

Submission to
PlayLab, Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival

Queen Elizabeth I

by
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Dramatis Personae:

<u>Elizabeth:</u>	Queen of England
<u>Duke of Norfolk:</u>	Powerful Catholic lord
<u>Duchess of Norfolk:</u>	Wife of Duke
<u>Robert, Lord Dudley:</u>	Master of Horse to the Queen; House of Warwick
<u>Edward Courtenay:</u>	Earl of Devon; a scholar; House of Exeter
<u>Archbishop of Canterbury:</u>	Leader of England's Catholic Church under Queen Mary
<u>William Lord Cecil:</u>	Secretary of State to the Queen
<u>Helen:</u>	Lady in Waiting to the Queen
<u>Sir John Josh Falstear:</u>	a bard
<u>Bridget:</u>	Queen's maid
<u>Anne:</u>	Queen's maid
<u>Don Gómez Suárez de Figueroa Feria:</u>	Ambassador to England of King Philip II of Spain

Time and Place

England. It is spring in the year 1559; ELIZABETH has been Queen for six months. Except in the epilogue and prologue, she is 25 years old.

Act IScene One

SETTING: Hampton Court Palace. Late at night.

AT RISE: ELIZABETH as 65 year-old woman sits alone, writing.

ELIZABETH [In her old age.]

Last night's gale swept in old leaves and fog. T'was torrent so strong the bells rang. Then the cuckoo awoke.

Of a sudden a person could hear a keening as if t'were Robert searching for a way in. Then Sir John was here, rattling the windows to wake us up, his Helen dancing about.

Our Helen. Our sprite. Our laughter. Her crying out.

Edward lying there.

It is not death we cannot abide, but unexpected it fairly whips the clothes away.

All those events came shortly on the heels after we were crowned. We were surrounded by France and Spain, by Catholics and Reformers, by soldiers and playwrights, artists and merchandise sellers and all sought either to bed the Queen or profit from her bedding.

Some day before the bells ring for old Elizabeth, a queen might tell her own story and pass it on to those for whom truth is only truth and not a predicament. Here is a wondrous tale, she might allow, for when the night is dark and the winter long, to bind a restless child to a mother's knee.

It began, as some recall, with a question,....

[ELIZABETH (as 25-year old) runs across stage, laughing, to stairs. Ascends as Robert Lord DUDLEY hurries to catch up to her. From above she turns still laughing. DUDLEY places a foot on the stair to ascend when men's voices are heard, whereupon he looks at her frantically and disappears around a corner. She retreats out of sight. Men's voices fade. She reemerges onto balcony.]

... was ever queen and maid combined?

ELIZABETH [As 25 year old.]

Was ever queen and maid combined? Must maid, like secret night, forever slink away as dawn comes on? And must a queen like glorious sun, weary in her afternoon, lie down afraid to yield herself complete to night? Are bright and dark, by God's design, contradictions, forbidden to share a single hour?

I am queen. I would be woman too.

I am England. I would be maid, as well.

The Duke of Norfolk instructs us to assume more a manly face and less of maid. Archbishop Canterbury directs his minions to interest the Queen less in ecstasy, more in confession. To him. What knows he of women?

A daughter of Ann Boleyn should not so quick let a crown become her Tower. I would love someone, truly, before I lie down to become bed for kings.

[Exit Elizabeth. Enter Duke of NORFOLK on the road below.]

NORFOLK

I am the Lord Duke of Norfolk, Catholic, strong, seized of broad lands, commander of minions and on my knees to a woman. Again. Queens are a canker.

[CANTERBURY approaches.]

CANTERBURY

Peace, my lord, and moderation, lest you disturb a sleeping queen and give notice.

NORFOLK

Disturb? How more disturb a crown which thus by slender cobweb swings? Disturb indeed; she should be waked. We'll waken her soon enough.

CANTERBURY

Followed by a long sleep, perhaps, but hush now! Someone comes.

[Enter COURTENAY].

What Courtenay? Abroad on such a night? Do you come from the queen?

COURTENAY

I d-d-do! my lords.

NORFOLK

How fares she, then, all lonely, no heirs, no husband, no alliance with worldly power?

COURTENAY

She h-h-has attended a tragedy of ancient Ilium which brought tears to her eyes and now methinks she weeps alone.

CANTERBURY

On such occasions t'is rumored she is wont to seek some solace.

NORFOLK

Since Hal were prince, 'tis lust is king and ecstasy queen! Where is Dudley tonight?

COURTENAY

My lords, she does but f-f- feel her way.

NORFOLK

Rome should tell her where and when to feel. Monarchs rule.

COURTENAY

'Rule' only? Cover England's village squares with crimson and wailing as did her late, never-to-be-lamented, Catholic sister?

NORFOLK

She should be thinking what Spaniard or Frenchmen to put in bed. Sheets are sufficient cloth for a queen. When afoot queens should be shadows of the men they mimic.

COURTENAY

You are m-m- much for shadows, my Lord.

CANTERBURY

Rome's way, and England's, is the law of sons.

COURTENAY

In Mary's villages, from Land's End to Glasgow, heads did roll for Rome's law. Where today is God's peace they promised? Have d-d-done with me, my Lord! For the first time, pray heaven, some person beneath the age of Me-Me-Methuselah upon the throne of England!

CANTERBURY

Sir?

COURTENAY

Age, my lords, without wisdom is a near cousin to youth without wisdom, only, lacking restraint or p-p-promise, rather more d-d- dangerous.

[COURTENAY exits.]

NORFOLK

Foolish bloodless line, the Exeters. Virgin or married, these two states and none other Rome does sanction for wenches and yet our green island turns gray with a pale protestant fever that converts earls to witless poets. A queen twenty-five, unmarried and unpregnant is contrary to natural law.

CANTERBURY

Lighten thy brow, my Lord, lest your visage bespeak our purpose and send signal. A wary bird is apt to skitter.

NORFOLK

When a yeoman seeks a red hen to bring her to the axe, t'is most effective to back up to the bird slow, look sideways. Then of a sudden turn about and seize a leg. Ha.

CANTERBURY

Good morrow, my Lord, I shall to church to pray for your success and our restoration.

[Exit CANTERBURY.]

NORFOLK

The Queen did this very night attend the theatre. She is given to sighs. If a wench's heart be touched, her mind is apt to drag along behind and if her soul crawls into bed her brain will follow. It could therefore be less congenial but more cunning to move her with love rather than steel.

Perhaps to perform some play, some mechanic to work upon the natural corruption of the female nature. The lady could be persuaded by her own sighs, pointed toward Spain or France, some place sufficient distant or weak to require a strong English lord for ally. Aha! This way comes the scarecrow man, the playmaker himself. Holla! Sir. Flap your banner and hither here, sir!

Act IScene Two

SETTING: A sitting room in a cottage near the Queen's palace.

AT RISE: A day later. Afternoon. Enter Sir John Josh FALSTEARE and HELEN, lady in waiting to the Queen.

FALSTEARE

The Lord Duke Norfolk offers me a commission! He wants a play about marriage. It should be based upon Homer's Odyssey. Can you bless my good fortune, sweet Helen?
[Bending towards her.]

HELEN [Moving away.]

You look like wheat stubble.

FALSTEARE

'Tis well excused. I don't sleep. It is the plague that whenever I see you I dream of Helen, sweet Helen, glorious Helen of Troy and don't sleep...

HELEN

I see you and think it's time for the harvest.

FALSTEARE

.... the most beautiful woman in all the ancient world.

HELEN

I remind you because I am beautiful or because I am ancient?

FALSTEARE

You are not historical. To love a goddess a hero must stand straight in the shining woman's path and look her dead in the very eye. If she is divine, he will burn up! Gaze upon your swain, my sweet, my love. If I melt you will know.

[Leans toward her.]

A little closer were better test.

[Bends still closer.]

If I do disappear you are immortal and I only English. Some say they are not the same.

[They kiss.]

I do not disappear. Let me test again, eyes full on!

HELEN

Nay. You exaggerate my beauty, sweet my lord, and say such things to get what you want.

FALSTEARE

I am not 'my lord.' Now you do mock me.

HELEN

So you are only 'sweet' then, but still I am half right.

FALSTEARE

And I am half satisfied.

HELEN

'Tis better now, half than whole.

FALSTEARE

My body aches.

HELEN

Only that one half below the waist, I think.

FALSTEARE

What must I do to stop this trembling?

HELEN

Marry me.

FALSTEARE

Marry you.

HELEN

Away poet! Above the neck is all you get this day.
[Ushers him to the door.]

FALSTEARE

This sweet nymph protests affection but does nothing in its proof. An English woman puts cold January to shame.

[Turning away to the door]

Above the neck. Above the *neck*! Affection from the neck up is a feast without meat! [Exits]

[Trailing from beyond the door]... a fish without scales, a frog without a *croak*.....unnatural, unbearable wench....

Act IScene Three

SETTING: Hampton Court Palace, the Queen's private chambers.

AT RISE: Queen ELIZABETH is standing in conversation with COURTENAY.

COURTENAY [Books under his arm.]

J-J-Jesus tells P-Peter to found the church. M-m-madam, the word ch-church did not by then exist. J-Jesus could not have said th-th-th....

ELIZABETH

That?

[COURTENAY, smiles.]

How do you know these things? [Laughs tenderly.]

COURTENAY [Looking at his own book.]

It is s-s-simple, madam, to lo...lo...like certain work with certain people, especially.

[Looks up at ELIZABETH, who is reading her book.]

I...I...

ELIZABETH

Yes?

COURTENAY [Not taking his eyes off her.]

I...I... You. Your Majesty. If you, your Majesty, read Mark and Luke there will be no 'church.'

I am boring you....

ELIZABETH

Is the word that you cannot say at all, the word 'love?'

COURTENAY

Yes, madam.

ELIZABETH

Not anywhere? Not to anyone?

COURTENAY

I can say 'I-I-like' quite well.
[Enter CECIL.]

ELIZABETH

Ah. Cecil. Thank you, Courtenay.
[COURTENAY gathers his books and rises.]

Sir, they would have us marry.

CECIL

It has been done before, Madam.

ELIZABETH

I am not a brood mare! I am Queen! I decide for the Queen!

CECIL

Their intention is most indirect, Majesty. It is through the heart they play, through theater.

ELIZABETH

How then?

CECIL

A play.

ELIZABETH

Persuade a Queen with a miserable play?

CECIL

A great play, madam.

ELIZABETH

About marriage, no doubt.

CECIL

Indeed, it is Homer's Odyssey. Norfolk is persuaded that this poem is a lyric to marriage.

ELIZABETH

He makes a bold point, wishing to impress me with the reformation of a hero who lay in more beds than there are bird's nests in England!

CECIL

My Lady, he does not suggest....

ELIZABETH

Whom does he choose to perform this play?

CECIL

It is not yet written, my Lady. Sir John Josh Falsteare will write it.

ELIZABETH

Falsteare? The wag who did of late allure us with the libidinous women of Troy?

CECIL

The same my Lady.

ELIZABETH

This is insidious unfair.

CECIL

Not so dire, perhaps. Poets are, designed—as they think—by God to make confusion profound; they are at least as apt to be profoundly confused.

ELIZABETH

Cecil, your blood is too old. An oaf with wit and heart is more like to romance a woman than some craggy castled noble with rocks where eyes should be. Consider Norfolk. There is more granite in that one head than chalk in Dover. What does his lordship contrive?

CECIL

No doubt, to put the script in print for all of England to read.

ELIZABETH

So all may cry out, 'Bed the Queen!'

CECIL

Aye, Madam. It is a cry intended to sweep the quarry toward the bowmen.

ELIZABETH

Catholic bowmen, at least. If they turn our papist subjects into archers, Cecil, we are done, a former queen. Former Queens live shorter lives than former anythings.

CECIL

If, Madam, begging your pardon, a woman plays at first the maid, even a duke may miscalculate.

ELIZABETH

'Plays the maid'?

CECIL

The Duke is used to march hither and thither with his chin in the air impressing all who appear. In such mind a man may slosh oblivious into some icy sea nor notice at all the water rising until his brain is nearly frozen.

ELIZABETH

Whereupon the maid has some advantage?

CECIL

Mayhap, my Lady, if she is quick.

ELIZABETH

Will the playmaker bend his poetry to us?

CECIL

Mayhap, my lady.

ELIZABETH

Good, my lord. Fetch him forthwith and we shall converse before he lures the Queen of England to bed with France or Spain. [Exit CECIL and ELIZABETH.]

COURTENAY [Emerging from shadow.]

Bold men of Europe come this way to b-b-blanket our English flame, she who burns brighter than the brightest lantern in any keep from Wales to Jerusalem. Barges of oh, so-well-suited men of high estate shall soon our rivers ascend bringing p-p-promises, indulgences and gold, mitres and minions, but not one who seeks the maid within the queen.

Yet I, tongue wrapped around my ears, words that reach the back of my mind but never the front of my lips, await mute in shadows, without course or p-p-plan. Oh, that I were bold enough to require the world to honor the woman beneath the crown!

Act IScene Four

SETTING: Evening, the same day. Outside, near the quarters of the Queen's ladies.

AT RISE: HELEN is coming from the Queen FALSTEARE meets her.

FALSTEARE

I leave. I have a play to write. For marriage, I suppose. I must get to the body of the thing.

HELEN

Leave now? So soon before you explore the body of some other work?

FALSTEARE

Do my ears deceive me? Say, again, my sweet, do you oppose my leaving?

HELEN

You were talking of some body, I think, but I forget now which it was.

FALSTEARE

You do drive me mad.

HELEN

Is it not a sweet madness?

FALSTEARE

You toy with a gentleman playmaker who writes for queens. This is tragical.

HELEN

Is it not a gentle tragedy?

FALSTEARE

Tragical is tragical.

HELEN

Poor man.

[Turns away.]

And me?

And me....

[Moving behind a column.]

You think a maid does not feel?

[Pulls him slowly toward her.]

I do.

[Kisses him.]

Are you true?

FALSTEARE

True as man can be, which is more or less true. You think too much. Tomorrow we may all be dead....

HELEN

T'would be better, I suppose, to love soon if death were near. Come then....

[Hears footsteps. Reemerges from behind the column. Enter Bridget.]

BRIDGET

Oh! My Lady, there is a summons from the Queen!

HELEN

Why then?

BRIDGET

Not for you, my Lady, for Sir John Josh Falsteare!

HELEN

Sir John Josh Falsteare? That old wordy fellow, apt betimes to overheat?

BRIDGET

Oh, my lady.

HELEN

Be off, Bridget. I will as the Queen commands and immediate search for such a man. Is he the one talks rather much, tends to bedevil innocent women...?

BRIDGET

Sooner, my Lady, sooner. The Archbishop and the Duke of Norfolk are assembled. Their visages are wrought with pure thunder and consequence! They say the matter is especially grand, magnificent even, bordering on serious, and is therefore also quite urgent.

HELEN [Pushing away FALSTEARE'S hand
which is groping from behind the post.]

Urgent is behind every pillar and post in the land, Bridget.

[Swats at her shoulder.]

Flies are urgent; fleas, too, and gnats. Male gnats, especially. Be you urgent gone, Bridget, and I will follow as urgent as urgency allows.

[Exit BRIDGET.]

Act IScene Five

SETTING: Half an hour later. The Queen's throne room.

AT RISE: Assembled are Queen ELIZABETH, Her Secretary of State William CECIL, Duke of NORFOLK, Archbishop of CANTERBURY, Sir John Josh FALSTEARE and HELEN.

CECIL [Stands close beside ELIZABETH.]

Remember, my lady, the maid.

ELIZABETH [To Cecil.]

Sir.

[To the assembled company.]

My lords you speak of marriage again. It is my duty, I know it.

NORFOLK

Aye, Majesty, and soon. This court dawdles and wavers, weakened by indecision, as my Lords Canterbury and Cecil will surely confirm.

ELIZABETH

I dawdle. It is a woman's nature.

NORFOLK

Not to marry is to invite Scotland's Mary, and France and invasion, then overthrow; the Tower for us all.

ELIZABETH

It is a place already known to us.

NORFOLK

Therefore do not treat light this counsel from your most trusted and wisest advisors.

ELIZABETH

You are said to be wise. You counsel marriage. We are thinking on't. Falsteare's recent drama did much distress us. Decision is difficult when a maid is in distress.

NORFOLK

This, Madam, is the very dawdle of which I speak! And unwise. And unpolitic.

[To CECIL.]

Sir, when she thinks, she thinks like a child!

ELIZABETH

Dawdle, unwisdom and bad politics. More reasons, among an unending list of reasons, for yet another marriage? How so this time? Burgundy? Hanover? Moscow? We weary of these proposals that spawn conflict in order to avoid conflict and breed quarrels for the sake of ending quarrels. Peaked and gaunt you all do look as if you've allied and bred yourselves near to exhaustion.

CECIL [Whispers.]

The maid, Madam.

ELIZABETH [Turning to FALSTEARE]

Whenever this band of noble souls surrounds me, Master Jack, we see trouble coming. But yours is the issue at hand, sir. We understand that Norfolk has asked of you a play?

FALSTEARE

He has, Majesty.

ELIZABETH

About Odysseus.

FALSTEARE

He has, Majesty.

ELIZABETH

And you have agreed?

FALSTEARE

He is Norfolk, your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

And I am queen!

And ... a maid, of course.

Why then, let it be done! Let it be, as he suggests, a play about Odysseus who was,
[turning direct to FALSTEARE],
so we've heard, a considerable wanderer.

NORFOLK [Coming forward]

He went home, Majesty, to his wife.

CANTERBURY

Rejoined at last, your Grace, in married union.

NORFOLK

Reestablished his estate and son. Put sheep and goats in their places.

ELIZABETH

My, my. Shall we have a sequel, then, to the *Betrayal of Troilus*? His love was a woman who visited many tents.

NORFOLK

Nay Majesty, I do protest: set the sequel later on, when a hero returns to his lawful wife.

ELIZABETH

You do protest a good deal, my Lord Norfolk. Not always, we're told, to our face!

[Withdraws toward a distant window.]

Think, Sir John, on the heart of this thing: Homer is in your hands. The story of a marriage. The greatest marriage in history, so Cecil tells us. Think on't! Write its meaning. Write as Canterbury would have you write, and lead a queen to bed, write as Norfolk requires and lead a queen to join with Spain; continue, somehow, the Tudor line; assist, in all ways, marriage! Poet, here is your golden chance! Foster a royal wedding!

[Pauses turning slowly back from the window, looking directly at

FALSTEARE]

Or, sir, if within this ancient story some deeper meaning lies, you might write a different thing and save a woman's soul.

We will be bound by the sense of the story, my Lords, as this poet writes it, this man of the world, this seer; his artistry shall be guide enough for us.

FALSTEARE

I am pleased your Majesty, beyond recall, to save a great lady's soul.

CANTERBURY

The Queen's soul shall be saved alone in marriage.

ELIZABETH

Pri' thee, Lord Archbishop: If marriage saves souls, shall we both marry for the grace of God and all that is holy, or only me?

CANTERBURY [Turning on CECIL]

Sir, she is young and lacks counsel in the ways of God and men!

ELIZABETH

Is not marriage—do we mistake?—power to you all? Does your sovereign queen misunderstand the ways of power and men at once, or are you suddenly bored because your monarch is so unbearably redundant to speak of both power and men in the same weary sentence?

NORFOLK

Majesty, Mary Queen of Scots seeks to invade England and she will gain much support because she has both husband and an heir!

ELIZABETH

And is beautiful! And is unscrupulous. And is Catholic! Indeed her taste in men is ever so catholic, so we are told....

NORFOLK

Majesty, only in marriage can England's heirs be found! Bastards serve no crown!

CANTERBURY

Hold, my lord!

ELIZABETH

It is said that monarchs achieve respect when occasionally some head does roll. Have you heard the same, my Lord?

NORFOLK

I have heard it, Majesty.

[ELIZABETH retreats to look out the window.]

ELIZABETH

Nay, you have recommended it, so we are told.

NORFOLK

I've rarely seen a Reformer stout enough to resist persuasion of the axe.

ELIZABETH

Nor Catholic neither.

ELIZABETH [To Norfolk.]

With every utterance, sir, you raise the stakes.

[COURTENAY enters unseen and stands at the back.]

Are you man enough to wager, my Lord?

NORFOLK

I seek a man to shore up England's throne.

ELIZABETH

You are afraid to wager?

NORFOLK

Afraid?

ELIZABETH

Good, then we shall wager and for your sake we might bring the axe into the bargain to secure our intent.

[NORFOLK and CANTERBURY whispering.]

NORFOLK

We require as condition, your Majesty, that this woman's game lead our country forward toward a royal marriage. England needs a king.

ELIZABETH

When Hal was king, a woman could lose her head for impertinence. This is a bird can fly in both directions.

NORFOLK

Majesty, t'were not impertinent to require a man where a man has forever stood.

ELIZABETH

We shall satisfy you, then, and us as well. Attend us Sirs:

M' lords, we shall wager. Let the stakes be high enough to gain a man's attention since all you dream is glory and death! Let us wager for once in our lives with wit the test, and artistry our guide. Write your play, Sir John! If you are persuasive, if you touch the heart of a queen with the meaning of marriage, if you reach the depths of a woman with your song and can persuade her with sweet music to the silken bed, then we will know our course and hasten to blessed marriage. Further, we will to whatsoever bed the powerful Lord Norfolk does himself propose!

CANTERBURY

Gracious Queen!

ELIZABETH

But if... If my Lords, in Homer there lies some meaner thing, not merely marriage alone to praise, if at its heart this be not a tale of love at all, if the poet and I do perceive some baser motive than marriage, I... I.. we shall take the advice of those who...

[turns slowly to Norfolk]
forever seek to solve the problems of this realm by striking off heads.

You did provoke us, Sir.

[The Queen moves deliberately to sit upon her throne; gazes upon the company.]

Cecil.

[CECIL moves to the left of the throne.]

And you, bard, listen: know the gravity of your charge.

[FALSTEARE slowly kneels to the cold, stone floor.]

Attend me all! We have a wager declared the outcome of which shall depend upon the Muse!

If you win, my Lord Norfolk, because Falsteare pleads your case with effect, we shall have a royal wedding and for your extreme anguish, you may choose our consort. If you lose, we shall, as you suggest, have the head of someone who troubles us with impertinence, and it shall be yours.

Let us play then; my bed or your head.

NORFOLK

One to the bed or one to the block?

ELIZABETH

Surely, our Lord Norfolk accepts no less for himself than he is willing to propose for others?

Cecil, we need your arm.

[Exit the Queen on CECIL's arm.]

Act IIScene One

SETTING: A private chapel Arundel castle of the Duke of NORFOLK in northern England.

AT RISE: The DUKE is in prayer. The Duchess of NORFOLK enters.

NORFOLK

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

DUCHESS [Approaches from behind]

On your knees, my Lord?

NORFOLK [Stands.]

It is not you, good wife, who stands suddenly under threat of the axe....

Of a sudden the outcome of this wager lies in the hands of a woman. She decides whether to give over her bed to my control or to take my life to save herself. Her body or mine. Stone statues will bleed before this maid turns such power to a man!

DUCHESS

There are servants passing by the door, sir.

NORFOLK

This is sore ungainly. The play was a foil. She turned it against me. I cannot lift a sword but nevertheless live under shadow of the axe. I thought to protect the faith and instead stew like a carrot in a woman's pot.

DUCHESS

Servants, sir. Does this make just the right impression?

NORFOLK

She was petulant. Not a true queen.

DUCHESS

Petulant is ordinary. Everyone knows women forget; she will too. She is ordinary and a woman.

NORFOLK

A king would not be strong weak, strong weak, king queen, king queen, like a duck. Kings are constant.

DUCHESS

My lord, the unfortunate child is all gown and no crown. She draws Norfolk in, and in so doing draws the Duchess, and drawing this duchess, mistakes greatly.

NORFOLK

Mistakes the Duchess? For whom?

DUCHESS

My lord, a mere queen is no match for an angered wife! The child places everything of ours at risk: titles, estates, and lives. Am I not most certainly invited to return the favor? The crown of England was not, I am quite sure, designed to fit only red hair.

Act IIScene Two

SETTING: Two weeks later. Outside, on the doorstep of Arundel castle, West Sussex.

AT RISE: DUCHESS OF NORFOLK awaits a visitor. Enter Robert Lord DUDLEY.

DUCHESS

Good morrow, Robert! Cousin! Welcome to Arundel!

DUDLEY [to himself]

Cousin?

[Approaching.]

Good morrow, my Lady! Strong is the morning's sun and green all England! On such days one has no fear to enter any noble house. You look regal as always; may I say, beyond compare?

DUCHESS [Bows slightly.]

Pray tell me, Sir, do you love the Queen enough to marry her?

DUDLEY

I do my Lady.

DUCHESS

You are aware, no doubt, that the Earl of Devon is also flitting about the Queen as a moth to flame?

DUDLEY

The stutterer? He who leans at will from Catholic toward Reformed for putrid politics and mere mortal gain? She does not attend that limp wick.

DUCHESS

Which you are not, of course. You are not, neither, Spain, nor France, nor Scotland, nor consistent Catholic yourself but, withal, you may be bendable to look almost as if you were.

[Pauses.]

You have heard of the royal wager with my husband?

DUDLEY

I have, my Lady. The Queen is much distressed by it.

DUCHESS

Distressed? I would have thought her pleased.

DUDLEY

She is not pleased by either end of the bargain.

DUCHESS

We could make the bargain more appealing to her.

If, in the course of Falstear's play, the Queen could actually find some choice with love and marriage combined....?

DUDLEY

I favor both.

DUCHESS

... and therefore could fall in love—through the play—with the idea of marriage, and then, in the flesh be encouraged to the same conclusion because the hero, with God's abundance of miracles, turns out to be a true prince.

DUDLEY

It has some superficial charm, my Lady, but it will be a cold day in Wales before I set a plot to bring the Queen to bed with some French or Spanish fop.

DUCHESS

My Lord Dudley, you might cure England's ills were a Warwick himself to act the hero in Falstear's play.

DUDLEY

I, a Warwick, would move her in the flesh. Homer to win her mind. Falstear's poetry to melt her last drop of mortal caution! Triple the persuasion to wed a crown!

[Pausing.]

I have the breeding. I could become king.

DUCHESS

There is that.

DUDLEY

You do control Falstear, then?

DUCHESS

We'll pay for the play.

DUDLEY

And could arrange for me to be hero?

DUCHESS

If you do but agree, we might resolve this tragic wager, and my husband's head, and the queen's heart, and make you a consort, all in one. England shall have a king, albeit a young one who will need close counselors. But if you are meet and fair with us, Dudley, Norfolk will back you.

DUDLEY

The Queen is dangerously caught 'tween Spain and France, Philip and Mary. I have, in certain moments, whispered caution. She sighs and says that such advice is not why I am at that moment in that place.

DUCHESS

Your queen is the unfortunate product of a faithless king and a brazen woman. But we, cousin, together, could shore her crown and restore the faith.

DUDLEY

As part of your sudden love for me you would expect this prince to bend her to the Roman way?

DUCHESS

'Reform' was easy, as you have found, to woo a queen; why not now the Roman faith to woo a kingdom?

Make no announcement, Robert, concerning your rebirth in the true faith 'til after promises are spoken; 'tis better a little devious when dealing with a woman.

DUDLEY

To the Queen I am Reformed not Catholic, confident, not afraid, friend, not counselor. Yet I do with some excitement consider a complete reversal of my cloth!

To be king.

DUCHESS

To be king.

DUDLEY

My Lady, I might do as you require.

DUCHESS

Done then!

[Enter DUKE of NORFOLK.]

NORFOLK

Ah! Dudley! Dudley?

[Turning to DUCHESS.]

My Lady?

DUCHESS

He agrees to woo the Queen with us close beside!

NORFOLK

And how, pray tell?

DUCHESS

As any man, but with the help of Falsteare and Homer! He agrees to sanctify her bed with a Catholic marriage!

NORFOLK

How then, Catholic?

DUCHESS

Why not? He is young, flexible, agrees to ride with us.

NORFOLK

Catholic? Can Catholics marry twice at once?

DUCHESS

Dudley?

NORFOLK

Aye.

DUCHESS

This is inconvenient.

Well then, make your choice, Sirrah. Clear the way.

Act IIScene Three

SETTING: a corridor near the kitchens of Hampton Court Palace

AT RISE: COURTENAY and HELEN come near to collision as they pass

HELEN

Pardon, sir, pardon. Sir? Is it Lord Devon?

COURTENAY

Aye, my Lady, and it is you I seek. I desire your c-c-counsel, truly.

HELEN

You, sir? Seek advice from me? You jest.

COURTENAY

I lo-lo--like a woman who likes me not.

HELEN

So is the way of the world.

COURTENAY

The one I lo-lo like is g-g-grand.

HELEN

Grand? How grand?

COURTENAY

Very grand.

HELEN

Oh. Oh.

COURTENAY

Sometimes it seems as if she a-a-attends me, asks questions, seeks counsel, wants to know why b-b-birds won't sing. Sometimes she knows me not.

HELEN

Edward, kings do not ever stutter.

[Enter Sir John Josh Falsteare.]

FALSTEARE

Falsteare the king maker!

HELEN

Sirrah?

FALSTEARE

Who would like to be king, here? See Sir John Josh! I have this day agreed to make Dudley king!

HELEN

Dudley?

FALSTEARE

Aye. Dudley. As noble a turncoat as ever there was. Norfolk will pay and I will anoint the youth with poetry and song. He is to become a hero in my play, irresistible to a certain grand lady.

HELEN

Dudley? Swagger Dudley? Dear lord. Is there none other...?

Oh!

COURTENAY

I would need only a small p-p-part in the play. I could come to her favor on the golden w-w-words of Sir John Josh F-F-Falsteare.

HELEN

This is a pickle. There is for our queen a choice: noble Spain, noble France, not so noble Warwick, or this good young man. On the surface there is nothing to recommend you, sir.

COURTENAY

A few strong w-w-words would suffice! She a-a-attends me already sometimes.

HELEN

Jack, he thinks. He feels. Mayhap he weeps. Put a scholar in bed with a queen and confound Europe!

COURTENAY

I do lo-lo-lo....like her!

FALSTEARE

Zounds! We shall have to teach not only how to do it, but how to say it. This is basic.

COURTENAY

I could sail to France and return shortly disguised as the Duke d'Alençon, a n-n-

FALSTEARE

...NOBLEman of some repute....

COURTENAY

....who wishes, as I have heard, to wed the Q-Q-

HELEN

Queen.

FALSTEARE

France is more nearly cousin than Spain...

COURTENAY

...and both are C-C-

HELEN AND FALSTEARE

Catholic.

COURTENAY

It is only words I lack!

FALSTEARE

Words are my bounty, sir, my river, my cascade! We shall drown her in watery words, silver seas of pounding words, lustrous waves of swelling words. After she is won, naturally, and in the fullness of time you shall unveil your true current and reveal all! She being English, and English women preferring as they do to make love in English—and to the same fellow continuously—she will hold to your craft, sir!

True France shall be rejected in the name of false France which being falsely accused shall thereafter become true England. This is the tradition when selecting a king.

Helen, let us find this man a skiff for France!

Act IIScene Four

SETTING: The gardens of Hampton Court Palace

AT RISE: FALSTEARE sleeps under a tree, papers covering him. The QUEEN, alone, approaches, unseen.

ELIZABETH

A mound of some new summer snow? I shall have to speak to the groundsmen!

FALSTEARE [Stumbling to his feet.]

Majesty!

ELIZABETH

Ah. Sir John. What progress then, in persuading me to marry?

FALSTEARE

Why, your Grace, I have found that Odysseus was a man 20 years away from his island home, who did nevertheless forever insist upon his return, always restless to regain his one true love!

ELIZABETH

Boring.

FALSTEARE

Nothing could deter him, your Grace.

ELIZABETH

Would you, too, have gone home then, poet, as he did?

FALSTEARE

Nay!

ELIZABETH

I thought not.

FALSTEARE

He left a good deal behind, begging your pardon, madam. I mean, when he turned home. A nice island, trees, Calypso, who was not a bad woman. Goddesses are usually a level above the rest. Just below queens.

ELIZABETH

Just.

FALSTEARE

Majesty, playmakers must always look through a thing to its pure bottom.

ELIZABETH

Look you then beneath Odysseus' idylls and find what Homer was honestly about. Find the code, Sir John, within Homer and take care to let us know not only of marriage but also of happiness!

FALSTEARE

Yes madam. Happiness.

Act IIScene Five

SETTING: A week later in an anteroom to the Queen's chambers

AT RISE: FALSTEARE and HELEN are in conversation.

HELEN

What sir? Gloomy?

FALSTEARE

I am destroyed.

HELEN

In a trice the man dissolves.

FALSTEARE

I am a clot.

HELEN

Yesterday, you said you were brilliant.

FALSTEARE

Yesterday's contagion has been replaced by today's brain. The Queen commands a play with happiness on one side and marriage on the other. Norfolk commands a play with Dudley on one side and Spain on the other. We, for our part, plot a play with Dudley, Norfolk, and sanity on one side and a stutterer on the other. How shall this be rehearsed? Our man has gone blithely to France while Dudley dawdles in Bedford.

Dudley is willing but unavailable, Courtenay is willing, able and more like to wed a book than a maid; France is to be fooled, the Queen is to be doubly fooled and Norfolk will thereby save his ancient head. The Queen will, persuaded by me, marry one of these two hapless boy kings and thank me for it while France and the loser... will have me drawn and quartered.

I think I had rather become a wool merchant.

HELEN

A married wool merchant?

FALSTEARE

The Queen seeks the virgin plateau. I must lead her by my pure example.

HELEN

It is not the Queen, Jack, commands you not to marry. You are a clot.

FALSTEARE

Ah.

HELEN

What, ah?

FALSTEARE

Ah.

HELEN

Sir?

FALSTEARE

Some things are fearful.

HELEN

And what is not?

FALSTEARE

Do you know what happens when a man turns a woman to a goddess?

HELEN

Well, sirrah, give over. Turn a woman to a woman, t'were sufficient.

FALSTEARE

Nay, I cannot see thee as plain maid. I am fond of thee, Helen, and in being fond honor thee, and in honoring thee worship thee, and in worshiping thee fear some darkness.

HELEN

What, that you shall lose me? Must you not have her first, to lose her?

FALSTEARE

History says to love a goddess is to destroy her.

HELEN

History! Take this hand, sir. Does a goddess have pulse? Cradle these fingers, sir. Does a goddess have pulse and heat? Touch this arm and lay direct connection, sir, to a

woman's heart, stirred to un-godlike mortal turmoil. 'Tis a grace, sir, that this worship of which you yourself take note is so like a maid's own that to hear his words is to hear her own mind, and to witness his longing were to witness her own heart. Is history's dead hand more lovely than this, more soft, more apt to lead thee home?

FALSTEARE

It is what they say. I do not ever ... want thee to disappear....

[Enter CECIL, passing.]

Lord Cecil, good morrow!

CECIL

Grave tidings, Falsteare, grave indeed. Love and death in profound confusion!

HELEN

This is a combination doesn't surprise me.

CECIL

I must immediate to the Queen. It is news shall shake the crown! Robert Lord Dudley, it seems, is, or was, already married!

HELEN

Ah!

FALSTEARE

The Queen will be sore destroyed.

CECIL

Worse. Worse. Lord Dudley's wife was found this morn at the foot of her stair in Bedford, her neck broke, her life gone!

HELEN [Falling to her knees.]

Oh!

FALSTEARE

God save her!

HELEN

Ah! God save the Queen! Dudley!

CECIL

Confusion abounds. Dudley weakened, Spain and France will press; Mary of Scotland will advance! I must to the queen!

Act IIIScene One

SETTING: Hampton Court palace. After midnight. A sliver moon is under dark clouds, partially visible.

AT RISE: The QUEEN alone in her bedroom.

ELIZABETH

There was a maid in Hatfield, once, before the riders came, used to lie with her head upon the silver flooded pillow and dream of Robert of Warwick, but not once of France nor Spain. Now my lords would have me not dream, but lie with Philip in order, as they say, to solidify him. Solidify, as if my body were some stony sea wall to harbor the fleet.

Queen, being wise, says to maid, you must not feel, and maid, being gentle, would agree but for the moon. It sings not and yet we sing. It whispers not and yet we whisper soft reply. It touches not, yet our arms spread out as if all heaven were in reach. This orb pretends 'tis day, not night, and we dream 'tis never day and always night!

Were I Norfolk and wise, I would banish the moon from every woman's room, especially a queen's. If I were him I'd say, Oh moon, Be gone! do not tempt the Spaniard's prize! We have queens here and property, not maids.

But Norfolk is not my friend and he will neither rid the moon from Hampton Court nor me from my anguish, but rather keep me like a tethered heifer awaiting at auction.

Robert could come tonight.

Oh! Moon be gone!

[A knock.]

Robert? Moon shine on!

[Door opens. Helen enters.]

HELEN

Your Majesty, Lord Cecil is here!

ELIZABETH

Cecil? Oh! Woe! This is news concerns a queen and not a maid!

Act IIIScene Two

SETTING: A week later. Arundel Castle, West Sussex.

AT RISE: The DUKE and DUCHESS of NORFOLK
in conversation

DUCHESS

If 'tis persuasion to act you need, my Lord, imagine that the Queen should suspect one of her advisors did harbor knowledge of Dudley's marriage and did not—as loyal advisors ought—tell her? What then of my Lord Norfolk's head?

NORFOLK

I had no sure foreknowledge! Some inkling, perhaps, is not knowledge. Knowledge is a deeper thing.

DUCHESS

Where once there was bluster, now there is craven reluctance.

NORFOLK

Your imagination might be more modest were it your head beneath the axe.

DUCHESS

Dudley exhibits a lack of tact and taste as is most certainly apt to stir the Queen's immediate wrath. To rally from such defeat he is thereafter likely in some intimate moment to gloriously recreate the truth to his own favor, laying blame anywhere but upon himself; most likely here. This is a blame could presage a charge of treason. Dispatch him.

NORFOLK

No maneuver? Merely dispatch him?

DUCHESS

Don't not, my Lord, remember how together we once were wont to glory in the sword? Was it not fine? Can't not recall?

[Silence.]

The deed were as well done by a lackey with courage as a lord without; the result as satisfactory.

NORFOLK

Glory was good. I do recall. Not good to rely on lackeys.

DUCHESS

T'were well, my Lord, to dispatch this bird before it squawks because if it squawks now t'will squawk in our direction.

NORFOLK

We are bound to him by your word.

DUCHESS

Only so long as he breathes.

Think on't. There is a sword fight in every Falsteare play. There could be some accident. After which, we shall seek out France or Spain or even, sweet, my lord, some noble English house.

NORFOLK

We pay the players.

DUCHESS

An accident in Warwick's house may perhaps, my Lord, lead to another, and from castle to castle such contagion might spread. Of old, noble, and responsible England, only Norfolks might remain.

Act IIIScene Three

SETTING: The Globe theater. Morning.

AT RISE: FALSTEARE is rehearsing DUDLEY.

DUDLEY

Sir John Josh Falsteare, I come to ask you to make me a hero, as you promised.

FALSTEARE

I promised? I agreed you should have a part in the play, as Lord Norfolk and you requested. I did not place you so quick upon the throne.

DUDLEY

It should not be a great challenge to make me a hero. I have the look.

FALSTEARE

And modesty, as well. Like Caesar, or do you prefer Brutus?

DUDLEY

Nay, neither Caesar nor Brutus. I like neither; they both die.

FALSTEARE

Can you play a man torn between the goddess and his wife?

DUDLEY

Ah! This part I know from crown to toes.

FALSTEARE

Try to use sentences which do not use the word 'crown.'

You are lost on an island in the arms of the goddess, Calypso. You do not want to go home all that much.

The Queen will approve if you play this part convincingly. She does not much want to be swayed to marriage.

DUDLEY

It sounds somewhat heroic.

FALSTEARE

You leave Calypso to go home at last to where marriage awaits. This shall be distressing to the Queen. Though Homer, the Archbishop and Norfolk would have you believe that returning to wedlock makes you the true hero. Play, I beseech you, Lord Robert, both lover and husband convincingly.

Surely, to be convincing, from the heart, in opposite roles, should not much distress a man of your experience.

DUDLEY

You judge me a fool, sir?

FALSTEARE

A fool? Oh, no, sir.

DUDLEY

A dolt then? A man cannot tell right from wrong? You have heard that my wife died, and you think me a coward, a demon, a man in love with the Queen for no reason save the glitter of the crown? You have thought as much, sir?

FALSTEARE

Not in such splendid detail.

DUDLEY

Is it a fool seeks to save England from becoming province to Spain or France? Have you thought on't sir? Shall we become the *muy piceño* Duchy of Angleterre? Should you like to write your plays in Spanish, Sir? *Si? No? Muchas gracias?* That is how foolish I am. I, the only man bold enough to save England for the English.

FALSTEARE

I see, sir.

DUDLEY

Seeing not, but thinking you see, see to this sir, that in your script you do assign to me the role of first soldier, and give that soldier such action as shall justify a woman's love. Women admire heroes sir, even if from time to time they are apt to kill a bit much. It is the way of the world sir, and I am used to it.

Act IIIScene Four

SETTING: That same evening. A masked ball for the Queen's birthday at Hampton Court Palace.

AT RISE: The Queen's maids are in conversation. DUCHESS is dancing with FERIA. ELIZABETH is dancing with CECIL. Music stops, ELIZABETH leaves off dancing, panting and gasping for breath.

BRIDGET

So many golden candles!

ANNE

Crimson gowns! Beecham at the bow and Somerset on the 'orn!

BRIDGET

Fine legs and black boots!

ANNE

Doublets of orange and yellow! Ribbons to win an eye that wanders. The Queen was dancing!

BRIDGET

There is fire beneath the ice!

[Music stops. ELIZABETH, enters, panting and gasping for breath. CECIL exits.]

ELIZABETH [Laughing.]

Well done!

[CECIL returns with COURTENAY who is masked but dressed as the DUKE D'ALENÇON.]

CECIL

Your Majesty. May I introduce his Grace Henri, the Duke d'Alençon?

ELIZABETH

Greetings, my good Lord. You are newly arrived I'm told.

[D'ALENÇON sweeps his hat off, kisses her hand. ELIZABETH looks suddenly at Helen and stares at her quizzically.]

Helen?

CECIL

Your Grace, the man apparently understands English a little, but speaks less.

ELIZABETH

Nor looks direct in the eye, neither. But his form is comely enough. How think you Helen? Well shaped, is he not? A good curve in the thigh? Will he run well?

HELEN

Will he run well?

[Turns direct to D'ALENÇON]

Could stumble in the hunt unless he looks up!

D'ALENÇON [Looking up sharply.]

Your M-M- Majesty!

ELIZABETH

Ah, his English improves.

My Lord Duke! Welcome.

[D'ALENÇON stays in a bow, hat in hand extended full to his side.]

Sir, you may arise.

D'ALENÇON

S'ank you, your Majestee.

ELIZABETH

S'ank you, my Lord Duke for coming. France does honor us. You have at home those accoutrements that make a good king, I'm told.

D'ALENÇON [Twirls his hat and bows again.]

S'ank you, your Majestee.

ELIZABETH

How did you leave France, my Lord, and your estates? All is well there, I hope.

D'ALENÇON

All is well *je crois*, s'ank you. I have 'orses....

ELIZABETH

'orses?

HELEN

Horses!

ELIZABETH

Ah! Horses! In England, we breed horses and queens, which is why you are here.

Can something be done about his English? Must the Queen practice love in splendid silence?

DUCHESS

Patience and training are all that is needed, I am sure, your Majesty.

HELEN

Why not send him... to Sir John Falsteare, let him take a part in the play and thus perfect his language?

ELIZABETH

Splendid, Sir, welcome to England where, in the game of kings, theatre and life are indistinguishable.

Voulez vous parler avec moi en Francais?

HELEN

Oh, oh!

ELIZABETH

Messieur?

[D'ALENÇON offers the Queen his arm and they exit in conversation.]

Supposeriez-vous, Monsieur, qu'un royaume serait mieux établi selon les préceptes de Cicéron, ou selon ceux de Machiavel?

D'ALENÇON

"Ni l'un, ni l'autre, Madame, Ciceron était un importun et Machiavel un scélérat."

HELEN

Oh! He knows French!

DUCHESS

I should hope so.

HELEN

How fortunate! I mean, that she should... at such depth!

[Exit DUCHESS. Music plays. Couples dance. When they stop, they unmask.]

[Enter DUDLEY and BRIDGET.]

DUDLEY

What is that?

BRIDGET

The French Duke, Sir.

DUDLEY

Bridget it is me, your old friend, Robert Dudley.

BRIDGET

Yes, sir.

[DUCHESS enters. BRIDGET exits.]

DUDLEY

Ah! Duchess! How then? All is well, I trust.

DUCHESS

Dudley. Sir, we are well, thank you. Your cause progresses, I hear. My, my, what a decisive young man you are. You will need counselors. Do you honestly think you can outmaneuver France?

DUDLEY

With your help my lady, as we

DUCHESS

We merely gossiped, my lord, idly. Surely you don't think I meant to suggest anything enduring between us?

[Exit DUDLEY and DUCHESS. Enter, ELIZABETH, d'ALENÇON still masked, and HELEN.]

ELIZABETH

He knows Cicero, Helen! He knows plants and tides and planets! Take him to John Falsteare, whom I think you know. Let him learn to speak and see if his English becomes as silver as his French!

[D'ALENÇON bows low again. Exit ELIZABETH]

HELEN

Lord Devon? Arise! Speak! How did you do that?

COURTENAY

Oh, that a man could always assume a different mask! Aiyee!

I, I, I ... do not s-s- stutter, my Lady, in French!

[Exit HELEN and COURTENAY. Enter ELIZABETH and
DUCHESS, in conversation.]

DUCHESS

Madam, you are wise to enjoy the company of this Frenchman, such a fine figure and France in the bargain! It is so uncommon for a noble woman to find a man with whom she can honestly converse.

ELIZABETH

Indeed.

DUCHESS

There is a certain loneliness a woman knows. Even, I suppose a Queen. Do allow the family Norfolk, your Grace, to assist you to find a worthy consort. You can depend upon us.

ELIZABETH

My Lady, your knowledge of men far surpasses ours....

We see you often of late in conversation with Lord Dudley. You knew, I suppose, of his marriage.

DUCHESS

Oh, Majesty, I supposed that everyone knew. Dreadful man. Surely your Majesty was close enough to suspect!

England can never be too careful of these Warwicks. We may be grateful that the glorious d'Alençon is so timely arrived!

ELIZABETH

A Queen needs friends like you, my Lady.

[Exit ELIZABETH and DUCHESS. Enter CANTERBURY, Duke of
NORFOLK, and Don Gómez Suárez de Figueroa FERIA, Ambassador of
King Philip II of Spain, already in conversation.]

FERIA

Pardon me Senores, but is it not possible you underestimate this woman? Have I not heard that on that day these few months ago when messengers rode to Hatfield to inform her that she had become Queen, they found her most religious? They did not discover her merely riding to the hunt. She was reading a Bible under a tree.

CANTERBURY

Many people read the Bible in our country, good sir. We are a religious people.

FERIA

... i dicen qu estaba leyendo la biblia en griego!....

NORFOLK

.... she was reading the Bible in Greek.

FERIA

Do many people in your country read the Bible in Greek?

NORFOLK

She was aware, surely, that messengers were coming. I doubt she has ever read the Bible past Adam's rib. She reads more by ribs and hips than Greek.

CANTERBURY

The matter is grave. I am informed by her messenger this very day that although she approves our gold and red vestments she will not agree, in her own chapel on Easter Sunday, to the elevation and adoration of the Host!

FERIA

Jesu Cristo!

CANTERBURY

Scotland's Mary is wed to the young dauphin in France who already styles himself King of England! It could be imagined that if Scottish Mary takes our throne we need search no more!

NORFOLK

There is danger in acting too sudden.

CANTERBURY

Danger? Heads, you used to say, should roll more easy! Flame and fury were your banner, m' Lord. Now you tiptoe like a bee keeper!

NORFOLK

When bees swarm 'tis well to be covered.

FERIA

... i tiene razon al estar preocupado por la rana!

NORFOLK

Good to be wary of the frog.

FERIA

Absolutemente! Pero I remind you, my Lords, of the extreme good will of His Majesty Philip II of Spain.

CANTERBURY

Don Gómez, I suppose, makes a better appeal than Ivan of Moscow.

FERIA

Moscow? England would weigh—on the same plate—against the master of an empire, *primero las ranas y despues los barbaros! Perdoneme. Estan locos.!*

[Exit FERIA.]

NORFOLK

First the frog, then Moscow. Thinks his empire is more than frogs or barbarians....

‘Tis excess to tease the Spaniard as if to throw stones at the hive. Go to him, your Grace, when you can. Assure him the Queen is yet grateful for Philip’s interest. It is even possible that if I should win the wager I myself will decide in Philip’s favor!

[Exit CANTEBURY. Enter DUCHESS, overhearing.]

DUCHESS

Soft, my lord! The Queen pursues the French bait! They talk. They laugh. She sends him to take part in Falsteare’s play to improve his English. He is Catholic. He is weaker than Spain. These things together advance the house of Norfolk.

[Exit DUCHESS and NORFOLK. Enter, ELIZABETH and CANTEBURY in conversation.]

ELIZABETH

We shall do mass on Easter Sunday at Whitehall, and you may follow the traditional rite. We will not disturb your consecration; we will not order away the wine or the bread. But if you elevate the cup, as my sister had you do to justify burning hundreds of good men and women of England during these unfortunate, bloody, and desperate five years, then sir, beware, this court will become colder to that cup than black ice to a witch's tit!

CANTERBURY

For 1500 years, your Grace, we have raised the Host in the cup!

ELIZABETH

For 1500 years, you have exalted not only Our Lord but also men’s power with the cup. There is heaven enough in your cup without it being raised.

CANTERBURY

I am 40 years a prelate, your Majesty, and there is more—and less—than mere men's power in the cup.

ELIZABETH

Why then, teach us! Preach it in your Easter homily at Whitehall and we will listen.

[ALL exit one way, except ELIZABETH who raises her mask and turns to exit opposite when DUDLEY appears, his mask also raised. They stand poised, at a distance. Slowly the queen allows her mask to fall.]

ELIZABETH

'Was she pretty, Robert? Did you ride together, as you are wont to do with queens? Did you dismount, betimes, and recover her lost shawl where it lay amongst the golden leaves of autumn, as you are wont to do with queens?

Oh Robert! It is said her death did little look an accident. You have, it seems, charmed your way to the Tower!

DUDLEY

The woman fell, your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

A woman died.

Have I not to wonder, Robert, dear Robert, were you married to a queen would she, too, one day fall down some Bedford stairs?

DUDLEY

This is not about women, great queen. Now is a moment to seize the tide and move toward glorious rule! Norfolk is uncertain in his love. Nay, worse. He is not to be trusted and should be moved aside. France is pressing and must be resisted....

[Queen turns.]

Think like a queen!

ELIZABETH

Dear Robert....

Lord Dudley, your place was more assured helping a queen think like a maid than a maid like queen. Once, you seemed able to make the whole river of English politics flow uphill toward higher ground. On that high plain you made flowers bloom and birds sing. Now it seems you are bound on a different course, on a common, ordinary and expedient flood

toward an ocean of ambition indiscriminate. You have washed out to sea, now, Lord Dudley, where you have nothing to teach a queen about how to think.

Act IIIScene Five

SETTING: Later that night. On a high road looking back toward Hampton Court Palace.

AT RISE: DUDLEY departing, alone, his cloak drawn close about to shield against the cold.

DUDLEY

Out to sea? There is some disease in her brain. The French fop is not what he seems. A street urchin could unravel that. The Norfolks neither. They bob and weave like hornets negotiating a summer breeze. Is there any of these, even one, not by deceit branded? False France? Nay. False Norfolks? Double nay. My queen of false love? The woman's mind dangles in dreamland, a territory cheek by jowl next to madness. Triple nay.

It shall be mete to observe ever so careful on Easter Sunday. If the Queen dishonor the Archbishop, wag her finger or threaten her kingdom with whim or female intemperance, proof of dementia so great it threatens the peace of our realm, I shall act. I shall appear broadminded, support Canterbury, gain Rome's affection and shore up my backside with random and sundry simple priests.

Then, under cover of the cloth's affection, the seducer from France shall be bent to English steel. He speaks exceeding smooth, woos more than talks sense and provokes already uncommon sighs and laughter when there is not the slightest cause. The poor child is befogged thereby. If the imposter appears, as tonight he has been bidden, upon Falsteare's stage his purpose to approach the Queen dangerous close, it shall be my honor to cut him to ribbons of French confetti.

[Listens to wind in the leaves.]

Now there was a whisper like Anne's last. Grieve not, my sweet, I'll soon send along a feignéd fop to keep you warm.

Rain, oh rain! On lofty ramparts there! Smooth them down; a Dudley is about to ascend! Madness leads to greatness, soon a queen to bend!

Act IVScene One

SETTING: Two weeks later. An ante-room in Hampton Court Palace.

AT RISE: HELEN and BRIDGET in conversation

HELEN

Bridget! How then! What news?

BRIDGET

I have only just returned my Lady from London, from Globe. The Frenchman and the hero of the play, one Odysseus, were practicing sword fighting. I myself was quite afeared for it looked as if they were truly bent on serious harm. Such a fire was in Odysseus' eye. I clutched my heart and stood spell-bound for terror; about to see a mortal or fair grievous wound! It would have been the end of Falsteare's play! All in all disgraced, perhaps 'The Wager,' too, undone.

HELEN

Where was Sir John during all this?

BRIDGET

Standing in the pit madam, calling to stop! They paid him no mind! I think the hero was possessed! He looked for all the world like Robert Lord Dudley!

HELEN

Oh, woe! Here is dangerous intersection!

BRIDGET

I thought the foreigner about to perish by Odysseus' sword when suddenly there was a loud cry of "Fire!" Smoke was visible through the portal opening behind to the alley! The one looked like Dudley leapt from the balcony, raced to the street and began issuing great commands. "Go here! Go there!" he cried, until men were running six ways from breakfast. It was glorious action, my lady.

HELEN

They put out the fire? How marvelous!

BRIDGET

Oh no, my Lady. It was grand to see a true captain, with shouting and running and mighty expostulating but it had no effect on the flames.

Then there was a sudden hush! The Frenchman was tip toeing upon a smoldering beam that stretched from the Globe toward the burning barn! We followed his eye and spied a babe, a seeming foundling stranded in a loft some distance above the street, near the flames! Smoke and fire were everywhere. Bystanders cried from the street below to urge the man forward and so he inched across! He was thirty footes up at least! Slow and sure he went, teetering now and then through billow and heat. A sigh escaped the crowd when he enfolded the terrified babe at last. Then, as before, he inched back to the Globe, child in arms!

HELEN

The Frenchman? Are you sure? The Duke d'Alençon?

BRIDGET

A hand of mercy quickly reached to grasp that noble arm and pulled the rescuer to safety! Cheers erupted from the street below! Our hero crept inside! We all did surge to rally to his sight and so crowded toward the theatre door. But he was gone! I saw him not again! Dudley also was disappeared!

HELEN

Ah, Jack! How now?! Your players at sword's points? One, a hero, less true than he appears, the other a villain, less noble than his peers!

Act IVScene Two

SETTING: Easter morning. Whitehall. The Queen's private chapel.

AT RISE: CECIL, HELEN, Edward COURTENAY are in their places. The Queen sits apart. DUDLEY sits where he can watch the queen. Archbishop CANTERBURY presides.

CANTERBURY

Laus tibi, Christe Amen.

[ELIZABETH nods to CANTERBURY who ascends the dais]

We are gathered today in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, on this blessed Sunday of the resurrection! No day so promising as this one! None so hopeful! On this day, in ritual and faith alone, man transcends death to the meaning of what he cannot know. To know what cannot be known. That is the paradox and blessing of this day.

HELEN [Whispering.]

S-s-see, how she shifts uncomfortable!

COURTENAY

Sh-sh- is not pleased.

CANTERBURY

Oh, how noble is the bended knee the man who marries his soul to God—and through Him—to his fellows!

It is union, reconciliation and understanding whereof we speak. All God's law points to marriage, which, when the trumpets of heaven sound, is the supreme form of God's love. We bow, therefore, to the cup because from this ritual marriage—as from all marriage—comes new life. We bow to union, reconciliation and understanding!

We raise the cup to marry us against loneliness and separation and to bring us fully—in marriage to the Lord—into the tapestry of life!

[Pauses. Takes a linen handkerchief from his vestment and slowly wipes his brow. Retreats from the dais, turns toward the altar, bows, stoops one knee to the stone floor, rises, picks up the cup and slowly raises it into the air.]

Hoc est enim corpus meum.

COURTENAY

The Qu-Qu- Queen is leaving!

I will to her!

[Queen departs, followed by CECIL. COURTENAY rushes toward the door. DUDLEY, too, exits quickly, but does not follow the Queen and turns to disappear.]

Act IVScene Three

SETTING: Whitehall, moments later.

AT RISE: COURTENAY and the QUEEN in conversation.

ELIZABETH

Dos't not think, Devon, that we need men—and queens—of courage these days? I will save my people from the fire which lurks behind Canterbury's fine words! How beauty is forced to kneel to the banal!

COURTENAY

The cup is not a signal for b-b-b burning now, unless the new queen makes it so.

ELIZABETH

It is a queen's requirement to keep her kingdom of one piece, Courtenay. We must act, sometimes, with dispatch, as—so I'm told—the Frenchman did. You have heard?

COURTENAY

Yes, madam. 'Tis true, he did e-ex-excel, but mayhap the true him were coward—sometimes the French are—and his courage only an accident, unplanned, p-p-perchance unrepeatable.

ELIZABETH

Sometimes a man, playing a part, can become what he seems.

COURTENAY

I k-k-know a man for whom there is no t-t-truth not itself a mask, and, no mask within which some speck of t-t-truth may not also lie. For this man, everything p-p-pointing as it does in two directions, s-s-s-speech is f-f-f-fraught with more d -da-danger than death.

ELIZABETH

Speech is overrated. Many men speak a great deal and matter little.

COURTENAY

If all the w-w-world and all its words were mine, I would speak.

Act IVScene Four

SETTING: Whitehall.

AT RISE: The QUEEN and COURTENAY in conversation.
FALSTEARE enters.

FALSTEARE

Majesty! The Code is deciphered!
[COURTENAY walks away.]

ELIZABETH

The Code?

FALSTEARE

Clear as if written by a school child! The Odyssey is a broadside for the cause of marriage and in direct opposition to true, natural and random love!

ELIZABETH

Marriage may not be such a disgrace.

FALSTEARE

Majesty, every event on the homeward voyage of the hero Odysseus is an event to cripple the image of pure love and build the duty of the husband to return to his tired wife! He lies with a goddess, beautiful, warm, brown-skinned in the sands of the Mediterranean and she promises to live with him forever! She, Calypso, is every lover's dream! Paradise forever! He forsakes her! And yet another goddess too! For what? To go home to his lands! The Odyssey is about securing property! It is about rejecting romance which endangers estate!

ELIZABETH

I should think everything endangers estate... most of all love....

FALSTEARE

Aphrodite loses all! She has lost the war in the Iliad. Athena the compromise goddess, androgynous, bland, gray-eyed hermaphrodite, has won the great battle and leads Odysseus home—away from passion!

ELIZABETH

And this is the well informed opinion of many scholars?

FALSTEARE

Nay, madam, it is the well informed opinion of Sir John Josh Falsteare.

ELIZABETH

Sometimes when the opinion is ten thousand to one, the one is wrong.

FALSTEARE

If it please my Lady, remember the Sirens! Or Scylla, or Charybdis: seduction, passion and obsession! The first will waylay a man, the second consume him and the third draw him down into the black waters of darkest destruction! Take it from a man who knows a good deal about passion, madam... from rumors and stories circulated by certain reliable sources. This is a poet's tale about the ruin of a husband who wandered, Madam.

ELIZABETH

Scylla was a monster.

FALSTEARE

A female monster.

ELIZABETH

Sirens were unnatural beasts.

FALSTEARE

Female unnatural beasts.

ELIZABETH

The Greeks did not like women.

FALSTEARE

Oh, no madam. They liked women. They liked them so much they were terrible afraid of them. Scylla had six heads so that she could nibble on men, piece by piece, a little bite here, another there. It is a nagging we feel, madam, we men. Sometimes lower class women can suck a man down. That's Charybdis.

ELIZABETH

All these beasts, Medusa, sphinxes, snakes and dragons were all passionate women?

FALSTEARE

It was a disguise, madam. Passion in its natural course produces curs. Property is threatened. You cannot, methinks, carry on Plantagenets or Yorks with curs.

ELIZABETH

Nor Tudors, neither. Not even you, historical man, can take away the blood that makes me queen. I can neither wash it out nor start anew as if Tudor were some property to choose.

Homer says marriage and queen are by history bound?

FALSTEARE

Like a mop to a handle.

ELIZABETH

The one no use without the other?

FALSTEARE

'Tis a mop from which all passion is squeezed. Tragical.

ELIZABETH

There could be passion with a false Frenchman.

FALSTEARE

False.

ELIZABETH

He discourses on Cicero and Virgil and could outwit the Pope. As a Frenchman he has shown his courage, as an Englishman he has shown his love.

I would keep the game alive awhile, poet. Let us do the play and thus deceive the Norfolks who seek to deceive us. As for Courtenay, we will await the act to infect the player. Mayhap the guise will transform a scholar to a prince!

Adieu poet. Finish the play.

Act IVScene Five

SETTING: a London hostelry

AT RISE: COURTENAY stands alone by the window

COURTENAY

'Tis, I believe, an ancient wisdom that a man should woo a woman with some false face. In this I have excelled. She loves me now as false France and spurns me as true England because France is so refined; I, English, a d-d-dolt and coward and I, French, a scholar and hero. Exactly as planned only I had not intended her to observe so well the dolt and coward. I have accomplished the incomparable feat of w-w-wooing the woman to love a false m-m-me who is less than me, but cannot show to her the better me for fear she like better the one who is less. Love is a p-p-pit.

Lovers usually speak some word before they part, as part we shall.

Oh, that I had the learning to know how or what to say.

Act VScene One

SETTING: Hampton Court Palace, a corridor on the way to the Queen's reception hall.

AT RISE: DUKE OF NORFOLK, Archbishop of CANTERBURY and Don Gómez Suárez de Figueroa FERIA are in conversation.

CANTERBURY

We are losing ground. Word that the Queen in her private chapel refuses to have the cup elevated has spread on a dark wind through all England and if the lady is not brought to a Catholic couch soon I fear the undermining of all that we hold most dear. The right marriage could revive her understanding. You have the letter from his Majesty King Philip?

FERIA

Nay, I delivered it already this morning. We should know her response just now. The letter is most eloquent. He never wrote better. Or, his ministers never wrote better.

[They enter the Queen's reception hall. The Queen is with CECIL.]

[Making a sweeping bow, hat to the floor]

Majesty!

ELIZABETH

Don Gómez, your sovereign has touched us with his tender solicitation. Does he write this poetry himself?

FERIA

He is most in love with your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

Many men are, my good man. It is a plague sweeping Europe.

FERIA

King Philip is a plague?

ELIZABETH

Nay! I did not say so! Love is a plague, my dear sir, do you not think so? Nevertheless, tell Philip that his letter has touched me.

FERIA

Will you accept his proposal?

ELIZABETH

Does he like books, Don Gómez? Conversation?

FERIA

Oh conversation, yes!

ELIZABETH

On second thought I have had enough of words. Is he dashing, Don Gómez, apt to storm a castle wall?

FERIA

Oh, no! Majesty! He is most sober.

ELIZABETH

How sober?

FERIA

Philip II, Majesty, is ruler of much of Europe and therefore a most responsible and solemn accountant for the welfare of many people; thoughtful, perspicacious, looking mostly to the future.

ELIZABETH

I prefer, I think, someone half between sober and dashing, someone between lofty-noble and mad with love. What think you of his Majesty in this light?

FERIA

Exactly.

ELIZABETH

How is my Lord Philip with burning planks, do you think?

FERIA

Madam, I fear I do not understand, but in case you are jesting with me I urge you great care. Lord Cecil, as you are her advisor, I urge England to consider the matter with some dispatch. Not only England would care to ally with Spain.

ELIZABETH

My, my. Philip loves me now but could upon necessity find passion elsewhere?

[FERIA bows.]

CANTERBURY

I would join, your Majesty in this noble consideration, though it may come by way of an uncertain messenger. You would secure your whole kingdom with marriage.

ELIZABETH

Your interest, my lord prelate, is a Catholic marriage. For you, Spain or France, or Hanover would do as well, would it not?

[Enter Duke of NORFOLK, COURTENAY, and HELEN.]

CANTERBURY

Of these, Spain would be estimable beyond contest, your majesty.

NORFOLK

Or, perhaps, France. 'Tis not long since Orleans and we were close under the same banner and we are recently informed of the great interest of the Duke d'Alençon.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Don Gómez, I appreciate your Catholic Majesty's kind and delicate attention and assure you that the Queen of England shall give every good construction to his proposal. Beg him to understand and be patient. Perhaps the Queen shall make up her mind this month.

CECIL

Your Majesty, sooner were also possible.

ELIZABETH

Ah, but there is a play this month, my lords, and we all have some stake in it, do we not, Lord Norfolk?

CECIL

Majesty, it has been a pressing time. You must consider Spain.

ELIZABETH

And I shall do so, as I have said. Thank you, Don Gómez, you may be excused. The Queen has instructions for these her English advisors.

[FERIA leaves with CANTERBURY.]

Norfolk, Sir, you have blustered, postured and pontificated to excess. Still, we have these last days harbored some concern that we have threatened a man's head and have not allowed him defense. Since in England it appears that theatre and government are so oft confused we ought to provide you a stage upon which you can sort them out.

Sir, attend to your interest: take some part in Falsteare's play. Most of the court is parading there, you may as well join them. If you play well, regardless of the outcome, you may expect some mercy from us. Your titles, perhaps, and estates I shall examine, but your life shall be your own. And, as the bargain becomes less harsh for you, so it shall be for us, as well. If, in the end it be decided that I shall marry, I shall, Sir, decide for myself.

Since the Duchess, as we have observed, is also apt at theatre, put her in the play as well. We like to know where you all are. Oh, be not so offended! She may find the transition from politics to Falsteare's alleys quite smooth. Instruct the poet to put women's voices behind the curtain. Helen, while we are about it, you, too, talk much of marriage and shall assist in Homer's case. Here, in one place, in one drama, shall we therefore all find resolution.

ELIZABETH

Now you may all be excused!

[ALL exit except COURTENAY.]

COURTENAY

I c-c-cannot be excused, M-M-Majesty.

'Tis not sufficient, my lady, to stop there, to rest the future of our English realm upon playacting. Some higher p-p-possibility, alone, is worthy of this queen. Let the play go on indeed, but never doubt, my Lady, that this Queen is beyond play; this queen is above Catholic or Reformed, France or Spain. This queen who's intelligence is the brightest flame in all of Europe, shall be more than a game for men or quarry in the hunt. My Lady, do not decide this wager as a child should, nor as a broker in a game of petty estates, but as one who shall lead England and shall lead as none before has ever led. Stand alone, if you choose, with consort or on your own, but stand you shall.

Eliza...b-beth.

ELIZABETH

My Lord.

Act VScene Two

SETTING: a London hostelry

AT RISE: DUKE and DUCHESS of NORFOLK are alone in a room. NORFOLK is sharpening his sword.

DUCHESS

So, Sir, you shall not lose your head.

NORFOLK

I am a thousand men! An army. Indomitable.

DUCHESS

Who must act, with his wife, in a common play.

NORFOLK

Ha. Ha! One-hundred-two suitors and twelve serving maids all die. Mayhem. Pure, bloody and beautiful mayhem. Thank you, Falstear. Dudley, as Odysseus, skewers them all, during which I, as Antonius, skewer him. He cuts down one hundred fourteen in fiction while I cut down one, in fact. Feigning mortal wound, I fall myself. When they roll bodies off stage, one will not roll. Ha. His.

DUCHESS

Your legs, my lord, are not strong.

NORFOLK

Ha! There is something about murdering one's wife that jellies a man. Dudley is no longer firm. He rises, as he claims, with the cuckoo, comes to court swelling his chest dreaming a kingdom but by vespers thins as butter in the sun and mopes about, rancid. In Falstear's play he congeals enough to woo Penelope as if she were his intended wife Elizabeth and then melts again, mourning lost Calypso as if she were his dead Anne. Flip flap. Wish wash. The man's brain dissolves from some agony so severe as to detach heart from mind and eyes from sword. Norfolk's old legs are enough to brace tight the steel slides into a wild man.

DUCHESS

Sweet, my lord, your mind rallies and how a woman loves to see her old soldier return! But sir, you wobble when you walk! Your thin pins shall ever lag behind your mind! Nay! The Queen puts a noble woman in her common play. How shall such ridicule be rewarded? T'is my honor, sir, to turn this charade to something real!

NORFOLK

Legs are nothing. Wobble into battle again, oh my pins, and die—if I must—at last returned to action!

DUCHESS

Oh, my lord, how shall I a queen become without a king? Nay! Force Dudley only to the curtain behind which I—as Penelope disguised—shall await. When his bulging breadth appears pressed to the cloth, I will—from behind—insert the knife sore beneath the doublet!

NORFOLK

Will not all the world know who is behind the curtain?

DUCHESS

My Lord, 'tis darker for me behind than you in front! During the melee let Dudley rush about and swagger and swing and roar. Let bodies fall hither and thither; none will know who dies real and who false until I have long left my place. Later will I confess to have sought succor for the wounded and have been far absent when death occurred. Mayhap 'twill look as if D'Alençon himself has done the deed! In this way we might our case by two steps at once advance!

NORFOLK

D'ost not, my Lady, quail at such bold plunging of the knife!?

DUCHESS

Am I not Norfolk? Is our son not Norfolk? Has England not desperate need for Norfolks? Would'st not, my lord, savor the sweet and gentle flood upon others' tongues of their kind regard for these their Norfolk majesties? Is not 'majesty', sweet estate, my Lord, sufficient to inspire one thin blade through the cloth?

Act VScene Three

SETTING: Evening. The Globe Theatre.

AT RISE: BRIDGET and ANNE are in the pit, where they see the stage and the Queen's box.

BRIDGET

Didn't hear Helen speaking Calypso?

ANNE

Glorious love!

BRIDGET

Eternal life, heart to heart, skin to skin, union!

ANNE

Jack Falsteare has her if he wants her!

BRIDGET

Silken sheets, moonlit skies, waves soft along the shore until the end of time! She spoke it as if her whole being were captured thereby!

ANNE

And so the tale will end exact as the bard does wish! Infused with the love of Calypso, she will be his, with or without marriage!

BRIDGET

And the Queen? How moved her face? Did you see her eyes?

ANNE

Calypso's soft words flushed her warm at first and I thought she would surely decide the wager against marriage and for pure, natural and random love, but then when Telemachus strode upon the scene and played Odysseus' glorious son she followed his every move as a cat watches a bird!

BRIDGET

Telemachus bends both heart and politics to his conceit and thereto adds bravery plus his own beauteous form!

ANNE

And the Duchess! What is she scheming about? There's a snail in the soup!

BRIDGET

Dudley is furious heroic!

ANNE

'ush! The last act is about to begin!

COURTENAY

[Approaching the Queen.]

You s-s-summoned me madam?

ELIZABETH [In her box with CECIL.
FALSTEARE behind.]

Rise to your role, sir, as you yourself have declared we should. You are all that is required, whether on or off the stage, to play the role of prince.

[COURTENAY exits.]

[Turning to FALSTEARE]

This is the final act, Sir?

FALSTEARE

Madam, you shall now hear the voices of passion—Calypso—and property—Penelope—pertinently posed, contraposed, and relatively re-contraposed! You will see Dudley as Odysseus, the Frenchman as Telemachus and merciless, glorious, action!

[Trumpet sounds.]

ODYSSEUS

Here is Odysseus, your king, returned at last!

TELEMACHUS

Sir, I am Telemachus, your son from the past!

ODYSSEUS

This is my land?

TELEMACHUS

Where you stand.

ODYSSEUS

I see nobles posing as kings,

*Crafty, wily, stealing things,
Can you kill, son, same as you woo?
[Silence.]
Dying is an art men learn to do.*

TELEMACHUS

*Sir, though life be short hope is not, by
Protecting the Queen l-l-l like is sought.*

CALYPSO [HELEN behind the curtain.]

*Return to me, hero, I am your fate
Love alone turns a poor man great.*

ODYSSEUS

Who's that?

TELEMACHUS

Some serving maid, hidden in there.

ODYSSEUS

Sounded like Calypso. ... fairest of the fair.

TELEMACHUS

Calypso? She of the shining hair and well turned hip?

ODYSSEUS

*Long nights she kept me from my ship. Someone should kill her, too. It's
what heroes do.*

CALYPSO [Crooning]

Forget Penelope. Remember warm and blissful sands.

ODYSSEUS

Shining legs, glowing hair, danger there.

PENELOPE [DUCHESS, behind the
curtain.]

Odysseus, King! Reclaim thy queen, regain thy mesne!

ODYSSEUS

Who was that?

TELEMACHUS

Your wife.

ODYSSEUS

She's still here?

TELEMACHUS

Twenty years. Very loyal.

PENELOPE [Pleading.]

By wives alone estate is bought.

CALYPSO

By goddess alone love is found.

ODYSSEUS

That's that servant girl playing the goddess again?

TELEMACHUS

Aye, father. Goddesses sleep here and there and are bad for marriage, as a rule.

ODYSSEUS

My son, for the sake of the wives we shall kill those girls too. It gets easier the more you do.

ELIZABETH

He's going to kill 102 suitors and now the serving maids. Sirrah,

[turning to FALSTEARE]

such brutality forces a decision 'gainst Odysseus and therefore against marriage. We do not like this direction.

FALSTEARE

Madam, methought you instructed....

ELIZABETH

Perhaps we have changed our mind. You methought more than entitled!

ODYSSEUS

Suitor's die! Paint the wall with crimson suitor's blood.

England's house no passion needs so much as king!

CECIL [To Falsteare.]
England, sir?

FALSTEARE
Nay, my Lord! Not my words!

ELIZABETH
Cecil, he claims our throne!

CECIL
He is possessed!

ANTONIOUS [NORFOLK rushing on
stage, sword in hand.]
*Odysseus you crafty beggar, you more resemble a dog's scrotum than
returnéd hero. By the sword's swift edge shall you be to estate so mean
reduced not even worms were by your wiles seduced!*

[ODYSSEUS backs up taunting then stumbles backward. Players halt
and look in amazement at each other.]

BRIDGET
Oh! Oh! He's lost his balance!

FALSTEARE
Oh, yes.

[TELEMACHUS leaps to interpose between ODYSSEUS and
ANTONIOUS.]

BRIDGET
Ah! Beauteous Telemachus intervenes!
[ODYSSEUS stumbles to his feet]

ODYSSEUS [Advancing.]
Elizabeth! England's house no passion needs so much as king!
[TELEMACHUS drifts backward toward curtain.]

CECIL
Treason! I will to the pit madam, and stop this thing!

ELIZABETH
Hurry! Sir, hurry! There is murder in the air!
[CECIL exits.]

Haste man!

[ANTONIOUS maneuvers, drawing ODYSSEUS toward the curtain.]

ANTONIOUS [To TELEMACHUS]

Away, varlet!

[TELEMACHUS backs into the curtain.]

No, sir!

COURTENAY

Ahh!

[Falls.]

ODYSSEUS [His back to COURTENAY.]

Villainous, lecherous, treacherous maids!

[Pierces the curtain wildly in direction of HELEN.]

HELEN [Behind curtain.]

Oh! Ohh!

NORFOLK

No-o-o!

[ODYSSEUS swings at ANTONIOUS. Turns about to face TELEMACHUS. Finds him down.]

Act VScene Four

SETTING: The Globe stage.

AT RISE: FALSTEARE sits upon the floor holding HELEN in his arms.

FALSTEARE

What fate is this robs a man of words, leaves him mute when for once he would speak simple? You were beautiful, Helen, to me. More so than Helen of old.

HELEN [Opening her eyes.]

I would have been that Helen if I could.

FALSTEARE

Nay! I did see you thus, because your present self did outshine the ancient one!

HELEN

We could have...could have...I would have settled for a wool merchant.

FALSTEARE

Abide, Helen, abide with me.

HELEN

I would Jack, you know I would, were I able.

[Closes her eyes then opens again.]

I must leave now Jack, 'tis time we part All is pain save the heart.

[Closes her eyes.]

FALSTEARE

Oh!

Burn, destroy, revile this play! Fire

This script and from this date no clue, nor whisper

Nor word of it. None again shall e'er hear of Falsteare's

Odyssey, nor e'er more Calypso rememberéd be;

Here lies my once and final goddess!

Act VScene Five

SETTING: Whitehall Palace, half an hour later.

AT RISE: Edward COURTENAY lies pale in bed, propped up on cushions, eyes closed. BRIDGET stands near, downcast. Enter ELIZABETH with CECIL.

CECIL

Robert Lord Dudley and the Norfolks have been taken straightway to the Tower, your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

Helen?

CECIL

She lay awhile, your Grace, in Jack Falstear's arms. He is there still, rocking her and will not allow any person to remove him.

ELIZABETH

And ... Lord Devon?

CECIL

He lingers, madam.

ELIZABETH

May I... speak with him?

CECIL

Yes, madam.

[Queen moves to COURTENAY'S side and kneels.]

ELIZABETH

Oh! Are you run completely through? Is it frightful. Sir?

[Silence.] [Turning to CECIL.]

Where is Canterbury?

CECIL

In Lambeth by now I should think.

ELIZABETH

Fetch him.

CECIL

Madam, a priest from Westminster were quicker. This man may not last until the cuckoo announces dawn.

ELIZABETH

Fetch him. Before the cuckoo cries!

[Exit CECIL and BRIDGET.]

[To COURTENAY.]

Now, sir, speak to me. Please. Are you suffering so great you cannot speak?

COURTENAY

Aye, Madam, it is suffering, but the worst wound is not by steel inflicted. This pain ushers from some source more cruel. I am possessed madam by l-l-l....

ELIZABETH

Say it then.

COURTENAY

L-L-L....

ELIZABETH

Open your eyes, sir, and look at me.

[COURTENAY opens his eyes.]

Say it, please, my Lord.

COURTENAY

L-L-.

ELIZABETH

Put the word in a sentence, sir. This is a way that princes do and it makes a woman happy.

COURTENAY [Sighs.]

Th-th-that you are queen of my England was never so much as that you are queen of my whole soul. Throat, mind, eyes, arms and legs are by you commanded as if I were some village puppet. When near your shining glance, I see more clear, and when you depart it is as if you order my arms and legs to ache. When we converse, my brain clears and when you smile my heart dances as if I am the galliard enshrined. If this be nothing, if these be words only, if there be no place, no rock, no sea which by these thoughts may be

concretely seen nor touched, then this be a form of madness and must by the name of ... love be called.

ELIZABETH

Oh yes! And for whom? Say, sir, for whom!

COURTENAY

Edward I-loves Elizabeth. He always has. Since 'er I glimpsed the magic of your mind and the sweetness of your tender care for such a one as me.

ELIZABETH

T'is a tenderness I did with such joy impart for there was in all England one man only knew me as maid and not as queen and in your gaze, Edward, I knew this surely. For this authentic, sweet and gentle heart I did always love you too, my Lord.

[Enter CECIL and BRIDGET.]

Tell Canterbury he may raise his chalice to the moon!

CECIL

At such a passing no mass is necessary, your Grace.

ELIZABETH

Nay! More than this is now required! This is a prince who brings queen and maid to unexpected and gentle union.

BRIDGET

Oh. Oh. Oh, yes!

ELIZABETH

For a wedding, Cecil. For a royal wedding!

CECIL

Madam, 'twere not entirely seemly....

ELIZABETH

I feel as if I were a cathedral enshrined in holy fire.

[Cuckoo calls.]

COURTENAY

My Lady; around your shoulders a shining and wondrous dawn appears, could be the sun!

ELIZABETH

Sir, the fire you see is ours alone. The sun has no radiance compares to this! 'Tis not the sun!

[Cuckoo calls twice.]

COURTENAY

Canterbury should make haste, I think.

ELIZABETH

Oh! He comes. I know he does!

COURTENAY

I see something like stars.

ELIZABETH

Yes! 'Tis night abides us still!

BRIDGET

Madam, a rider approaches!

[COURTENAY is still.]

[Three times a cuckoo calls.]

CECIL

Open the doors, Bridget. It is Canterbury.

[Stepping away.]

Edward, Lord Devon, in her heart as husband shall forever remembered be. I shall tell the world, of course, but courtiers and all the rest will surely suppress the news, ever wishing France or Spain to choose. Still, Anne and Bridget and every woman of low estate shall from kitchen to kitchen pass this tale....

ELIZABETH [the old Elizabeth back at the table
writing in her journal]

... and from hearth to hearth report shall spread until in such future age as women themselves select, they shall, as one, proclaim it loud and history correct. Until that day, let English children their mothers' knees surround and—remembering then this shining hour—softly sing, Elizabeth the maid for one moment had her king!

Finis.