

Mary's Hand

Introduction

Eclipsed by her younger half-sister, Elizabeth, Mary Tudor lies 'in the shadow hand of Time' - confused with Mary Queen of Scots, vilified as 'Bloody Mary' or forgotten. Hailed at her funeral as 'a King's daughter' (first child of Henry VIII) and 'King also' (first Queen of England to rule in her own right) the hand that Fortune dealt her was a tricky one. She lies beneath Elizabeth in Westminster Abbey, awaiting resurrection in the afterlife and in the popular imagination.

At the top of the show Mary invites the audience to help tell her story in a game of cards. The cards (Court Cards - Royals only!) represent the key players in her life. For the show to begin the audience must choose a card. The choice of that and subsequent cards determines the order in which she will sing her story. Consequently, the libretto is non-linear.

So that music and narrative may flow with the audience interaction, there are two 'arcs': Hearts & Spades (plus Jack of Clubs) and Diamonds. In addition there are five 'stand-alone' cards: King of Clubs, Queen of Clubs, Ace of Hearts, Joker and Jack of Hearts.

The Jack of Hearts is announced in the Prologue as the final card to be played and segues into the Epilogue.

The Cards

King of Hearts	Henry VIII, Mary's father, King of England. His bright aspect.
Queen of Hearts	Catherine of Aragon, Mary's mother. First wife of Henry VIII, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella. She was first married to Henry's older brother Arthur who died after five months. Henry uses this to petition the Pope for a divorce, setting in motion the English Reformation.
Jack of Hearts	Mary's phantom baby.
King of Spades	Henry VIII, her father, in his dark aspect.
Queen of Spades	Anne Boleyn, Mary's stepmother. Henry's second wife, the mother of Elizabeth. Accused of serial adultery she is beheaded in the Tower.
Jack of Spades	Thomas Cranmer, first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury. Built the case for the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine, setting in motion the English Reformation. Later burned at the stake by Mary.
King of Diamonds	Philip II of Spain, Mary's husband. Son of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Mary's first cousin. Co-reigns with Mary as King of England. In the war with France he loses the Port of Calais.
Queen of Diamonds	Susan Clarencius, lifelong friend and chief of Mary's Ladies.
Jack of Diamonds	The Port of Calais, England's last remaining possession in France.
King of Clubs	Edward VI, Mary's Protestant younger half-brother. On Henry's death he becomes King at the age of 9 and the country is governed by a Regency Council. At the age of 15 he contracts a fatal illness. To stop Mary coming to the throne and returning the country to Catholicism he names his Protestant cousin Lady Jane Grey his heir. Mary deposes Jane and she is later executed.
Queen of Clubs	Elizabeth, Mary's Protestant half-sister. Daughter of Anne Boleyn. Succeeds Mary, becoming Elizabeth I. Popularly celebrated as <i>Gloriana</i> .
Jack of Clubs	Thomas Cromwell. Henry's Chief Minister, instigator of the English Reformation. Engineers the execution of his former ally Anne Boleyn. Coerces Mary into accepting her father as Head of the Church of England and giving up her claim to the throne.

Prologue

I am the one you do not like,
first Queen Regnant.
Bloody Mary!
Two hundred and eighty heretics
burned at the stake.
The facts are non negotiable,
though they be interpreted
by those who do present them.

For I am history's creature,
can no longer speak for myself.
Documents, letters, accounts
tell my outward circumstance.
But my mind is a locked room.
Enter with imagination
if you wish to talk with the dead.

I wager you think me a Loser,
no match for sister Elizabeth.
Her name resounds - a deafening
Gloriana!
Mine is hard to hear,
a litany obscure,
for here I sit
still as the grave
in the shadow hand of Time.

Enter with imagination
if you wish to talk with the dead!

I like a game of dice,
cards are a passion.
I'll play the hand
that Fortune dealt
to tell my story.

No lower orders here,
no 2s or 3s
or overreaching 10s.
Royals only!

Kings, Queens, Jacks

here are placed
according to their suit.
Hearts for those
bound to me in Love.

Diamonds they who
value their estate.

Clubs for those
whose intellect and mind
defines them.

Spades for those
who speak to me of Death.

A single Ace,
music to my soul.

One Joker
who's sure to strike a chord.

One card I shall not play
until the spirit bids me
and that you shall discover.

We are players in a troublesome time,
schism and confusion plague the nation.
When liars and inventors talk of truth
how shall we know the fact from the fiction?

My story waits impatient,
it's your call!
Who shall be my King of Hearts?
My Queen? My Jack?
Who my King of Diamonds?
My Queen of Spades?

Choose a card so we may begin!
Act without reserve!
A card! A card!
Come, choose a card!

Arc: Hearts & Spades, Jack of Clubs

I

King of Hearts

My father,
Henry, King of England,
the Eighth of that name,
loves music and dancing,
a naughty prank,
and oh how he can joust!
Jouster, Japester, Jove
was never so merry!
A ring on every finger
sometimes two,
no one kicks higher,
no one laughs louder.
I have his laugh,
I have his kick.

2

Queen of Hearts

My mother,
Catherine of Aragon,
daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella,
Los Reyes Catolicos.
Proud,
yet humble in devotion
to her Faith and to her King.

When I was born,
seventh child,
only survivor,
hope is resurrected.

Princess Mary!
My mother rides in the zenith
of his favour.

I am schooled in queenly virtue.
He does not protest,
extolls my learning,
sends me to Ludlow

to learn governance.
But governance was never his intent.
That's for a son.

I bleed, woman's blood,
a knife in the gut,
a head full of woe. A cross
I must endure my mother says.
In her voice I hear
the sighing of the willow.

3

Queen of Spades

There is a rose
pink and fulsome as the flesh
of maidens.
It bears the name of one
whose life was death to me
Anne Boleyn!

Cultivated in the Court of France,
she joined my mother's Ladies,
let fall a petal in my father's lap
and set the bee a buzzing.

My father cannot sleep.
One hand on the bible,
the other on his codpiece
My mother was his brother's wife.
Unholy matrimony! unlawful!
He must be freed!

A scouring wind,
my mother blows them out of court,
the double-dealing pack.
Women of all stations roar
Catherine! She is his lawful wife!

The Queen of Spades,
wears my mother's jewels,
fracks the King body and soul.
She so perverts him

Red turns to Black.

4

King of Spades

His loyal Queen
is out of the game.
The pomegranate
wormwood in his mouth,
her Spanish tongue
the rattle of dry leaves.

5

Jack of Spades

Archbishop Cranmer! Heretic Knave!
annuls a marriage of twenty years,
splits the nation,
sends the souls of Englishmen
hissing to Hell! Oh!
But you will burn for this!

The loving girl, the apple of her father's eye,
is gone
and Mary so contrary to her King,
the nettle in his patch,
is come.

So father, call me what you will,
I am a Princess of the Blood!
Never shall I bow to that woman!

The birds of summer are flown,
the calls of goose and redwing
settle on the air,
the crow cries winter.

In murky Fenland
my mother lies.
Five years I have not seen her face.
She tells the days of Christmas,
then to God commends herself at last.
Oh mother!
Did you see the Spanish sun once more?

The snows of the Sierra?
The sharpness of the moon?

Oh you who have a mother lost
and did not hold a hand in parting
you will know my madness!

Winter streaks the sky
pomegranate.
I swallow Death.

In a smouching lavolta,
my father exalts that woman.
The rat in the garden feasts.

6

Jack of Clubs

Thomas Cromwell,
Good Master Secretary.

He loves me not
neither does he hate me.
He is a politician.
Expedient.
I serve his purpose
as he serves mine.
For now.

Words of culpable unseemliness
he notes,
Clubs her in crafty ploy
and she is tumbled.
The promise of her womb
stained,
Anne Boleyn,
ragged rose,
returns to earth.
No one speaks her name.

Waspish Cromwell
turns on me now.
Ah, but his sting is fearful!
With one stroke of the pen

Mother, Faith, Crown
I scratch away.
There is no spark in Mary.

End arc

segue:
These sad events are History to you.
But there's a common woe that we all share,
a force of nature we're all subject to:

The Joker

The Jester in the pack,
the English weather!

But it's no joke.
Year upon year
no summer,
mighty floods and rain.
Oh merciful heavens abate!

The marigold, the lily and the rose,
the scarlet poppy, lupin, gentle fern,
the hollyhock and sweet carnation
drowned!

The gooseberry, the plum,
soft apricot and yellow quince,
the fiery radish and the lusty bean
drowned!

The butterfly, the demoiselle
fold their wing,
the honey bee is silent.
Beer and wine in the cellar,
man and beast in the field
all drowned!
A stormy crossing,
the Spanish fleet appears.
My husband to be,
a fair white feather in his cap,
arrives in rain torrential,
quite drowned!

Oh mercy!
Will it never cease?
Water in my wine!
Merciful heavens, abate!

Arc: Diamonds

I

King of Diamonds

My Diamond King
Philip of Spain,
the Second of that name.

Once I was betrothed to his father,
my cousin the Emperor,
a man in his twenties. I was six.
A husband's a thing for the good of the realm.

A husband..
It was never my inclination.
My Council presses me -
marry an Englishman!
But there's none to my liking.
My Ladies, as ever, tell me their mind.

2

Queen of Diamonds

My Ladies!
Dowdy old women you think? Let me correct you!
Lovely Jane Dormer, her beauty set in verse,
pretty Anne Bacon, Frances Neville -
her comeliness provokes lewd men!
And Queen amongst them,
loyal and true,
Susan Clarencius!

My Diamond Ladies
favour gowns in the French style,
share the secrets of women and men,
the thrills and spills of the marriage bed
in voluptuous polyphony!

Oh Lord! Since the day I was born
I never took a fancy to anyone.

Now, in grievous torment,
I have Susan about me.
I cannot sleep,
the matter of a husband
eats my soul.
Veni, creator spiritus,
Lord of Miracles instruct my mind!
For my fear is great
and my heart trembles.
Inspire me, oh Counsellor!

Ah, wisdom shines!
My mind is at peace.
I shall love him perfectly,
Philip!
God grant me grace to please him.

A tree in leaf, his crown
shakes the heavens.
In height he does not far exceed myself
but towers in charm, a noble spruce,
on comely legs.

I am skilled in Latin,
play lute and spinet
singularly well,
but in wooing matters
I am a maid,
an old one.
My lips are tight,
my fine complexion's
furrowed.

Oh heavens!
Eleven years between us!
Ladies, who amongst you
has known a younger man
and not felt doubt?

We pledge our troth in diamonds,
his a lesser one. What do I care?

Philip and Mary
on the coins of the realm,
King and Queen of England,
France, Ireland, Naples,
Jerusalem.
Princes of Sicily and Spain,
Archdukes of Austria,
Dukes of Milan, Burgundy, Brabant,
Counts of Habsburg, Flanders and Tyrol!

Beloved subjects,
barbarians in the sight of Europe,
we shall raise you!
I know you hate foreigners,
Philip will win you over!
He likes a jug of beer, says
“Good night my lords”
in the Queen’s English.
Of his *virilitas* no question,
he has a son. Soon
I shall be quick with child!

(referencing Jack of Hearts)
Miserere mei.
You shall hear how nature did play false
when last I play this card.

Duty calls,
away, away to the troublesome Netherlands
in the service of his father.
Through hall and chamber publicly we walk.
The Queen does not weep.

Now I watch,
at my high window leaning,
through secret tears.
Most dearest lord and husband,
sans vous ne puis.
The droning orchard pales.
Oh Husband, I do unspeakably long!

The budding hawthorne counts
a second Spring when you return.
English troops must join
the Imperial Force?

My Council is doubtful,
till on these shores
the French incite rebellion.
C'est la Guerre! Husband, adieu!
Victory at St Quentin!
Into the air the English bonnets fly!

Our troops retire for winter
when war must sleep.
But oh calamity!
The unseasonal French
play a sudden hand.

3

Jack of Diamonds

I lose my Jack!
The Diamond in the English Crown,
Calais!
No place on earth touches me nearer.

From Hampton Court to the Palace of St James I go,
fever and contagion in the air.
Jane Dormer is sick. She is restored.
I am not.

Husband,
you say you will miss me.
In Brussels you mark my passing -
a black horse, a crown upon the saddle
where my spirit rides.

But when your hour comes
and in sculpted marble your wives are gathered,
where is Mary, your English Queen?
I am not there.

End Arc

King of Clubs: Edward VI

In years a Jack
I must call you King,
Edward,
the Sixth of that name.

Little brother,
tumbling into hedges with your friend,
squabbling in the schoolroom with Elizabeth,
all summer long we three play Catch.
But Time is running at our heels.

Little brother King,
all about your person
are wicked and wily men
malevolent to me!
The Faith that you deny
was ever that of England.
You twist me as our father did
forbidding me the Mass.
I pray you let me live in the past!

I weep, you weep,
still I cannot move you,
cannot obey your law.
I must fly England!
The Emperor will protect me
for my mother's sake.

The imperial ship is anchored,
I must not tarry.
But what will become of me?
Which of my ladies shall I take,
which of my rings, to Antwerp?
But what will become of me?

There is no present danger,
Shall Mary lose her dream of England?

Edward,
if I chance to die
your Council will be the cause.
But you're the one to decay.

What are the odds?
The stench of your sputum is deathly,
still you would deny me.
Jane Grey, Queen of England?
Deluded boy!

From the East I ride
in quickening summer.
The bells are set a-pealing
and the Heavens laugh
for Mary!
By the grace of God
Queen of England,
France and Ireland,
Defender of the Faith!

Queen of Clubs: Elizabeth

She is the one you love,
my Protestant half-sister,
Elizabeth,
future Queen,
the First of that name.

Outwardly so like myself
hair, nose and lips we share,
but on her cheek
the blooming rose of youth.

When she comes riding into town,
a great company of velvet coats and gowns,
the curtain of her litter open to the crowd,
she glisters!
Her face she turns to the sun; I droop,
a shrinking violet wanting shade.

Melancholia,
dismal winter of the soul,
she does not know.
She has her mother's humour,
that sudden flash of choler
then conflagration!

As a girl I knew the temper of that Queen,
Anne Boleyn,
felt the scorching mettle of her will.
The daughter cools the quickness
in the mother's blood.
She keeps her head.

At my coronation we stand together,
sisters.
Beads of white coral trimmed with gold
I give her,
jewels for her ladies.
How does she repay me?

Intrigue! Mischief!
Deceit and Disruption!
Dissent flows to your door,
Elizabeth!
Direct proof may chance to fail
but you can never thoroughly be cleared.
Put your cards on the table!

How stiffly you persist in your truth!
I'll deal you out.
Away away to the bloody Tower!
Your mother's ghost shall teach you
the song of The Chopper!

But you resist the living and the dead.
Sister
I am weary of this game.

Our several stars were fixed at birth
in direst aspect,
our mothers and ourselves
a woeful constellation.
Sister,
when the fatal trumpet sounds,
shall we still turn in hateful opposition?

Ace of Hearts: Soul Song

The wild card
that trumps the rest,
is the Song that sings
in every living Soul.
Not so long ago,
a world away,
God was alive here.
He moved mysterious
in ordinary ways.
He lived in the grain,
in the salt,
the bread and the wine,
as now He does not.

The religion I have ever professed,
if t'were embraced with charity
I would be glad.
But these preachers sow sedition,
pollute the minds of youth,
urge disobedience.
An example must be made!

Archbishop Cranmer!
divorced my mother,
Catherine of Aragon,
made me a bastard.
Now Mary holds the cards
the devil asks for mercy.

Knave!
You think your hoary hairs will save you?
Think again.
See them dance
in the crackle and spit of catching flame
devil Bishops
Latimer and Ridley!
Knave!
You think if you recant you will be saved?
Think again.
You've signed away your truth
now burn! Ha!

But lo! In devouring flame
the Knave outplays me!
Recants his recantation!
Fire chokes the tongue
too late,
his words fly up into the air,
spark across the land.

Beware the hand of martyrs,
the cards they carry up their sleeve.
They play a waiting game.

I am all out of tune
with Fortune's hand;
the inconstant world
affords no rest.

Ah Mary!
Nowhere shall you find repose
save in the Garden of the Soul.
Listen to the sparrow's song,
the piping thrush, the calling dove,
sweet murmur of the day
doth comfort when the night is long.
And know at last the heart shall rest
in Love Divine, for we are blessed.
Gratitude is all.

Jack of Hearts: The Phantom Baby

Mary takes a pressed pansy from inside her prayerbook.

1

There is a flower some call Hearts-ease,
Mary's face, Jack-jump-up-and-kiss-me.
It's for thoughts – *pensées*.
You know it in tamer form.

This Jack o' my Heart
flowered in my thoughts,
my morning sickness.
Prepare the cradle!

Master Jack,
what shall I call you?
Philip? Charles?
Ferdinand? Henry?
Master Jack,
may you be beautiful and comely,
noble of mind, pure of heart,
my benediction!

2

Swollen
like a mighty flood
raging with desire
I feel it!
The Ladies of my Chamber,
the Physicians,
feel it!
The child moves!
Tell the nation!

Frideswide alone says
No,
poor bloated Queen,
the garden that you tend
is a graveyard.

Peace, woman!
Hold your tongue!
It is God's Will.
The lilac has withered,
the cornflower bows her head
to summer.
Why so still?
Speak, Ladies!
When shall the waters break?

Harvest comes,
I am not gathered.
Now I see they all
but flatterers be,
the wishing-well is dry.
Ah, Frideswide!
You alone are true to me,
you alone.

Mother, is this your affliction?
Life miscarried, still-born?
Or is it yours, father?

Peace, daughter.
Disgrace is all your own.
A bloody lump, a spill of blood
is something. But this!
A bellyful of nothing.
Vain confection.
Ghost.

3

I have failed him,
my husband.
He will not stay
to drop a second coin
into an empty cup.

I have failed the nation.
England connected.

I have failed my God.
She will unmake me -
Gloriana!
The Holy Mass occulted!

Ah, but nothing shall be
hidden from you, Lord,
go unavenged.
Have mercy on the soul
of Elizabeth. And on the soul
of Mary. She shall play
a Queen's ambition though she
dream no more.

Epilogue

The Evening Primrose tells the hour,
Purples and Goldenrod stand firm.
My hand is played.
The Yellow Lily speaks of sorrows
past, Daisies bright at Michaelmas
star the firmament all out of time.

From this dark bower I go
singing
upon the wings of angels
Libera me!

Mary holds up a miniature of Queen Elizabeth I

You who poke about the tombs
in The Abbey,
observe two sisters waiting resurrection.
One in marble splendour puts
the other into shade, yet
Truth I say is ever bound to Time.

She who lies atop this Mary
glories in the name of Virgin Queen,
Elizabeth whose trumpet blew
for Protestants and for herself -
Gloriana!

She holds up a miniature of Mary Queen of Scots

But lo! A second catholic Mary comes
to steal her thunder – Mary Queen of Scots!
Mightily entombed, she soars!
We barren sisters lie a hasty coda.

And so beyond the grave we learn
Time will take from us our partial will
and leave us to the will of partial men.

End