurel, held aloft by fame,
Above thy blasting reach, shall safely flourish,
And bloom immortal to the latest times;
Whilst thou, amidst thy tangling snares involved,
Shalt sink confounded, and unpitied fall.

Bur. Rail on, proud lord, and give thy choler vent:
It wastes itself in vain; the queen shall judge
Between us in this warm debate. To her
I now repair: and, in her royal presence,
You may approve your innocence and faith.
Perhaps you'll meet me there. Till then, farewell.
[*Exit.*]

South. Confusion wait thy steps, thou cruel monster!—
My noble and illustrious friend betray'd
By crafty faction, and tyrannic power!
His sinking trophies, and his falling fame,
Oppress my very soul. I'll to the queen,
Lay all their envy open to her view,
Confront their malice, and preserve my friend.
[*Exit.*]
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SCENE II.

Presence Chamber.

*The QUEEN discovered, sitting on
her Throne. RALEIGH, LORDS,
and ATTENDANTS.*

Qu. Eliz. Without consulting me! presumptuous man!
Who governs here?—What! am not I your queen?
You dared not, were he present, take this step.

Ral. Dread sovereign, your ever faithful commons
Have, in their gratitude and love for you,
Preferred this salutary bill against him.

Enter BURLEIGH.

Qu. Eliz. You, my Lord Burleigh, must have known of this.
The commons here impeach the Earl of Essex
Of practising against the state and me.
Methinks I might be trusted with the secret.
Speak, for I know it well, 'twas thy contrivance.
Ha! was it not? You dare not say it was not.

Bur. I own my judgment did concur with theirs.
His crimes, I fear, will justify the charge,
And vindicate their loyalty and mine.

Qu. Eliz. Ha! tell not me your smooth deceitful story!
I know your projects, and your close cabals,
You'd turn my favour into party feuds,
And use my sceptre as the rod of faction:
But Henry's daughter claims a nobler soul.
I'll nurse no party, but will reign o'er all,
[Pg 18]And my sole rule shall be to bless my people:
Who serves them best, has still my highest favour:
This Essex ever did.

Enter SOUTHAMPTON.

Behold, Southampton,
What a base portrait's here! The faithful Essex
Here drawn at large, associating with rebels,
To spoil his country, and dethrone his queen!

South. It is not like.—By Heaven, the hand of envy
Drew these false lines, distorted far from truth
And honour, and unlike my noble friend
As light to shade, or hell to highest heaven.
Then suffer not, thou best of queens, this lord,
This valiant lord, to fall a sacrifice
To treachery and base designs; who now
Engages death in all his horrid shapes,
Amidst a hardy race, inured to danger;

But let him, face to face, this charge encounter,
And every falsehood, like his foes, shall fly.

Qu. Eliz. To me you seem to recommend strict justice,
In all her pomp of power. But are you sure
No subtle vice conceal'd assumes her garb!
Take heed, that malice does not wear the mask,
Nor envy deck her in the borrow'd guise.
Rancour has often darken'd reason's eye,
And judgment winks, when passion holds the scale.
Impeach the very man to whom I owe
My brightest rays of glory! Look to it, lords;
Take care, be cautious on what ground you tread;
Let honest means alone secure your footing.
Raleigh and you withdraw, and wait our leisure.

[*Exeunt* RALEIGH and SOUTHAMPTON.]

Lord Burleigh, stay; we must with you have farther
Conference.—I see this base contrivance plain.

Your jealousy and pride, your envy of
His shining merit, brought this bill to light.
[Pg 19]But mark me, as you prize our high regard
And favour, I command you to suppress it:
Let not our name and power be embarrass'd
In your perplexing schemes. 'Twas you began,
And therefore you must end it.

Bur. I obey.

Yet humbly would entreat you to consider
How new, unpopular, this step must be,
To stand between your parliament's enquiry
And this offending lord.—We have such proofs—

Qu. Eliz. Reserve your proofs to a more proper season,
And let them then appear. But once again
We charge you, on your duty and allegiance,
To stop this vile proceeding; and to wait
Till Essex can defend himself in person.
If then your accusations are of force,
The laws, and my consent, no doubt, are open.
He has my strict command, with menace mix'd,
To end effectually this hated war,
Ere he presume to quit the Irish coast.

Bur. Madam, my duty now compels me to—

Qu. Eliz. No more! see that my orders be obey'd.

[*Exit* BURLEIGH.

Essex a traitor!—it can never be—

His grateful and his honest soul disdains it.—

Can he prove false? so high advanced, so honour'd,

So near my favour—and—I fear, so near

My heart!—Impossible.—This Burleigh hates him,

And, as his rival, therefore would destroy him;

But he shall find his narrow schemes defeated.

In vain their fraudulent efforts shall combine

To shake my settled soul, my firm design;

Resolved to lift bright virtue's palm on high,

Support her grandeur, and her foes defy.

[*Exit.*

[Pg 20]

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.

An Antichamber in the Palace.

Enter BURLEIGH.

Bur. Essex arrived! Confusion to my hopes!

His presence will destroy me with the queen.

I much suspect he had some private notice,

Perhaps, a punctual order, to return.

He lurks too near her heart.—What's to be done?

Now is the important crisis—

Keep up thy usual strength, my better genius!

Direct my steps to crush my mortal foe.

Enter QUEEN

ELIZABETH *and* RALEIGH.

Qu. Eliz. It cannot be! Return'd without my leave!

Against my strict command!—Impossible!

Ral. Madam, the earl is now at court, and begs
An audience of your majesty.

Qu. Eliz. Amazing!
What! break his trust! desert his high command,
Forsake his post, and disobey his queen!
'Tis false—invented all.—You wish it so.

Bur. Madam, I wish some other rumours false;
Reports, I fear, of great concern to you.

Qu. Eliz. What rumours? what reports? your frown would much
Denote: your preface seems important.—Speak.
[Pg 21]

Bur. Some new commotions are of late sprung up
In Ireland, where the west is all in arms,
And moves with hasty march to join Tyrone,
And all his northern clans. A dreadful power!
Nay, more; we have advices from the borders,
Of sudden risings, near the banks of Tweed;
'Tis thought to favour an attempt from Scotland.
Meanwhile, Tyrone embarks six thousand men
To land at Milford, and to march where Essex
Shall join them with his friends.

Qu. Eliz. (Apart.) In league with James!
And plotting with Tyrone! It cannot be.
His very pride disdains such perfidy.
But is not Essex here without my leave!
Against my strict command! that, that's rebellion.
The rest, if true, or false, it matters not.
What's to be done?—admit him to my presence?
No, no—my dignity, my pride forbid it.
Ungrateful man, approach me not; rise, rise,
Resentment, and support my soul! Disdain,
Do thou assist me—Yes, it shall be so.

Bur. I see she muses deep;
Tyrone's invasion wakes her fear and anger,
And all her soul is one continued storm.

Qu. Eliz. For once my pride shall stoop; and I will see
This rash, audacious, this once favour'd man;
But treat him as his daring crimes deserve.

Enter SOUTHAMPTON.

South. [*Kneeling.*] Permit me, madam, to approach you thus;
Thus lowly to present the humble suit
Of the much-injured, faithful Earl of Essex,
Who dares not, unpermitted, meet your presence.
He begs, most gracious queen, to fall before
Your royal feet, to clear him to his sovereign,
Whom, next to heaven, he wishes most to please.
[Pg 22]Let faction load him with her labouring hand,
His innocence shall rise against the weight,
If but his gracious mistress deign to smile.

Qu. Eliz. Let him appear.
[*Exit* SOUTHAMPTON.
Now to thy trying task,
My soul! Put forth, exert thy utmost strength,
Nor let an injured queen be tame.—Lie still,
My heart, I cannot listen to thee now.

Enter ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON.

Essex. Forgive, thou injured majesty, thou best
Of Queens, this seeming disobedience. See,
I bend submissive in your royal presence,
With soul as penitent, as if before
The all-searching eye of Heaven. But, oh, that frown!
My queen's resentment wounds my inmost spirit,
Strikes me like death, and pierces through my heart.

Qu. Eliz. You have obey'd, my lord! you've served me well!
My deadly foes are quell'd! and you come home
A conqueror! Your country bids you welcome!
And I, your queen, applaud!—Triumphant man!
What! is it thus that Essex gains his laurels?
What! is it thus you've borne my high commission?
How durst you disregard your trusted duty,
Desert your province, and betray your queen?

Essex. I came to clear my injured name from guilt,
Imputed guilt, and slanderous accusations.
My shame was wafted in each passing gale,
Each swelling tide came loaded with my wrongs;
And echo sounded forth, from faction's voice,
The traitor Essex.—Was't not hard, my queen,
That, while I stood in danger's dreadful front,
Encountering death in every shape of terror,
And bleeding for my country—Was't not hard,
My mortal enemies at home, like cowards,
Should in my absence basely blast my fame?
[Pg 23]

Qu. Eliz. It is the godlike attribute of kings,
To raise the virtuous, and protect the brave.
I was the guardian of your reputation;
What malice, or what faction, then, could reach you?
My honour was exposed, engaged for yours:
But you found reason to dislike my care,
And to yourself assumed the wrested office.

Essex. If aught disloyal in this bosom dwells,
If aught of treason lodges in this heart,
May I to guilt and lasting shame be wedded,
The sport of faction, and the mark of scorn,
The world's derision, and my queen's abhorrence.
Stand forth the villain, whose envenom'd tongue
Would taint my honour, and traduce my name,
Or stamp my conduct with a rebel's brand!
Lives there a monster in the haunts of men,
Dares tear my trophies from their pillar'd base,
Eclipse my glory, and disgrace my deeds?

Qu. Eliz. This ardent language, and this glow of soul,
Were nobly graceful in a better cause;
Where virtue warrants, and where truth inspires:
But injured truth, with brow invincible,
Frowns stern reproof upon the false assertion,
And contradicts it with the force of facts.
From me you have appeal'd, ungrateful man!
The laws, not I, must listen to your plea.
Go, stand the test severe, abide the trial,

And mourn, too late, the bounty you abused.
[*Exeunt* QUEEN ELIZABETH, SOUTHAMPTON, &c.]

Essex. Is this the just requital, then, of all
My patriot toils, and oft-encounter'd perils,
Amidst the inclemencies of camps and climes?
Then be it so.—Unmoved and dauntless, let me
This shock of adverse fortune firmly stand.
[Pg 24]

Enter SOUTHAMPTON.

South. Alas, my lord! the queen's displeasure kindles
With warmth increasing; whilst Lord Burleigh labours
T'inflame her wrath, and make it still burn fiercer.

Essex. I scorn the blaze of courts, the pomp of kings;
I give them to the winds, and lighter vanity;
Too long they've robb'd me of substantial bliss,
Of solid happiness, and true enjoyments.
But lead me to my mourning love; alas!
She sinks beneath oppressing ills; she fades,
She dies for my afflicting pangs, and seeks
Me, sorrowing, in the walks of woe.—Distraction!
Oh, lead me to her, to my soul's desire.

South. Let caution guide you in this dangerous step.
Consider well, my lord, the consequence—
For should the queen (forbid it, Heaven!) discover
Your private loves, your plighted hands, no power
On earth could step between you and destruction.

Enter BURLEIGH.

Bur. My lord of Essex, 'tis the queen's command,
That you forthwith resign your staff of office;
And further, she confines you to your palace.

Essex. Welcome, my fate! Let fortune do her utmost;
I know the worst, and will confront her malice,
And bravely bear the unexpected blow.

Bur. The queen, my lord, demands your quick compliance.

Essex. Go, then, thou gladsome messenger of ill,
And, joyful, feast thy fierce rapacious soul
With Essex' sudden and accomplish'd fall.
The trampled corse of all his envy'd greatness,
[Pg 25]Lies prostrate now beneath thy savage feet;
But still th' exalted spirit moves above thee.
Go, tell the queen thy own detested story:
Full in her sight disclose the snaky labyrinths,
And lurking snares, you plant in virtue's path,
To catch integrity's unguarded step.

Bur. Your country has impeach'd, your queen accused you;
To these address your best defence, and clear
Your question'd conduct from disloyal guilt.
What answer to the queen shall I return?

Essex. My staff of office I from her received,
And will to her, and her alone, resign it.

Bur. This bold refusal will incense the queen,
This arrogance will make your guilt the stronger.
[Exit.

South. Sustain, my noble friend, thy wonted greatness;
Collect thy fortitude, and summon all
Thy soul, to bear with strength this crushing weight,
Which falls severe upon thee; whilst my friendship
Shall lend a helping hand, and share the burden.
I'll hence with speed, and to the queen repair,
And all the power of warmest words employ,
To gain you yet one audience more, and bring
Her majesty to milder thoughts. Farewell.
[Exit.

Essex. As newly waked from all my dreams of glory,
Those gilded visions of deceitful joys,
I stand confounded at the unlook'd-for change,
And scarcely feel this thunderbolt of fate.
The painted clouds, which bore my hopes aloft,
Alas, are now vanish'd to yielding air,
And I am fall'n indeed!—
How weak is reason, when affection pleads!
How hard to turn the fond, deluded heart

From flatt'ring toys, which sooth'd its vanity!
The laurell'd trophy, and the loud applause,
The victor's triumph, and the people's gaze;
[Pg 26]The high-hung banner, and recording gold,
Subdue me still, still cling around my heart,
And pull my reason down.

Enter LADY RUTLAND.

Rut. Oh, let me fly,
To clasp, embrace, the lord of my desires,
My soul's delight, my utmost joy, my husband!
Once more I hold him in my eager arms,
Behold his face, and lose my soul in rapture!

Essex. Transporting bliss! my richest, dearest treasure!
My mourning turtle, my long-absent peace,
Oh, come yet nearer, nearer to my heart!
My raptured soul springs forward, to receive thee:
Thou heaven on earth, thou balm of all my woe!

Rut. Oh, shall I credit, then, each ravish'd sense?
Has pitying Heaven consented to my prayer?
It has, it has; my Essex is return'd!
But language poorly speaks the joys I feel;
Let passion paint, and looks express my soul.

Essex. With thee, my sweetest comfort, I'll retire
From splendid palaces, and glitt'ring throngs,
To live embosom'd in the shades of joy,
Where sweet content extends her friendly arms,
And gives increasing love a lasting welcome.
With thee, I'll timely fly from proud oppression.
Forget our sorrows, and be bless'd for ever.

Rut. Oh! let us hence, beyond the reach of power,
Where fortune's hand shall never part us more!
In this calm state of innocence and joy,
I'll press thee to my throbbing bosom close.
Ambition's voice shall call in vain; the world,
The thankless world, shall never claim thee more,
And all thy business shall be love and me.

Essex. The queen, incensed at my return, abandons me
To Cecil's malice, and the rage of faction.
[Pg 27]I'm now no more the fav'rite child of fortune:
My enemies have caught me in the toil,
And life has nothing worth my wish but thee.

Rut. Delusive dream of fancied happiness!
And has my fatal fondness then destroy'd thee?
Oh, have I lured thee to the deadly snare
Thy cruel foes have laid?
I dreaded Cecil's malice, and my heart,
Longing to see thee, with impatience listen'd
To its own alarms; and prudence sunk beneath
The force of love.

Essex. Forbear, my only comfort;
Oh, tell me not of danger, death, and Burleigh;
Let every star shed down its mortal bane
On my unshelter'd head: whilst thus I fold
Thee in my raptured arms, I'll brave them all,
Defy my fate, and meet its utmost rigour.

Rut. Alas, my lord! consider where we are.
Oh, 'tis the queen's apartment;
Each precious moment is by fate beset,
And time stands trembling whilst we thus confer.

Essex. Then, let us hence from this detested place;
My rescued soul disdains the house of greatness,
Where humble honesty can find no shelter.
From hence we'll fly, where love and greatness call;
Where happiness invites—that wish of all:
With sweet content enjoy each blissful hour,
Beyond the smiles of fraud, or frowns of power.

[*Exeunt.*
[Pg 28]

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE I.

An Apartment in the Palace.

*Enter BURLEIGH and LADY
NOTTINGHAM.*

Not. My lord, I've sought you out with much impatience.
You've had an audience of the queen: what follow'd?

Bur. Soon as I told her, Essex had refused
To yield his dignities, and staff of office,
Against her high command, pronounced by me,
She seem'd deprived of reason for a moment;
Her working mind betray'd contending passions;
She paused, like thunder in some kindling cloud,
Then instant burst with dreadful fury forth:
"And has th' ungrateful wretch defy'd my mandate?
The proud, audacious traitor, scorn'd my power?
He dares not, sure?—He dies—the villain dies!"
I instantly withdrew,
But soon was countermanded, and desired
To bring the Earl of Essex to her presence.
I like it not; and much I fear she'll stand
Between this high offender and the laws.

Not. Is Essex then secured?

Bur. Madam, he is;
And now comes guarded to the court.

Enter GENTLEMAN.

Gent. Madam, the queen
Is in her closet, and desires to see you.
[*Exit.*

[Pg 29]*Not.* I attend her.

Bur. She wants, no doubt, to be advised by you.
Improve this fair occasion, urge it home.

Not. I know her foible. Essex long has had
An interest in her heart, which nothing can
O'erturn, except his own ungovern'd spirit:

It is, indeed, the instrument by which
We work, and cannot fail, if rightly used.

Bur. Madam, the queen expects you instantly.
I must withdraw, and wait the earl's arrival.
[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE II

The Queen's Closet.

QUEEN ELIZABETH *discovered.*

Qu. Eliz. Ill-fated, wretched man! perverse and obstinate!
He counterworks my grace, and courts destruction.
He gives his deadly foes the dagger to
Destroy him, and defeats my friendly purpose,
Which would, by seeming to abandon, save him.
Nor will he keep the mask of prudence on
A moment's space.—What! must I bear this scorn!
No: let me all the monarch re-assume;
Exert my power, and be myself again.
Oh, ill-performing, disobedient, heart!
Why shrink'st thou, fearful, from thy own resolve?

Enter LADY NOTTINGHAM.

Thou comest in time; I'm much disturb'd, abused,
My Nottingham, and would complain to thee
[Pg 30]Of insolence, neglect, and high contempt.
Essex presumed to dictate laws within
My palace gates. How say'st thou, Nottingham?

Not. Surely, my gracious queen, it cannot be!
His heat and passion never could impel him
To take so bold a step, to such rash guilt:
Methinks his very honour should prevent it.

Qu. Eliz. This haughty man has wanton'd with my grace,
Abused my bounty, and despised my favours.

Not. His conduct has, I fear, been too unguarded:
His hasty temper knows not where to stop.
Ambition is the spur of all his actions,

Which often drives him o'er his duty's limits;
(At least his enemies would have it so.)
But malice, madam, seldom judges right.

Qu. Eliz. Oh, Nottingham! his pride is past enduring;
This insolent, audacious man, forgets
His honour and allegiance;—and refused
To render up his staff of office, here,
Beneath my very eye.

Not. Presumptuous man!
Your faithful subjects will resent this pride,
This insolence, this treason to their queen;
They must, my gracious sovereign. 'Tis not safe
To shield him longer from their just resentment.
Then give him up to justice and the laws.

Qu. Eliz. You seem well pleased to urge severity.
Offended majesty but seldom wants
Such sharp advisers—Yet no attribute
So well befits the exalted seat supreme,
And power's disposing hand, as clemency.
Each crime must from its quality be judged;
And pity there should interpose, where malice
Is not the aggressor.

Not. Madam, my sentiments were well intended;
Justice, not malice, moved my honest zeal.
[Pg 31]My words were echoes of the public voice,
Which daily rises, with repeated cries
Of high complaint against this haughty lord.
I pity, from my heart, his rash attempts,
And much esteem the man.

Qu. Eliz. Go, Nottingham,
My mind's disturbed, and send me Rutland hither.
[Exit LADY NOTTINGHAM.
O vain distinction of exalted state!
No rank ascends above the reach of care,
Nor dignity can shield a queen from woe.
Despotic nature's stronger sceptre rules,
And pain and passion in her right prevails.
Oh, the unpity'd lot, severe condition,

Of solitary, sad, dejected grandeur!
Alone condemn'd to bear th' unsocial throb
Of heartfelt anguish, and corroding grief;
Deprived of what, within his homely shed,
The poorest peasant in affliction finds,
The kind, condoling, comfort of a dear
Partaking friend.

Enter LADY RUTLAND.

Rutland, I want thy timely
Counsel. I'm importuned, and urged to punish—
But justice, sometimes, has a cruel sound.
Essex has,
No doubt, provoked my anger, and the laws;
His haughty conduct calls for sharp reproof,
And just correction. Yet I think him guiltless
Of studied treasons, or design'd rebellion.
Then, tell me, Rutland, what the world reports,
What censure says of his unruly deeds.

Rut. The world, with envy's eye, beholds his merit;
Madam, 'tis malice all, and false report.
I know his noble heart, 'tis fill'd with honour;
No trait'rous taint has touch'd his generous soul;
[Pg 32]His grateful mind still glows with pure affection;
And all his thoughts are loyalty and you.

Qu. Eliz. I grant you, Rutland, all you say; and think
The earl possess'd of many splendid virtues.
What pity 'tis, he should afford his foes
Such frequent, sad occasions to undo him!

Rut. What human heart can, unafflicted, bear
Such manly merit in distress, beset
By cruel foes, and faction's savage cry?
My good, my gracious mistress, stretch, betimes,
Your saving arm, and snatch him from destruction,
From deadly malice, treachery, and Cecil.
Oh, let him live, to clear his conduct up!
My gracious queen, he'll nobly earn your bounty,
And with his dearest blood deserve your mercy.

Qu. Eliz. Her words betray a warm, unusual, fervour;
Mere friendship never could inspire this transport.

[*Aside.*

I never doubted but the earl was brave;
His life and valiant actions all declare it:
I think him honest too, but rash and headstrong.
I gladly would preserve him from his foes,
And therefore am resolved once more to see him.

Rut. Oh, 'tis a godlike thought, and Heav'n itself
Inspires it. Sure some angel moves your heart,
Your royal heart, to pity and forgiveness.
This gracious deed shall shine in future story,
And deck your annals with the brightest virtue;
Posterity shall praise the princely act,
And ages yet to come record your goodness.

Qu. Eliz. I'll hear no more—Must I then learn from you
To know my province, and be taught to move,
As each designing mind directs?—Leave me.

Rut. Her frowns are dreadful, and her eye looks terror.
[Pg 33]I tremble for my Essex. Save him, Heav'n!
[*Exit.*

Qu. Eliz. Her warmth has touch'd me home. My jealous heart,
My fearful and suspicious soul's alarm'd.

*Enter BURLEIGH, RALEIGH,
and GENTLEMEN.*

Bur. The Earl of Essex waits your royal will.

Qu. Eliz. Let him approach—And now once more support
Thy dignity, my soul; nor yield thy greatness
To strong usurping passion—But he comes.

Enter ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON.

Essex. Permitted thus to bend, with prostrate heart,
[*Kneels.*
Before your sacred majesty; I come,
With every grateful sense of royal favour
Deeply engraved within my conscious soul.

Qu. Eliz. I sent my orders for your staff of office.

Essex. Madam, my envy'd dignities and honours,
I first from your own royal hand received,
And therefore justly held it far beneath me
To yield my trophies, and exalted power,
So dearly purchased in the field of glory,
To hands unworthy. No, my gracious queen,
I meant to lay them at your royal feet;
Where life itself a willing victim falls,
If you command.

Qu. Eliz. High swelling words, my lord, but ill supply
The place of deeds, and duty's just demand.
In danger's onset, and the day of trial,
Conviction still on acting worth attends;
Whilst mere professions are by doubts encumber'd.

Essex. My deeds have oft declared in danger's front
How far my duty and my valour lead me.
Allegiance still my thirst of glory fired,
And all my bravely gather'd, envy'd laurels
[Pg 34]Were purchased only to adorn my queen:

Qu. Eliz. Your guilty scorn of my entrusted power,
When with my mortal foes you tamely dally'd,
By hardy rebels braved, you poorly sought
A servile pause, and begg'd a shameful truce.
Should Essex thus, so meanly compromise,
And lose the harvest of a plenteous glory,
In idle treaties, and suspicious parley?

Essex. O, deadly stroke! My life's the destined mark.
The poison'd shaft has drank my spirits deep.—
Is't come to this? Conspire with rebels! Ha!
I've served you, madam, with the utmost peril,
And ever gloried in th' illustrious danger,
Where famine faced me with her meagre mien,
And pestilence and death brought up her train.
I've fought your battles, in despite of nature,
Where seasons sicken'd, and the clime was fate.
My power to parley, or to fight, I had
From you; the time and circumstance did call

Aloud for mutual treaty and condition;
For that I stand a guarded felon here; a traitor,
Hemm'd in by villains, and by slaves surrounded.

Qu. Eliz. Shall added insolence, with crest audacious,
Her front uplift against the face of power?
Think not that injured majesty will bear
Such arrogance uncheck'd, or unchastised.
No public trust becomes the man, who treads,
With scornful steps, in honour's sacred path,
And stands at bold defiance with his duty.

Essex. Away with dignities and hated trust,
With flattering honours, and deceitful power!
Invert th' eternal rules of right and justice;
Let villains thrive, and outcast virtue perish;
Let slaves be raised, and cowards have command.
Take, take your gaudy trifles back, those baits
Of vice, and virtue's bane. 'Tis clear, my queen,
[Pg 35]My royal mistress, casts me off; nay, joins
With Cecil to destroy my life and fame.

Qu. Eliz. Presuming wretch! Audacious traitor!

Essex. Traitor!

Qu. Eliz. Hence from my sight, ungrateful slave, and learn
At distance to revere your queen!

Essex. Yes; let
Me fly beyond the limits of the world,
And nature's verge, from proud oppression far,
From malice, tyranny, from courts, from you.

Qu. Eliz. Traitor! villain!
[Strikes him.]

Essex. Confusion! what, a blow!
Restrain, good Heaven! down, down, thou rebel passion,
And, judgment, take the reins. Madam, 'tis well—
Your soldier falls degraded;
His glory's tarnish'd, and his fame undone.
O, bounteous recompence from royal hands!

But you, ye implements, beware, beware,
What honour wrong'd, and honest wrath can act.

Qu. Eliz. What would th' imperious traitor do?
My life
Beyond thy wretched purpose stands secure.
Go, learn at leisure what your deeds deserve,
And tremble at the vengeance you provoke.
[*Exeunt all but ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON.*

Essex. Disgraced and struck! Damnation! Death were glorious!
Revenge! revenge!

South. Alas, my friend! what would
Thy rage attempt? Consider well the great
Advantage now your rash, ungovern'd temper
Affords your foes. The queen, incensed, will let
Their fury loose.—I dread the dire event!

Essex. Has honest pride no just resentment left?
Nor injured honour, feeling?—Not revenge!
High Heaven shall hear, and earth regret, my wrongs.
[Pg 36]Hot indignation burns within my soul.
I'll do some dreadful thing!—I know not what;
Some deeds, as horrid as the shame I feel,
Shall startle nature, and alarm the world.
Then hence, like lightning, let me furious fly,
To hurl destruction at my foes on high;
Pull down oppression from its tyrant seat,
Redeem my glory, or embrace my fate.
[*Exeunt.*

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE I.

The Palace.

Enter QUEEN
ELIZABETH *and* NOTTINGHAM.

Qu. Eliz. Not taken yet?

Not. No, madam: for the Earl
Of Essex, leagued with desperate friends, made strong
And obstinate resistance; till, at length,
O'erpower'd by numbers, and increasing force,
He fled for shelter to a small retreat,
A summer-house, upon the Thames; resolved
To perish, rather than submit to power.

Qu. Eliz. Oh, where shall majesty bestow its favours,
Since Essex has a traitor proved to me,
Whose arm hath raised him up to power and greatness;
Whose heart has shared in all his splendid triumphs,
[Pg 37]And feels, ev'n now, his trait'rous deeds with pity?
But hence with pity, and the woman's pangs:
Resentment governs, and the queen shall punish.

Enter BURLEIGH.

Bur. Illustrious queen! the traitors all are seized.
Their black debates
Were held at Drury House. The dire result
Was this: that Essex should alarm the citizens
To open mutiny, and bold rebellion.
Their purpose was to seize your royal palace,
And sacred person; but your faithful people,
As by one mind inform'd, one zeal inspired,
Rose up at once, and with their virtue quell'd them.

Qu. Eliz. Thanks to their honest, to their loyal hearts!
But say, were any persons else concern'd,
Of high distinction, or of noted rank?

Bur. Yes, madam, many more;
'Mong whom the bold Southampton foremost stands.
They're now our prisoners, and are safe secured;
But Essex, with Southampton, and the rest
Of greater note, I would not dare dispose of
Without your royal mandate; and they now
Attend without, to know your final pleasure.

Qu. Eliz. Is this the just return of all my care?
My anxious toilsome days, and watchful nights?
Have I sent forth a wish, that went not freighted

With all my people's good? Or have I life,
Or length of days desired, but for their sake?
The public good is all my private care!
Then could I think this grateful isle
Contain'd one traitor's heart? But, least of all,
That Essex' breast should lodge it? Call the monster,
And let me meet this rebel face to face!
Do you withdraw, and wait within our call.
[*Exeunt* BURLEIGH and NOTTINGHAM.]

[Pg 38]Enter ESSEX.

You see, we dare abide your dangerous presence,
Though treason sits within your heart enthroned,
And on that brow rebellion lours, where once
Such boasted loyalty was said to flourish.
How low the traitor can degrade the soldier!
Guilt glares in conscious dye upon thy cheek,
And inward horror trembles in thine eye.
How mean is fraud! How base ingratitude!

Essex. Forbear reproach, thou injured majesty,
Nor wound with piercing looks, a heart already
With anguish torn, and bleeding with remorse.
Your awful looks, alone, are arm'd with death,
And justice gives them terror.

Qu. Eliz. Hapless man!
What cause could prompt, what fiend could urge thee on
To this detested deed? Could I from thee
Expect to meet this base return? from thee,
To whom I ought to fly with all the confidence
That giving bounty ever could inspire,
Or seeming gratitude and worth could promise?

Essex. Alas! I own my crimes, and feel my treasons;
They press me down beneath the reach of pity.
Despair alone can shield me from myself.

Qu. Eliz. My pride forbids me to reproach thee more;
My pity, rather, would relieve thy sorrow.
The people's clamours, and my special safety,
Call loud for justice, and demand your life.

But if forgiveness from an injured queen
Can make the few short hours you live more easy,
I give it freely, from my pitying heart;
And wish my willing power could grant thee more.

Essex. Oh, let me prostrate thus before you fall,
My better angel, and my guardian genius!
[Pg 39]Permit me, royal mistress, to announce
My faithful sentiments, my soul's true dictates;
Vouchsafe your Essex but this one request,
This only boon—he'll thank you with his last,
His dying breath, and bless you in his passage.

Qu. Eliz. Rise, my lord!
If aught you have to offer can allay
Your woes, and reconcile you to your fate,
Proceed;—and I with patient ear will listen.

Essex. My real errors, and my seeming crimes,
Would weary mercy, and make goodness poor;
And yet the source of all my greatest faults
Was loyalty misled, and duty in extreme.
So jealous was my sanguine heart, so warm
Affection's zeal, I could not bear the least
Suspicion of my duty to my queen.
This drove me from my high command in Ireland;
This, too, impell'd me to that rude behaviour,
Which justly urged the shameful blow I felt;
And this, O fatal rashness! made me think
My queen had given her Essex up, a victim
To statesmen's schemes, and wicked policy.
Stung by that piercing thought, my madness flew
Beyond all bounds, and now, alas! has brought me
To this most shameful fall; and, what's still worse,
My own reproaches, and my queen's displeasure.

Qu. Eliz. Unhappy man! My yielding soul is touch'd,
And pity pleads thy cause within my breast.

Essex. Say, but, my gracious sovereign, ere I go
For ever from your presence, that you think me
Guiltless of all attempts against your throne,
And sacred life. Your faithful Essex ne'er

Could harbour in his breast so foul a thought.
Believe it not, my queen. By heaven, I swear,
When in my highest pitch of glory raised,—
The splendid noon of Fortune's brightest sunshine,[Pg 40]—
Not ages of renown,—could yield me half
The joy, nor make my life so greatly blest,
As saving yours, though for a single hour.

Qu. Eliz. My lord, I would convince you, that I still
Regard your life, and labour to preserve it;
But cannot screen you from a public trial.
With prudence make your best defence; but should
Severity her iron jurisdiction
Extend too far, and give thee up condemn'd
To angry laws, thy queen will not forget thee.
Yet, lest you then should want a faithful friend
(For friends will fly you in the time of need)
Here, from my finger, take this ring, a pledge
Of mercy; having this, you ne'er shall need
An advocate with me, for whensoever
You give, or send it back, by heaven, I swear,
As I do hope for mercy on my soul,
That I will grant whatever boon you ask.

Essex. Oh, grace surprising! most amazing goodness!
Words cannot paint, the transports of my soul!
Let me receive it on my grateful knees,
At once to thank, and bless the hand that gives it.

Qu. Eliz. Depend, my lord, on this—'twixt you and me,
This ring shall be a private mark of faith
[*Gives the ring.*]
Inviolate. Be confident; cheer up;
Dispel each melancholy fear, and trust
Your sovereign's promise—she will ne'er forsake you.

Essex. Let Providence dispose my lot as 'twill,
May watchful angels ever guard my queen;
May healing wisdom in her councils reign,
And firm fidelity surround her throne;
May victory her dreaded banners bear,
And joyful conquests crown her soldiers' brow;
[Pg 41]Let every bliss be mingled in her cup,

And Heaven, at last, become her great reward.

[*Exit.*

Qu. Eliz. 'Tis done;

And yet foreboding tremors shake my heart.

Something sits heavy here, and presses down

My spirits with its weight. What can it mean?

Suppose he is condemn'd! my royal word

Is plighted for his life; his enemies,

No doubt, will censure much.—No matter; let them;

I know him honest, and despise their malice.

Enter COUNTESS of RUTLAND.

Rut. Where is the queen? I'll fall before her feet

Prostrate; implore, besiege her royal heart,

And force her to forgive.

Qu. Eliz. What means this phrensy?

Rut. Oh, gracious queen! if ever pity touch'd

Your generous breast, let not the cruel axe

Destroy his precious life; preserve my Essex,

My life, my hope, my joy, my all, my husband!

Qu. Eliz. Husband!—What sudden, deadly blow is this!

Hold up, my soul, nor sink beneath this wound.—

You beg a traitor's life!

Rut. Oh, gracious queen!

He ever loved—was ever faithful—brave!

If nature dwells about your heart, oh, spurn

Me not!—My lord! my love! my husband bleeds!

Qu. Eliz. Take her away.

Rut. I cannot let you go.

Hold off your hands!—Here on this spot I'll fix—

Here lose all sense. Still let me stretch these arms,

Inexorable queen!—He yet may live.

Oh, give him to my poor, afflicted heart!

One pitying look, to save me from distraction.

[Pg 42]*Qu. Eliz.* I'll hear no more. I'm tortured—take her hence.

Rut. Nay, force me not away.—Inhuman wretches!
Oh, mercy, mercy!—Then to thee, good Heaven,
(My queen, my cruel queen, denies to hear me!)
To thee, for mercy bend.
Melt down her bosom's frozen sense, to feel
Some portion of my deadly grief, my fell
Distraction.—Turn, oh, turn, and see a wife,
A tortured wife——

Qu. Eliz. Why am I not obey'd?

Rut. Nay, do not thus
Abandon me to fell despair. Just Heaven,
That sees my sorrows, will avenge the wrong,
This cruel wrong—this barbarous tyranny.
[*Forced off.*]

Qu. Eliz. Wedded to Rutland! Most unhappy pair!
And, oh, ill-fated queen! Never till now
Did sorrow settle in my heart its throne.
Recall my pledge of safety from his hands,
And give him up to death!—But life or death
To me is equal now.
Unhappy state, where peace shall never come!
One fatal moment has confirm'd my doom—
Turn'd all my comfort to intestine strife,
And fill'd with mortal pangs my future life!
[*Exit.*]
[Pg 43]

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE I.

A Room in the Tower.

*Enter RALEIGH and LIEUTENANT of
the TOWER.*

Ral. Their peers, with much indulgence, heard their plea,
And gave them ample scope for their defence;
But naught avail'd—their crimes were too notorious.

They bore their sentence with becoming spirit;
And here's the royal mandate for their deaths.—
The Lady Nottingham! What brings her hither?

Enter LADY NOTTINGHAM.

Not. Lieutenant, lead me to the Earl of Essex,
I bring a message to him from the queen.

Lieut. He's with his friend, the brave Southampton, madam,
Preparing now for his expected fate.
But I'll acquaint his lordship with your pleasure.
[*Exit.*

Ral. What means this message? Does the queen relent?

Not. I fear she does;
Go you to court, for Cecil there expects you.
I've promised to acquaint him with what passes
'Twixt me and Essex, ere I see the queen.

Ral. Madam, I go.
[*Exit.*

Not. Now, vengeance, steel my heart!
[Pg 44]Offended woman, whilst her pride remains,
To malice only, and revenge, will bow;
And every virtue at that altar sacrifice.
But see, he comes, with manly sorrow clad.
There was a time, that presence could subdue
My pride, and melt my heart to gentle pity.
I then could find no joy but in his smiles,
And thought him lovely as the summer's bloom;
But all his beauties are now hateful grown.

Enter ESSEX.

Essex. Whether you bring me death, or life, I know not.
But, if strict friendship, and remembrance past,
May aught presage to my afflicted heart,
Sure mercy only from those lips should flow,
And grace be utter'd from that friendly tongue.

Not. My lord, I'm glad you think me still your friend.
I come not to upbraid, but serve you now;
And pleased I am to be the messenger
Of such glad tidings, in the day of trouble,
As I now bring you. When the queen had heard,
That by the lords you were condemn'd to die,
She sent me, in her mercy, here to know
If you had aught to offer, that might move
Her royal clemency to spare your life.

Essex. Could any circumstance new lustre add
To my dread sovereign's goodness, 'tis the making
The kind, the generous Nottingham its messenger.

Not. 'Tis well, my lord; but there's no time to spare—
The queen impatient waits for my return.

Essex. My heart was wishing for some faithful friend,
And bounteous Heaven hath sent thee to my hopes.
Know then, kind Nottingham, for now I'll trust
Thee with the dearest secret of my life,
[Pg 45]'Tis not long since, the queen (who well foresaw
To what the malice of my foes would drive me)
Gave me this ring, this sacred pledge of mercy;
And with it made a solemn vow to Heaven,
That, whensoever I should give, or send
It back again, she'd freely grant whate'er
Request I then should make.

Not. Give, give it me,
My lord! and let me fly, on friendship's wings,
To bear it to the queen, and to it add
My prayers and influence to preserve thy life.

Essex. Oh! take it then—it is the pledge of life!
Oh! it is my dear Southampton's
Last, last remaining stay! his thread of being,
Which more than worlds I prize!—Oh, take it, then;
Take it, thou guardian angel of my life,
And offer up the incense of my prayer!
Oh, beg, entreat, implore her majesty,
From public shame, and ignominious death,
And from the obdurate axe, to save my friend.

Not. My lord, with all the powers that nature gave
And friendship can inspire, I'll urge the queen
To grant you your request.

Essex. Kind Nottingham!
Your pious offices shall ever be
My fervent theme; and if my doubtful span
Relenting Heaven should stretch to years remote,
Each passing hour shall still remind my thoughts,
And tell me, that I owe my all to thee:
My friend shall thank you too for lengthen'd life.
And now I fly with comfort to his arms,
To let him know the mercy that you bring.

[*Exeunt.*

[Pg 46]

SCENE II.

The Court.

Enter QUEEN

ELIZABETH *and* BURLEIGH.

Qu. Eliz. Ha! is not Nottingham return'd?

Bur. No, madam.

Qu. Eliz. Dispatch a speedy messenger to haste her.—
My agitated heart can find no rest.
So near the brink of fate—unhappy man!

Enter LADY NOTTINGHAM.

How now, my Nottingham—what news from Essex?
What says the earl?

Not. I wish, with all my soul,
The ungrateful task had been another's lot.
I dread to tell it—lost, ill-fated man!

Qu. Eliz. What means this mystery, this strange behaviour?
Pronounce—declare at once; what said the earl?

Not. Alas, my queen! I fear to say; his mind
Is in the strangest mood that ever pride

On blackest thoughts begot.—He scarce would speak;
And when he did, it was with sullenness,
With hasty tone, and downcast look.

Qu. Eliz. Amazing!
Not feel the terrors of approaching death!
Nor yet the joyful dawn of promised life!

Not. He rather seem'd insensible to both,
And with a cold indifference heard your offer;
[Pg 47]Till warming up, by slow degrees, resentment
Began to swell his restless haughty mind;
And proud disdain provoked him to exclaim
Aloud, against the partial power of fortune,
And faction's rage. I begg'd him to consider
His sad condition; nor repulse, with scorn,
The only hand that could preserve him.

Qu. Eliz. Ha!
What!—Said he nothing of a private import?
No circumstance—no pledge—no ring?

Not. None, madam!
But, with contemptuous front, disclaim'd at once
Your proffer'd grace; and scorn'd, he said, a life
Upon such terms bestow'd.

Qu. Eliz. Impossible!
Could Essex treat me thus?—You basely wrong him,
And wrest his meaning from the purposed point.
Recall betimes the horrid words you've utter'd:
Confess, and own the whole you've said was false.

Not. Madam, by truth, and duty, both compell'd,
Against the pleadings of my pitying soul,
I must declare (Heaven knows with what reluctance),
That never pride insulted mercy more.
He ran o'er all the dangers he had past;
His mighty deeds; his service to the state;
Accused your majesty of partial leaning
To favourite lords, to whom he falls a sacrifice;
Appeals to justice, and to future times,
How much he feels from proud oppression's arm:

Nay, something too he darkly hinted at,
Of jealous disappointment, and revenge.

Qu. Eliz. Eternal silence seal thy venom'd lips
What hast thou utter'd, wretch, to rouse at once
A whirlwind in my soul, which roots up pity,
And destroys my peace!

Let him this instant to the block be led.

[*Exit* NOTTINGHAM.

[Pg 48]Upbraid me with my fatal fondness for him!
Ungrateful, barbarous ruffian! O, Elizabeth!
Remember now thy long-establish'd fame,
Thy envy'd glory, and thy father's spirit.
Accuse me of injustice too, and cruelty!—
Yes, I'll this instant to the Tower, forget
My regal state, and to his face confront him:
Confound the audacious villain with my presence,
And add new terrors to the uplifted axe.
[*Exit.*

SCENE III.

The Tower.

Enter ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON.

Essex. Oh, name it not! my friend shall live—he shall!
I know her royal mercy, and her goodness,
Will give you back to life, to length of days,
And me to honour, loyalty, and truth.
Death is still distant far.

South. In life's first spring,
Our green affections grew apace and prosper'd;
The genial summer swell'd our joyful hearts,
To meet and mix each growing fruitful wish.
We're now embark'd upon that stormy flood,
Where all the wise and brave are gone before us,
E'er since the birth of time, to meet eternity.
And what is death, did we consider right?
Shall we, who sought him in the paths of terror,
And faced him in the dreadful walks of war,

Shall we astonish'd shrink, like frightened infants,
And start at scaffolds, and their gloomy trappings?

[Pg 49] *Essex*. Yet, still I trust long years remain of friendship.
Let smiling hope drive doubt and fear away,
And death be banish'd far; where creeping age,
Disease, and care, invite him to their dwelling.
I feel assurance rise within my breast,
That all will yet be well.

South. Count not on hope—
We never can take leave, my friend, of life,
On nobler terms. Life! what is life? A shadow!
Its date is but the immediate breath we draw;
Nor have we surety for a second gale;
Ten thousand accidents in ambush lie
For the embody'd dream.
A frail and fickle tenement it is,
Which, like the brittle glass that measures time,
Is often broke, ere half its sands are run.

Essex. Such cold philosophy the heart disdains,
And friendship shudders at the moral tale.
My friend, the fearful precipice is past,
And danger dare not meet us more. Fly swift,
Ye better angels, waft the welcome tidings
Of pardon to my friend—of life and joy!

Enter LIEUTENANT.

Lieut. I grieve to be the messenger of woe,
But must, my lords, entreat you to prepare
For instant death. Here is the royal mandate,
That orders your immediate execution.

Essex. Immediate execution! what, so sudden?—
No message from the queen, or Nottingham!

Lieut. None, sir.

Essex. Deluded hopes! Oh, worse than death!
Perfidious queen! to make a mock of life!
My friend—my friend destroy'd! Why could not mine [Pg 50]—

My life atone for both—my blood appease?
Can you, my friend, forgive me?

South. Yes, oh yes,
My bosom's better half, I can.—With thee,
I'll gladly seek the coast unknown, and leave
The lessening mark of irksome life behind.
With thee, my friend, 'tis joy to die!—'tis glory!
For who would wait the tardy stroke of time?
Or cling like reptiles to the verge of being,
When we can bravely leap from life at once,
And spring, triumphant, in a friend's embrace?

Enter RALEIGH.

Ral. To you, my Lord Southampton, from the queen,
A pardon comes; your life her mercy spares.

Essex. For ever blest be that indulgent power
Which saves my friend! This weight ta'en off, my soul
Shall upward spring, and mingle with the bless'd.

South. All-ruling Heavens! can this—can this be just?
Support me! hold, ye straining heart-strings, hold,
And keep my sinking frame from dissolution!
Oh, 'tis too much for mortal strength to bear,
Or thought to suffer!—No, I'll die with thee!
They shall not part us, Essex!

Essex. Live, oh, live!
Thou noblest, bravest, best of men and friends!
Whilst life is worth thy wish—till time and thou
Agree to part, and nature send thee to me!
Thou generous soul, farewell!—Live, and be happy!
And, oh! may life make largely up to thee
Whatever blessing fate has thus cut off,
From thy departing friend!

[Pg 51]

Lieut. My lord, my warrant
Strictly forbids to grant a moment's time.

South. Oh, must we part for ever? Cruel fortune!
Wilt thou then tear him hence?—Severe divorce!

Let me cling round thy sacred person still,—
Still clasp thee to my bosom close, and keep
Stern Fate at distance.

Essex. Oh, my friend! we'll meet
Again, where virtue finds a just reward!
Where factious malice never more can reach us!
I need not bid thee guard my fame from wrongs:
And, oh! a dearer treasure to thy care
I trust, than either life or fame—my wife!
Oh, she will want a friend!
Then take her to thy care—do thou pour balm
On her deep-wounded spirit, and let her find
My tender helps in thee!—I must be gone,
My ever faithful, and my gallant friend!
I pr'ythee, leave this woman's work.—Farewell!
Take this last, dear embrace—Farewell for ever!

South. My bursting breast! I fain would speak, but words
Are poor—Farewell!—
But we shall meet again—embrace in one
Eternal band, which never shall be loosed.
[*Exit.*

Essex. To death's concluding stroke, lead on, Lieutenant.—
My wife!—Now reason, fortitude, support me!
For now, indeed, comes on my sorest trial.

Enter COUNTESS of RUTLAND.

Oh, thou last, dear reserve of fortune's malice!
For fate can add no more,—
Oh, com'st thou now to arrest my parting soul,
And force it back to life?

[Pg 52]*Rut.* Thou sole delight—
Thou only joy which life could ever give,
Or death deprive me of—my wedded lord!
I come, with thee, determined to endure
The utmost rigour of our angry stars!
To join thee, fearless, in the grasp of death,
And seek some dwelling in a world beyond it!

Essex. Too much, thou partner of this dismal hour,
Thy gen'rous soul would prompt thee to endure!
Nor can thy tender, trembling, heart sustain it.
Long years of bliss remain in store for thee;
And smiling time his treasures shall unfold
To bribe thy stay!

Rut. Thou cruel comforter!
Alas! what's life—what's hated life to me?
Alas, this universe, this goodly frame,
Shall all as one continued curse appear,
And every object blast, when thou art gone.

Essex. Oh, strain not thus the little strength I've left,
The weak support that holds up life! to bear
A few short moments more, its weight of woe,
Its loss of thee! Oh, turn away those eyes!
Nor with that look melt down my fix'd resolve!
And yet a little longer let me gaze
On that loved form! Alas! I feel my sight
Grows dim, and reason from her throne retires:
For pity's sake, let go my breaking heart,
And leave me to my fate!

Rut. Why wilt thou still
Of parting talk?
Oh, that the friendly hand of Heaven would snatch
Us both at once, above the distant stars,
Where fortune's venom'd shafts can never pierce,
Nor cruel queens destroy!

Essex. The awful Searcher, whose impartial eye
[Pg 53]Explores the secrets of each human heart,
And every thought surveys, can witness for me,
How close thy image clings around my soul!
Retards each rising wish, and draws me back
To life, entangled by that loved idea!

Lieut. My lord,
It now grows late.

Essex. Lead on.

Rut. Stay, stay, my love! my dearest, dying lord!
Ah! whither wouldst thou go? Ah, do not leave me!
[*Faints.*

Essex. Thou sinking excellence! thou matchless woman!
Shall fortune rob me of thy dear embrace,
Or earth's whole power, or death divide us now?
Stay, stay, thou spotless, injured saint!

Lieut. My lord, already you have been indulged
Beyond what I can warrant by my orders.

Essex. One moment more
Afford me to my sorrows—Oh, look there!
Could bitter anguish pierce your heart, like mine,
You'd pity now the mortal pangs I feel,
The throbs that tear my vital strings away,
And rend my agonizing soul.

Lieut. My lord——

Essex. But one short moment, and I will attend.
Ye sacred ministers, that virtue guard,
And shield the righteous in the paths of peril,
Restore her back to life, and lengthen'd years
Of joy! dry up her bleeding sorrows all!
Oh, cancel from her thoughts this dismal hour,
And blot my image from her sad remembrance!
'Tis done.—
And now, ye trembling cords of life, give way!
Nature and time, let go your hold!—Eternity
Demands me.

[*Exeunt ESSEX and LIEUTENANT.*

Rut. Where has my lost, benighted soul been wand'ring?[Pg 54]—
What means this mist, that hangs about my mind,
Through which reflection's painful eye discerns
Imperfect forms and horrid shapes of woe?—
The cloud dispels, the shades withdraw, and all
My dreadful fate appears.—Oh! where's my lord?—
My life! my Essex! Oh! whither have they ta'en him?

Enter QUEEN
ELIZABETH *and* ATTENDANTS.

Qu. Eliz. To execution!—Fly with lightning's wing,
And save him!
Be calm, he shall not die! Rise up—I came
To save his life.

Rut. 'Tis mercy's voice that speaks!—
My Essex shall again be mine! My queen,
My bounteous, gracious queen, has said the word!
May troops of angels guard thy sacred life!
And, in thy latest moments, waft thy soul,
To meet that mercy in the realms of joy,
Which, now, thy royal goodness grants to me!

Enter BURLEIGH.

Bur. Madam, your orders came, alas! too late.
Ere they arrived, the axe had fallen on Essex.

Rut. Ha! dead! What hell is this, that opens round me?
What fiend art thou, that draws the horrid scene?
Ah! Burleigh! bloody murd'rer! where's my husband?
Oh! where's my lord, my Essex?
Destruction seize, and madness rend my brain!
See,—see they bend him to the fatal block!
Now—now the horrid axe is lifted high—
It falls—it falls!—he bleeds—he bleeds! he dies!

[Pg 55]*Qu. Eliz.* Alas! her sorrows pierce my suffering heart!

Rut. Eternal discord tear the social world,
And nature's laws dissolve! expunge—erase
The hated marks of Time's engraving hand,
And every trace destroy! Arise, Despair!
Assert thy rightful claim—possess me all!
Bear, bear me to my murder'd lord—to clasp
His bleeding body in my dying arms!
And, in the tomb, embrace his dear remains,
And mingle with his dust—for ever!
[Exit.

Qu. Eliz. Hapless woman!
She shall henceforth be partner of my sorrows,
And we'll contend who most shall weep for Essex.
Oh, quick to kill, and ready to destroy!

[*To* BURLEIGH.

Could no pretext be found—no cause appear,
To lengthen mercy out a moment more,
And stretch the span of grace?—Oh, cruel Burleigh!
This, this was thy dark work, un pitying man!

Bur. My gracious mistress, blame not thus my duty,
My firm obedience to your high command.
The laws condemn'd him first to die; nor think
I stood between your mercy and his life.
It was the Lady Nottingham, not I.
Herself confess'd it all, in wild despair,
That, from your majesty to Essex sent
With terms of proffer'd grace, she then received,
From his own hand, a fatal ring, a pledge,
It seems, of much importance, which the earl,
With earnest suit, and warm entreaty, begg'd her,
As she would prize his life, to give your majesty;
In this she fail'd—In this she murder'd Essex.

Qu. Eliz. Oh, barbarous woman!
Surrounded still by treachery and fraud!
What bloody deed is this!—Thou injured Essex!
[Pg 56]My fame is soil'd to all succeeding times;
But Heaven alone can view my breaking heart—
Then let its will be done.
From hence, let proud, resisting mortals know
The arm parental, and the indulgent blow.
To Heaven's corrective rod submissive bend;
Adore its wisdom, on its power depend;
Whilst ruling justice guides eternal sway,
Let nature tremble, and let man obey.
[*Exeunt.*

THE END.