



# Mary, Queen of Scots

*Eric Melvin*

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[This story is written for 10 - 14 year olds but will also be of interest to those keen to learn more about Mary. On the night of February 7th 1587, Mary, Queen of Scots prepared for her execution at Fotheringhay Castle. What were the thoughts of the captive Queen as her last hours slipped by? Mary was born in Linlithgow Palace on December 8th 1542. As told in the story, Mary was only six days old when her father James V died. Mary was crowned as Queen of Scots at Stirling Castle in September 1543. Her uncle, Henry VIII of England wanted the infant Mary to marry his son Edward. The Scots though refused this proposed marriage. An English army invaded Scotland. Edinburgh was captured in 1544 and burnt to the ground. In August 1548, Mary was sent to France for her safety. There she was brought up in the French Court of Henri II. Mary married Francois, the Dauphin of France on Sunday 24th April 1558 in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Mary was 15, Francois was only 14. In July 1559 her father-in-law, Henri II died. Mary found herself Queen of France as well as Queen of Scots. However her sickly husband died in December the following year. News of her mother's death in 1560 prompted her decision to return to Scotland where she arrived on 19th August 1561. She was just 19 years of age. For the first 4 years of her reign, Mary ruled the turbulent Scotland well. However Scotland needed an heir. Who should she marry? Mary made one of several mistakes by marrying her cousin, Henry, Lord Darnley in July 1565. She quickly though discovered that this marriage was a disaster. Darnley was an arrogant, jealous and at times, violent young man. Mary had angered many of her Scottish nobles who resented this young upstart. Mary lacked strong advisers by her side whom she could rely on. Instead she drew ever closer to a small group of friends and courtiers including her Italian secretary, David Rizzio. This close friendship provoked the rage of her husband, Henry Darnley. He plotted the murder of the Queen's secretary. In March 1566 Rizzio was brutally stabbed to death in front of Mary by a group of Darnley's friends. She retreated to the safety of Edinburgh Castle to await the birth of her child. Her son James was born in June 1566. In March 1603, James succeeded his cousin Queen Elizabeth and was crowned King of the new United Kingdom of England and Scotland. On the night of the 10th February 1567 Darnley was assassinated in Edinburgh. Historians continue to argue over Mary's involvement in her husband's murder. Mary did not help her cause by marrying the Earl of Bothwell, the man many believed to have been one of Darnley's murderers, just 3 months after his death. The country was outraged and she and Bothwell were confronted at Carberry just outside Edinburgh, by a coalition of her nobles on 15th June 1567. Bothwell fled while Mary surrendered herself to her nobles. She was brought back to Edinburgh in disgrace. She was imprisoned in Loch Leven Castle and forced to abdicate. She daringly escaped from the castle on 2nd May 1568. Mary took the fateful decision to throw herself on the mercy of the English Queen. For the next nineteen years, Mary was effectively held as a prisoner by her royal cousin. Mary was held in confinement in a succession of castles in the Midlands of England. She never met Elizabeth. Mary was implicated in several Catholic plots to overthrow Elizabeth. Almost certainly any evidence produced was forged. After a brief trial Mary was found guilty of treason. Pressed by her advisers, Elizabeth signed Mary's death warrant. Mary was executed at Fotheringay Castle in Northamptonshire on 8th February 1587. Her son James had the body of "his dearest mother" moved from Peterborough Cathedral to Westminster Abbey in 1612. Arguments continue to this day about Mary - martyred heroine or wicked murderess? Our story summarises the life of one of the most remarkable characters in history.

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