

# Love, Liz

By: Lauren Grove

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## **Characters**

(8 - 14 actors possible. Double casting is an option.)

### **Main Cast:**

Elizabeth I – Queen of England.

Kat Ashley – Elizabeth’s chief lady in waiting and former governess.

William Cecil – Elizabeth’s Secretary of State and most trusted advisor.

Robert Dudley – One of Elizabeth’s closest confidants and the only man she ever loved.

### **Ladies of the Privy Chamber:**

Geraldine Fitzgerald – Elizabeth’s longtime friend, witty and flirty.

Bess of Hardwick – Elizabeth’s gossipy, snobby friend

Helena Snakenborg – A sweet lady-in-waiting and a hopeless romantic

Anne Russell – Elizabeth’s faithful friend and diligent servant.

### **Suitors:**

Phillip II – King of Spain. Elizabeth’s one-time suitor turned bitter enemy,

Eric XIV – King of Sweden. A very persistent suitor who does not take no for an answer.

Henry, Duke of Anjou – Flamboyant French prince with a penchant for wearing dresses.

Archduke Charles – Prince of Austria. A very reluctant suitor.

### **Optional Ensemble:**

Gustav, Ferdinand I of Austria

## **Setting**

England, 16<sup>th</sup> century

The Queen’s Bedchamber and the Presence Chamber at Whitehall Palace

Westminster Abbey

## **Set Description**

The short Westminster Abbey and Presence Chamber scenes can be performed in front of a closed curtain and represented simply by two identical thrones, side by side.

When the curtain opens, it reveals the Queen's Bedchamber. This can be as simple or ornate as desired, but should at the least have a bed, dresser, and a desk.

## **Young Royals Editions**

This is the regular edition of *Love, Liz*. There is also a Young Royals edition available, intended for high school performers. The language is a bit tamer and there are more characters than in this original version. Performing groups may feel free to use language and characters from either version, and combine the texts as they see fit, as long as the order of the scenes does not change, and the dialogue is written by Lauren Grove. (Contact Lauren Grove for further clarification.)

## **Casting**

We are playing with history, shoehorning various characters and events that span decades into one night. As history is fluid in this play, casting should not be based on traditional Elizabethan looks. Any female identifying actor may be cast in any of the female roles, regardless of ethnicity, body type, age, etc. This play celebrates women, so the casting process should as well. (Hair color lines may change if desired.) In addition, ANY actor may play the male roles. Understudies may be referred to as Lords and Ladies in Waiting. If double casting is needed, the male roles may be played by as few as two actors.

## **Accents**

Each of the four suitors should have accents that reflect their home country, and may be used for comedic effect. The women, Robert, and Cecil should only do British accents if all are capable of authentic accents. Otherwise, American accents are fine.

## **Costumes**

The costumes for the Westminster Abbey and presence chamber scenes should be authentic to 16<sup>th</sup> century England. The male characters should also always be in authentic dress from the time period. When it comes to the sleepover in the queen's chamber, the ladies may be in modern, fun pajamas, or 16<sup>th</sup> century shifts/chemises in a variety of colors. Only the queen should wear purple. Crew members, especially those moving the thrones, have the option of wearing 16<sup>th</sup> century Tudor servant livery.

**ACT I**  
**SCENE I**

Westminster Abbey, London

*(The play begins on a dark stage with the curtains closed. Trumpets play a loud fanfare before a booming voice cuts through the dark.)*

CECIL: Sirs and Madams, I here present unto you Elizabeth, your undoubted Queen.

*(A large spotlight reveals two ornate thrones set in front of a closed curtain. Elizabeth sits rigidly in one of the thrones, robed in crimson velvet with the Crown of St. Edward atop her head. She nervously holds the English coronation orb and scepter, and stares straight ahead. The king's throne remains starkly empty.)*

CECIL: We, this day, set a crown of pure gold upon her head and ask God to enrich her royal heart with abundant grace, and crown her with all princely virtues. God save the queen!

VOICES: *(Several voices cry out.)* God save the queen! God save the queen! God save the queen!

*(The trumpets play again. Elizabeth looks over to the empty king's throne with grave concern. As the trumpets die away, the spotlight slowly tightens until it shines on just the empty king's throne for a tense moment. Then, blackout.)*

**SCENE II**

The Presence Chamber at Whitehall Palace

*(During the very brief blackout, Renaissance music softly plays. Lights come up on the queen alone, before the closed curtain, sitting on her throne. The robe, crown, orb, and scepter are gone. She wears a purple gown with a jeweled crown on her head. She is reading a parchment intently. Now and then she smiles or even giggles. At one point she clutches the letter to her chest. As she continues to read, she smiles again and then rises and begins to walk offstage. William Cecil enters and bows to the queen.)*

CECIL: Your Majesty, may I have a word?

ELIZABETH: *(She quickly tucks her parchment into her jeweled belt, hiding it from Cecil.)* Oh, Lord Cecil. I was just off to...

CECIL: This will only take a moment, Madam. And some of these matters are of the utmost importance.

ELIZABETH: *(She looks off to where she was going, and then back at Cecil.)* Very well. What can I do for you, my lord?

CECIL: A few matters of state. First, your cousin Lettie Knollys has asked permission to house her mare at the royal stables while she is at court.

ELIZABETH: Our dear cousin is always asking for something, isn't she?

CECIL: It seems so.

ELIZABETH: Fine, she has our permission.

CECIL: *(He checks the item off his list.)* Noted. Next order of business. The vice-admiral needs your approval for naval training exercises to begin after the harvest.

ELIZABETH: Granted.

CECIL: Wonderful. Sign here. *(He hands her a document and a quill. Elizabeth signs it and gives it back to Cecil.)*

ELIZABETH: Will that be all, sir?

CECIL: Uh, no... There is one final matter... *(He clears his throat, knowing this will be a difficult conversation. He produces the scroll.)* Your Majesty, as your Secretary of State, the House of Commons has tasked me with presenting a formal petition unto you.

*(Cecil bows and raises the scroll to Elizabeth. She unfurls it and begins to read.)*

ELIZABETH: A formal petition?

CECIL: *(He rises.)* Yes. The petition begs your Majesty to marry as soon as possible in order to safeguard your throne and your kingdom.

ELIZABETH: What?

CECIL: The petition also reminds your Majesty that you yourself would indeed benefit if you take a consort.

ELIZABETH: Surely this is none of the council's business.

CECIL: You are no longer a private person. You are an anointed queen. Your marriage is the country's business.

ELIZABETH: *(Flustered, she continues to read. She then hands the scroll back to Cecil.)* I must tell you, sir, that I do not think I will ever marry.

CECIL: *(He speaks in a caring yet patronizing tone.)* Come, come now, Madam. Do you not wish for a husband to guide and protect you?

ELIZABETH: I am capable of guiding and protecting myself.

CECIL: He would also father your heirs to ensure the succession; something that plagued your father throughout his life, as I'm sure your Majesty well remembers.

ELIZABETH: I am all too familiar with that subject, yes.

CECIL: It is only a matter of time and choice. You have received several more letters from eager suitors. Shall I deliver them to your chamber this evening?

ELIZABETH: *(She sighs.)* If you must.

*(Robert Dudley enters, removes his hat, and bows gallantly to the queen.)*

ROBERT: Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH: *(Her entire demeanor changes and her face alights with a smile.)* Robert! *(She looks back at Cecil's disapproving face.)* I mean, my Lord Dudley. *(She holds out her hand to Robert, which he kisses.)*

ROBERT: Did you receive my letter, your Majesty?

ELIZABETH: *(She smiles and maybe even blushes.)* I did, sir. I was just reading it when Lord Cecil arrived. *(She gestures to Cecil on the other side of her.)*

ROBERT: Ah, William! *(He gives a short bow to Cecil.)*

CECIL: That's Master Secretary to you, Dudley.

ROBERT: Why are you bothering our gracious Majesty on this fine day?

CECIL: *(His face reddens)* I am not bothering her! I come with official state business!

ELIZABETH: *(She scolds Robert, but her smile betrays her affection for him.)* Do not tease our good Secretary, Lord Dudley.

ROBERT: Of course not. The country would be lost without him.

CECIL: Is there something you needed?

ROBERT: I was on my way to the stables. I just happened upon you and her Majesty by chance.

CECIL: By chance indeed. *(He turns to Elizabeth.)* Weren't you saying you were on your way somewhere, Madam?

ELIZABETH: Oh, well, yes... *(She looks at Robert for a moment.)* If there is nothing else, gentlemen, I will retire to my chamber.

CECIL: Your Majesty. *(He bows.)*

ROBERT: *(He leans in and whispers to the queen.)* Later?

*(Elizabeth glances quickly behind her to make sure Cecil isn't looking. She smiles and gives a small nod. Robert smiles back, bows, and kisses her hand. Elizabeth exits, and the two men rise.)*

ROBERT: So, what is this official state business? *(He snatches the scroll from Cecil's hands.)*

CECIL: A petition from the House of Commons for her Majesty's eyes only! *(Cecil attempts to get the scroll back from Robert, with no luck.)*

ROBERT: *(He begins to read the scroll.)* The council begs her Majesty to marry? And with great haste. *(He laughs.)* That will be the day...

CECIL: What do you mean?

ROBERT: You are setting nets to catch the wind, my lord. I have known the queen better than any man alive since I was eight years old. She will never marry.

CECIL: It is unthinkable that a woman should rule alone, sir. The queen's mind will surely change.

ROBERT: I do not share your confidence, Cecil.

CECIL: She must. It's a matter of national security!

ROBERT: National security?

CECIL: We are but one of a few Protestant nations. The queen must take a powerful husband and produce legitimate heirs to protect England against our Catholic enemies abroad.

ROBERT: *(He reads the scroll again.)* "To safeguard your throne and your kingdom..." *(He takes a moment to ponder the implications.)* Powerful words.

CECIL: True words

ROBERT: Still, I am certain she will never wed.

CECIL: Oh, she will.

ROBERT: How can you be so sure?

CECIL: It's what her council wants. It's what her country wants. It's what most of Europe not only wants but expects. She cannot deny millions of people what they so greatly desire.

ROBERT: (*Doubtful*) Have you met her?

CECIL: Surely it is also God's will for her to take a husband. And I know our queen shall not deny God.

ROBERT: She is rather religious... Do you really suppose you can convince the queen to marry?

CECIL: I do. (*He finally grabs the scroll back.*) It is not a question of if she will marry, but who. She daily receives proposals from all over Europe.

ROBERT: He is neither a good Englishman nor a loyal subject who advises the queen to marry a foreigner.

CECIL: And who should she marry? One of her own subjects?

ROBERT: (*He begins walking away.*) No, of course not, I... (*He stops mid-step and mid-sentence. He takes a moment to think. He turns around to Cecil with a mischievous grin*) Well, actually, yes. Yes, perhaps she should.

CECIL: I like not the look I see in your eyes...

ROBERT: An English-born king could be very popular indeed.

CECIL: Or quite hated, depending on who he is.

ROBERT: But surely if the queen loves him, the people will too... And I believe we all know who the queen's favorite courtier is... (*He lounges languidly, pompously, on the king's throne.*)

CECIL: How dare you sit there!

ROBERT: It's rather comfortable. I could get used to this...

CECIL: (*He begins to hit Robert with the scroll.*) Get. Out. Of. That. Chair.

ROBERT: (*He laughs and rises.*) All right, all right. I hope you don't intend to hit me when the queen places me on that throne.

CECIL: Do not be ridiculous! You are the Master of the Horse, Dudley. Hardly a fit consort for a queen.



ROBERT: Her Majesty also made me an Earl, my lord.

CECIL: *(Speaking under his breath.)* Not one of her better decisions...

ROBERT: *(He feigns offense.)* You wound me.

CECIL: No matter the hold you seem to have over our queen, I again say you are no fit consort. Especially with your... *reputation* around court.

ROBERT: Reputation?

CECIL: The things people say! That you have a... *filly* in every stall this side of the Thames. That you even have the queen in your thrall...

ROBERT: Do not trust everything you hear at court, sir. But mark these words... I believe I will officially enter the lists for her Majesty's hand.

CECIL: The lists? *(He laughs)* I have seen you joust, my lord. I like not your chances.

ROBERT: This is one game I am determined to win... *(He dons his hat.)* I am rather glad I ran into you, Cecil. *(He rests his hand on the arm rest of the king's throne.)*

CECIL: Do not think to aim so high, my Lord. It will be your downfall.

ROBERT: *(He smiles.)* We shall see, Master Secretary. Good day. *(He bows his head towards Cecil and exits. Blackout.)*

### SCENE III

The Queen's Bedchamber at Whitehall Palace

*(During the blackout, we hear a chorus of individual voices calling to the queen until they join together.)*

INDIVIDUAL VOICES: *(Each voice calls out a line. They can begin to overlap.)*

Your Majesty!

A petition for your Majesty!

A moment of your time!

God save you, your Majesty!

Please, just a moment!

Will you marry soon, Your Majesty?

When will we have an heir?

Who shall be our King?

Please, your Majesty!

ALL VOICES TOGETHER: Your Majesty! Your Majesty! Your Majesty!

*(The lights come up and the curtain opens to reveal the queen's sumptuous, regal bedchamber. She enters through the door and quickly closes it on the voices, pressing her back against it. She takes a deep breath. Her chamber consists of a bed, dresser, and various Tudor era décor. The door to an outdoor balcony is represented downstage left, with a door leading to the queen's wardrobe closet upstage left. Elizabeth removes Robert's letter from her belt, kisses it, and then puts it in a tiny, jeweled box.)*

KAT: *(She calls from offstage)* Your Majesty?

ELIZABETH: *(She quickly hides the box amongst the things on her dresser.)* Yes, it's me, Kat.

*(Kat enters from the wardrobe closet. She wears a simple robe. She has the queen's purple night robe in her hand. She lays it on the bed and goes to the queen.)*

KAT: Another long day?

ELIZABETH: Aren't they all? It seems everyone desires a piece of me.

KAT: Well, you are the queen.

ELIZABETH: I tell you, Kat, the only people who long to rule are those who have no knowledge of what it entails.

KAT: Heavy is the head that wears the crown.

ELIZABETH: I believe I've heard that somewhere.

*(Kat begins to remove Elizabeth's crown and jewels. Once the crown is removed, she is visibly more at ease. She relaxes her shoulders, smiles, and seems more herself.)*

KAT: Are you tired?

ELIZABETH: Exhausted. All I wish for is a quiet night alone in my chamber. Just me and my thoughts.

KAT: Well, about that...

*(At that moment, Geraldine, Bess, Helena, and Anne jump up from behind the bed.)*

LADIES: Surprise!!

*(There is a shift in Elizabeth. Elizabeth is happier and more at ease. Her ladies, including Kat when she removes her robe, can be in fun modern pajamas or different colored Tudor shifts/chemises. They are armed with nail polish, snacks, magazines, and a radio; all things needed for a proper sleepover. The language becomes more modern. The women are away from the prying eyes of the court and safe in the sanctuary of the Queen's bedchamber. A fun romp of a girls' night is surely about to ensue.)*

ELIZABETH: Girls! *(As she goes to each one, she hugs them, kisses their cheek, or takes their hand.)* Anne. Geraldine. My sweet Helena. And even Bess is here...

GERLADINE: Surprised?

ELIZABETH: Very.

KAT: They barged their way in and begged me to let them stay.

ANNE: We had no choice. We never see you anymore!

ELIZABETH: You're the ladies of the privy chamber. I see you every day.

BESS: Emptying your chamber pot and carrying your train into church are not exactly the highlights of my social calendar.

HELENA: We want to spend actual quality time with you. We miss our friend!

GERALDINE: We miss our Liz.

ELIZABETH: It's not as though I've been distant on purpose. I'm busy; I have a country to run!

BESS: Yes, yes, we know. You're very important.

ANNE: The big boss lady in charge.

GERLADINE: Can't you take a break for just one night?

HELENA: Please?

ANNE: We brought everything we need for a proper slumber party.

ELIZABETH: I don't know, I really am tired...

BESS: Tired and BORING! Come on, Liz!

ELIZABETH: *(She smiles.)* Well, I would hate for word to get out that I was *boring*. *(She turns to Kat.)* What do you think, Kat?

KAT: I think a little fun wouldn't hurt...

ELIZABETH: *(She smiles and nods.)* Ok, girls' night!

LADIES: Girls' night!!

*(The girls begin to bring things out from behind the bed and put them all over the room.)*

HELENA: I've got the radio.

ANNE: I've got the nail polish.

BESS: Where are the snacks?

ANNE: Right here Bess, calm down.

GERALDINE: We got you these, Liz. Go try them on. *(She hands Elizabeth a pair of purple pajamas.)*

ELIZABETH: They're so cute!

GERALDINE: Of course they are. I picked them out.

*(Elizabeth goes to her closet to change. The ladies spring into action. Within moments the floor is littered with plush pillows for lounging, the radio is softly playing a Renaissance song. They put a poster of some Tudor hunk – Shakespeare, William Byrd, Francis Drake, or Christopher Marlowe, etc – over one of Elizabeth's portraits. Anne lays out nail polish colors, Helena is braiding Geraldine's hair while Geraldine is reading a magazine, Bess is diving into the chips. The girls chat happily. After a moment, Elizabeth reenters in her matching pajamas.)*

GERALDINE: Now you're dressed for girls' night!

ALL: Girl's night!

*(Kat and Elizabeth sit on the bed and look at nail polish colors.)*

BESS: We haven't done this in forever.

GERALDINE: Braid my hair in the French fashion, Helena.

HELENA: That will be so pretty!

ANNE: *(She moves towards the bed.)* Let me paint your nails, Kat.

KAT: Oh, I don't know...

ANNE: Come on.

ELIZABETH: You're the one who said a little fun wouldn't hurt.

KAT: Ok, but nothing too wild.

ANNE: *(She picks up a bottle of nail polish)* How about this one? It's called Plague Purple.

KAT: No, no!

ANNE: Bubonic blue? No, that's just as bad... Tilbury Teal, Lancaster Lavender, Plantagenet Plum... Here we go! How about Courtly Coral?

KAT: That's much more my speed.

HELENA: Bess, turn up the music. I love this one!

ELIZABETH: Is this Thomas Tallis?

HELENA: Yes, I just adore him. His songs are so romantic. *(She sighs wistfully.)* You should invite him to court, Liz!

BESS: You know he's in his fifties, right?

HELENA: I don't want to date him! I just want to meet him. He's a genius.

GERALDINE: Don't knock an older man until you've tried one.

BESS: Or five, in your case.

GERALDINE: What they lack in youth they more than make up for in experience.

BESS: I'm sure their deep pockets don't hurt either, do they Geraldine?

GERALDINE: What can I say? Older men give great jewelry. They also give great...

ANNE: Hey, save some chips for the rest of us, Bess!

BESS: *(Annoyed.)* Sorry. *(Bess begrudgingly hands the chips to Anne. Anne pops one in her mouth before continuing to paint Kat's nails. Bess finds a package of cookies and begins to eat them.)*

ELIZABETH: *(She tries to look at the cover of Geraldine's magazine.)* What are you reading?

GERALDINE: Tudor Beat. It's their 50 Yummiest of Europe issue.

ELIZABETH: Yummiest of Europe?

GERALDINE: Yep, they've got all the dreamboats... William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Michelangelo, Ivan the Terrible...

ELIZABETH: Who's number one?

GERALDINE: Let me see. *(She flips through the pages.)* Uh... wow. Pope Pius IV...

BESS: What? Were the voters blind, or just stupid?

ANNE: As a loyal Protestant, I'd like to file a formal complaint with the editor.

BESS: Yeah, my vote is for Shakespeare.

GERALDINE: Agreed. I do like a stiff...

KAT: Gerladine!

GERALDINE: Collar! I was going to say collar!

BESS: Sure you were.

GERALDINE: Oh, Helena, they have your Thomas Tallis at number 39! *(She hands Helena the magazine.)*

HELENA: *(She looks at his picture.)* So handsome...

BESS: But so old.

HELENA: Anyone catch your fancy, Liz?

ELIZABETH: Here, let me see. *(She takes the magazine.)*

ANNE: *(She finishes Kat's nails.)* There, Kat. What do you think?

KAT: *(She admires her hands.)* Very pretty. Thank you.

GERALDINE: Do my nails next, Anne. *(She picks up a bottle.)* I like this one, Virginal Violet.

BESS: Try to use Virginal Violet on Geraldine and the bottle will crack.

GERLADINE: My dear Bess, weren't you the one caught in the gardens after midnight with a certain Italian ambassador just last week?

ALL *(Except Kat)*: Oooooo!

KAT: Ladies, please! Let's have some decorum.

ANNE: But it's girls' night.

GERALDINE: You don't mind, do you, Liz?

ELIZABETH: *(She laughs)* Don't stop on my account. This is the most fun I've had in ages.

HELENA: We haven't had a girls' night since your coronation. You're always so busy.

ELIZABETH: Well, there's policies to approve, meetings to attend, reforms to enact...

GERALDINE: *(Slyly.)* Husbands to marry...

ELIZABETH: *(She groans.)* Not you too!

GERALDINE: What do you mean?

ELIZABETH: Lord Cecil brought me a petition from the House of Commons today. They urge me to take a husband as quickly as possible.

ANNE: It's not just your councilors. It's all anyone can talk about at court.

HELENA: Everyone wants to know who the lucky man will be.

*(Elizabeth gets up from the bed and walks away from her friends. After a moment she turns to them.)*

ELIZABETH: Why do I have to marry at all?

KAT: Of course you'll marry, Elizabeth.

HELENA: Don't you want to get married and have children?

ELIZABETH: Certain events in my childhood made it impossible for me to equate marriage with any sort of security. My father, he... *(She turns away, unable to finish the sentence.)*

GERALDINE: We know.

ANNE: We understand.

BESS: How does the old rhyme about his wives go? Oh, yes...  
"Divorced, beheaded, died.  
Divorced, beheaded, survived."

KAT: Bess!

BESS: *(Anne smacks Bess in the arm.)* Oww!

ANNE: Read the room.

ELIZABETH: That little rhyme is not so clever when it's your own mother who was the first beheaded.

KAT: On false charges.

HELENA: And poor Kate Howard, executed just a few years later.

BESS: Yeah, but she had it coming...

ANNE: *(She smacks Bess in the arm again.)* Shh!

ELIZABETH: And they say my stepmother Catherine Parr was the one to survive... until she remarried and then died in childbirth.

GERALDINE: But, Liz...

ELIZABETH: Marriage is a dangerous business for women.

KAT: Elizabeth... *(She gets up and goes to Elizabeth.)* Not all marriages are as tumultuous as your father would have you believe.

GERALDINE: She's right, I absolutely adore my husband.

BESS: And everyone else's...

HELENA: My parents have been happily married for over forty years.

KAT: Your father was the exception, Elizabeth, not the rule. The country needs you to marry.

ANNE: Then you can give us little princes and princesses we can spoil!

ELIZABETH: And what about childbirth?

KAT: There's always the chance a woman could die in childbirth. I won't deny it. But there's equally a chance you could catch the plague, get an infection, succumb to a fever, or die from a simple toothache!

BESS: Medieval healthcare really sucks.

ANNE: Plenty of women survive childbirth and go on to have lots of kids.

HELENA: I have twelve siblings.

KAT: Will you at least consider taking a husband?

ELIZABETH: Of course I'll consider it. I consider it every day. I know what's expected of me. It's just never something I desired.

ANNE: Maybe you just need some more time to think it over.

ELIZABETH: Maybe, but it doesn't help when new marriage proposals keep pouring in from all over Europe.



ANNE: Wait, what?

GERALDINE: Who proposed?

BESS: When?

HELENA: What did you say?

ANNE: How long has this been going on?

ELIZABETH: Since before my coronation.

BESS: And you're just telling us now?!

GERALDINE: How many are there?

*(Elizabeth goes to her wardrobe closet. She returns with a comically large, ornate chest. She dumps the contents onto the bed as dozens of letters and parcels tumble out.)*

ANNE: Dear God in heaven...

BESS: There are dozens.

HELENA: Let us read them!

ELIZABETH: Absolutely not.

HELENA: Please?

ELIZABETH: No, they're private.

ANNE: Come on, Liz, it's girls' night! If we don't talk about boys, I think we're breaking the first rule of sleepover etiquette.

GERALDINE: Exactly.

HELENA: Pretty please?

BESS: You know we're not going to let this go.

ELIZABETH: *(She sighs.)* Fine, I'll read you one letter, but just one.

*(The ladies cheer.)*

BESS: Go for the parcel in the gold velvet. That one's the biggest.

ELIZABETH: *(She retrieves the parcel out of the pile and pulls out a letter.)* This is from Eric, the King of Sweden.

HELENA: Oh, a king!

GERALDINE: Get it, girl!

ELIZABETH: He enclosed this portrait of himself.

*(Elizabeth takes a small portrait out of the parcel. The ladies pass it around. A spotlight shines on stage right. Eric enters in his full Swedish royal regalia. He smiles at the audience and poses.)*

KAT: My, he is handsome!

ANNE: He looks like a Viking warrior.

GERALDINE: He's welcome to come raid my village...

ERIC: *(He speaks in a happy tone with a thick, Swedish accent. He is often smiling.)* My dearest Queen Elizabeth. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Eric, King of the most glorious country of Sweden. I write to you because, though we have never met, you have already enchanted me. Word of your goodness and virtue has reached my court. I have also seen a portrait of your Majesty and I must say, your beauty is beyond compare. You are like some red headed goddess descended from the heavens. I would humbly like to offer myself in marriage to you.

*(The girls squeal with delight upon hearing the proposal.)*

Our marriage is undoubtedly a match ordained by God, not only because you have pierced my heart like a javelin, but also because our union would be a political triumph. Sweden is a Protestant nation, and we are eager to align ourselves with England. Surely, my sweetheart, we could take on the dregs of Catholic Europe together! Please accept the enclosed jewels as a token of my great affection

*(Elizabeth holds up a sparkling necklace as the girls admire it.)*

And there is plenty more where that came from, my darling. I await your response with great hope and expectation. Yours forever, your most devoted servant and lover, Eric.

*(Eric bows to the audience, bows to the ladies, and then exits.)*

BESS: Laying it on a bit thick, isn't he?

HELENA: No, he's wooing her. I think it's romantic.

GERALDINE: *(She holds up the necklace.)* He gets my vote!

KAT: What do you think, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: I don't know... Don't get me wrong, he's very handsome and the necklace is great, but I don't even know this man.

BESS: I've heard the King of Sweden is very rich.

GERALDINE: Rich, handsome, and a king. What more is there to know?

HELENA: And he says he loves you!

ANNE: Wait, she can't pick the very first guy who shows an interest. She's got to play the field.

BESS: Good point. *(She hands Elizabeth another letter.)* Here, read this one now.

ELIZABETH: What? No. I told you girls we could read one.

ANNE: We can't stop at just one!

GERALDINE: Yeah! It's like Bess with chips!

BESS: I truly despise you. *(Geraldine smiles and gives Bess a wink.)*

ELIZABETH: The letters are going away now. *(She takes the letter out of Anne's hands and begins gathering up the other papers and parcels on the bed.)*

KAT: *(She takes Elizabeth's hands and guides her away from the letters.)* Whether you're inclined to marry or not, you're going to have to. If not for yourself, for the country. And with this many suitors, it's going to be a very hard decision. We're your friends. Let us help.

ELIZABETH: But...

BESS: It's happening, Liz. Just deal with it.

ELIZABETH: I am your queen, you know? I could just order you all to leave.

BESS: Yeah, uh huh, sure. Read this one. *(She thrusts a letter at Elizabeth.)*

ELIZABETH: *(She sighs but takes the letter.)* It's from Phillip.

GERALDINE: Phillip? As in Phillip II of Spain? As in your late sister's widower? *(Elizabeth nods.)*

ANNE and HELENA: Eww!

BESS: Maybe you are better off single...

*(Elizabeth raises up the letter to read it aloud. A spotlight comes up on stage right as Phillip enters, in dark colors, looking very austere and menacing.)*

PHILLIP: *(He speaks coldly though civilly, with a Spanish accent.)* Elizabeth, I hope this letter finds you well. I congratulate you on your ascension to the throne. Truly it is God's work that put you there, but never forget you also owe your crown to me. When your sister wanted to put you to death for your religious beliefs, it was I who stayed Mary's hand and bid her to let you live.

KAT: I don't believe that for a second.

PHILLIP: However, I now hear troubling reports coming from England. I surely thought you would come to your senses about religion once you became queen, but it seems you are letting your country slide back into the very heresy that your late sister and I fought so hard against. It is imperative that you understand the Protestant religion is an abomination to God, and you are putting your soul and the souls of your subjects at risk of eternal damnation! *(He calms himself and forces a smile.)* But fear not, Elizabeth, for I have a solution. You can save England and repay my many kindnesses towards you by marrying me.

BESS: Boo!

PHILLIP: It is against the laws of God and nature for a woman to hold dominion over men. But with me by your side, as the true and rightful king, we will rule England and Spain together. I will bring your nation back into the fold of the faithful just as a shepherd brings his lost flock back to the safety of the pasture. I understand you may have fears over the close affinity we share due to my marriage to your sister, but I am sure our most high and holy Pope would be only too happy to issue a papal bull allowing us to marry.

Think carefully on my offer. It is most generous. And you do not want to be all alone in Europe, Elizabeth. That's not a safe position to be in.

GERALDINE: Is that a threat?

PHILLIP: Send me a swift answer, as this is not a hard question. I bid you happiness and good health, and may God bless you and England. From his most high Majesty, King Phillip II of Espana. *(Phillip gives a curt nod to Elizabeth and then to the audience, and exits.)*

BESS: Again I say, boo!

GERALDINE: Yeah, Eric is a much better choice.

ANNE: Please don't tell me you're considering this proposal.

ELIZABETH: Of course not. If I find I'm compelled to marry, it certainly won't be to Phillip. I remember all too well how happy the people were when my sister Mary became queen, and how quickly their love turned to hate when she took a Spanish husband.

KAT: Not to mention a Catholic husband.

GERALDINE: Plus, Phillip was almost never here. He spent most of his time in Spain. He practically deserted Mary.

HELENA: I swear that heartbreak is what killed her in the end.

ANNE: England can't survive another Spanish marriage.

BESS: Then it's settled. *(She stands, takes Phillip's letter from Elizabeth's hands, and tears it in two.)* Thank you, next!

*(The ladies laugh and cheer. Kat picks up a letter and smells it.)*

KAT: This one is scented with perfume.

GERALDINE: *(She takes the letter)* It smells French. *(She sniffs again.)* And expensive. *(She hands the letter to Elizabeth, who opens it.)*

ELIZABETH: *(She looks at the letter.)* You're right, it's from France.

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Henry enters, dressed ostentatiously in the French Renaissance style. He wears a dangling pearl earring in one ear and several jeweled rings on his fingers.)*

HENRY: *(He is flamboyant and flirtatious, and speaks in a heavy French accent.)* My belle Elizabeth! I am Henry, Duke of Anjou. It is with deepest pleasure that I write to you an official proposal of marriage. Oh, please say yes, my queen! I would worship you with my body, mind, and soul!

I am a little bit younger than you, it is true. I am nineteen and you are... Well, a true Frenchman would never reveal a woman's secrets, or her age. But do not worry at our petite age difference. You can be la puma. A cougar. Oui? Your friends will be so jealous!

*(The girls open their fans in unison and begin to fan themselves.)*

I am also Catholic, it is true, but do not hold that against me. Catholics can be very fun. I hear you Protestants are a bit, how do you say, puritanical? Oui? We will have to change that, ma chere! We French like to indulge in life. Is it not better to live life to the fullest? And I promise you, my little fleur Anglais, if you marry me, you will be very full...  
*(He winks and laughs heartily.)*

GERALDINE: I like this one already.

HENRY: My mother is in favor of the match, and who would not want Catherine de Medici as a mother-in-law? I hope I can visit you soon to ask for your hand in person. Or perhaps you can visit me in France? You will love this country, as assuredly as I love you. I promise to show you a very good time, mon amour. Adieu for now, until I receive your reply. Signed with my own hand, your adoring Henry.

*(Henry bows deeply to the ladies and then to the audience, and then exits.)*

ANNE: *(She continues to fan herself.)* That was... wow.

HELENA: The Duke of Anjou... He's the French king's brother, right?

GERALDINE: And his heir. He's next in line for the throne.

BESS: He has quite the reputation.

HELENA: He does?

BESS: I heard the Duke is completely dominated by lust.

GERALDINE: The French are known for their decadence, in and out of the bedroom. It's one of the reasons I admire them.

BESS: And that's not all. I heard the Duke enjoys wearing dresses and often attends court balls in elaborate female frocks.

HELENA: Really?

BESS: With a full face of makeup.

GERALDINE: *(Disapprovingly)* Bess, do I detect a judgmental tone?

BESS: No... Live and let live, I say. I just thought Liz should know what she might be getting into.

ANNE: *(To Elizabeth.)* Hey, if his gowns are prettier than yours, you could always share.

GERALDINE: With a simple “I do” you would double your wardrobe!

HELENA: But does he like women?

BESS: Women AND men!

HELENA: Oh my...

GERALDINE: Good for him, I say! He gets my vote!

ANNE: We’ll put Henry in the “maybe” pile. My vote is still for King Eric.

HELENA: Let me pick the next one.

ANNE: No, it’s my turn!

*(Anne and Helena begin squabbling over the letters, with Bess and Geraldine joining in. Kat pulls Elizabeth to the side.)*

KAT: Admit it, you’re having fun.

ELIZABETH: *(She smiles.)* Maybe a little

KAT: It’s exciting to be courted. Let yourself enjoy it.

ELIZABETH: It does feel good to be wanted.

KAT: It might feel even better to accept one of these proposals.

ELIZABETH: We’ll see...

KAT: *(She’s hesitant, then whispers quietly to Elizabeth)* Elizabeth... you’re not reluctant to marry because of... you know who... right?

ELIZABETH: I have no idea what you’re talking about.

KAT: Elizabeth...

ELIZABETH: Not now, Kat, please.

KAT: We need to have a talk about him.

ELIZABETH: Not now.

KAT: Then when?

ELIZABETH: Later. *(She waves a dismissive hand at Kat and returns to her ladies.)* So, who is the lucky bachelor behind door number four?

*(Kat shakes her head and returns to the group. Anne emerges from the scuffle triumphant with a package in her hand. She brings it to Elizabeth.)*

ANNE: This one next, Liz.

ELIZABETH: *(She begins to open the package and the girls gather round, thoroughly enjoying themselves.)* This package came from Austria.

GERLADINE: *(She is full of excitement.)* Is it from Ferdinand, the Holy Roman Emperor?

BESS: I hear he's freshly widowed.

GERALDINE: You could be queen AND empress!

ELIZABETH: No, it's from his son.

GERALDINE: Maximilian? That's not so bad, at least he's the heir.

ELIZABETH: No, the other one, Archduke Charles.

GERALDINE: The spare? Oh...

BESS: Now who's being judgmental?

GERLADINE: I'm not judging anyone, but our Liz is queen. She can't marry a second son.

ELIZABETH: Here's his portrait.

*(All the girls gasp at his portrait. Helena puts her hand over her heart. Kat begins to fan herself. A spotlight comes up stage right. Charles enters. He is a very handsome man, but clearly less than enthusiastic about writing to Elizabeth.)*

GERALDINE: I change my mind!

HELENA: Are you ok, Kat?

KAT: I'm fine.

BESS: I think Kat sees something she likes.

ANNE: I think Kat is having a hot flash...



KAT: Oh, hush. He's far too young for me. But... *(She cocks her head and examines Charles again)* He is nice to look at...

ANNE: What does he say, Liz? *(Elizabeth begins to read the letter.)*

CHARLES: *(He seems bored and mopey. He speaks in a German/Austrian accent.)* Elizabeth. Hello. My father has bid me to write to you. So, I am. He wishes for me to propose an alliance between our countries that would be sealed with our betrothal. I am supposed to tell you that I will share the pains, cares, and exertions of government with you, the queen.

*(Ferdinand enters, giving his son a disapproving glare.)*

**(\*Note from the playwright\*** Having Ferdinand on stage is optional. If you wish for him to merely be a voice offstage, please contact Lauren Grove for alternate Charles letters.)

FERDINAND: Charles...

CHARLES: I mean, with you, the "illustrious" queen. And I will participate in the fruits and benefits of the realm. I not only want to bear the name of royalty, but I also want to help you in the administration of your realms and dominions.

FERDINAND: Keep going...

CHARLES: *(He sighs and continues, like a petulant teenager.)* My father also bids me tell you that I am courteous, affable, just, liberal, and wise. Your English agent in Vienna once told me that I was beautiful and well faced. I'll let you decide for yourself. I have seen your portrait. It was... fine.

FERDINAND: Charles!

CHARLES: It was amazing, stunning, fantastic, divine. You're the most beautiful woman on earth! *(He turns to Ferdinand.)* Happy now?

FERDINAND: Better.

CHARLES: *(He turns back to the audience.)* We, I mean I, greatly await your response. Sincerely, Charles.

*(Ferdinand clears his throat and gives Charles a look. Charles rolls his eyes.)*

CHARLES: Love, Charles. *(Charles exits without so much as a nod. Ferdinand follows.)*

*(There is silence amongst the ladies for a moment as they take in the cold letter.)*

ANNE: He doesn't seem overly enthusiastic.

BESS: That's just cause he's Austrian. You know how they are.

HELENA: Maybe he was just nervous?

GERALDINE: At least he's hot. I could forgive a lot if I got to lay next to that every night.

BESS: Down, girl.

GERALDINE: Look! Charles is in the 50 Yummiest of Europe! He's number nineteen!

ANNE: That's a good sign, Liz.

ELIZABETH: Why? Because some bored English housewives voted for him based merely on his looks? Forgive me if I want more than a nice face.

GERALDINE: It says under his picture that he likes good wine, summer sunsets, and long walks on the beach.

HELENA: How romantic!

ANNE: Any of the other suitors in there?

GERALDINE: Eric is thirteen.

ANNE: Huzzah!

GERALDINE: Here's our French Henry at seven!

KAT: Well, he is very pretty.

GERALDINE: And... Phillip is nowhere to be found.

BESS: No surprise there. I doubt a dour expression and religious fanaticism are appealing to the readers of Tudor Beat.

ELIZABETH: Is this really how I'm supposed to make the biggest decision of my life?

GERALDINE: Henry made it all the way to seven, Liz. That's got to count for something. Look at him!

ELIZABETH: Can we even trust these portraits? My father was entranced by the painting of his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves. But when he met her on their wedding day, he said she looked like a horse.

ANNE: Harsh.

ELIZABETH: And Philip cursed both his painters and ambassadors when he finally laid eyes on my sister.

BESS: Liz has a point. I've heard a rumor that Charles of Austria actually has an abnormally large head.

ELIZABETH: See!

KAT: Stop it, Bess! (*She turns to Elizabeth*) I'm sure those rumors about Charles and his head are just rumors. From all accounts, he is very handsome. And so are Henry and Eric. Don't worry.

ELIZABETH: I'm plenty worried. This is my potential marriage we're talking about.

GERALDINE: Come on, Liz. None of these guys light your fire?

ELIZABETH: My fire?

GERALDINE: You know what I mean.

ELIZABETH: That's not what I'm looking for.

GERALDINE: Then what are you looking for? What do you want in a man?

ANNE: Yeah, Liz, tell us.

BESS: And before you insist yet again that you don't want to marry, just humor us.

ELIZABETH: Fine. (*She rises and begins pacing, really thinking on the question.*) Well, I'd prefer he be Protestant.

ANNE: Of course.

GERALDINE: And handsome?

ELIZABETH: That would be nice... but it isn't necessary.

GERALDINE: Oh, it's necessary.

BESS: What about rich?

HELENA: Could we let her answer for herself, please?

ELIZABETH: Thank you, Helena.

HELENA: Keep going, Liz.

ELIZABETH: I want someone who loves me for who I am, not for my crown. I wouldn't want someone too ambitious for power. But I don't want him to be idle, either. He must be faithful and pious, but not a zealot. He should be good-natured; someone I can share a laugh with. Gentle, but strong. Affable, yet stoic. I want... *(She takes a moment, thinking of Robert, and smiles. She touches the box that contains his letters.)* I suppose I want a friend. *(She turns to look at her ladies.)* A best friend.

*(The ladies smile, some putting a hand to their heart. Kat rises and begins to cross towards Elizabeth.)*

GERALDINE: *(To Bess, as she gestures towards Elizabeth.)* I'll have what she's having.

BESS: She described the perfect man!

HELENA: That was beautiful, Liz.

KAT: *(Quietly aside to Elizabeth.)* Best friend? You're not describing... you know who, are you?

ELIZABETH: *(Quietly aside to Kat.)* Don't be ridiculous.

ANNE: You know, Liz, there's no reason why that perfect man can't be amongst these suitors. *(She gestures to the letters.)*

HELENA: Anne is right. And now that we know what you're looking for, we can better judge their letters.

BESS: Come on, Liz. Let us find you a best friend.

KAT: *(She puts a hand on Elizabeth's shoulder.)* Prove me wrong.

ELIZABETH: *(She puts her arm through Kat's arm and leads her back to the bed.)* Very well, who am I to deny my ladies? Hand me the next letter.

*(The ladies get excited again.)*

ANNE: Here, it's another one from Eric.

*(Elizabeth takes the letter and begins to read. A spotlight comes up stage right. Eric enters.)*

ERIC: Yoohoo! It's me, Eric, King of the most glorious country of Sweden. I was wondering if you have received my letters, my dearest Elizabeth? I have not received a reply, much to my dismay. My heart yearns to hear from you. I would hasten through

armies of foes to be at your side, because your most devoted Eric is bound by an eternal love towards you.

HELENA: He's so romantic!

ERIC: Along with this letter, I am dispatching a handsome gift of tapestries and ermines just for you. If this is not enough to prove my utter devotion, I will send you ships filled with mountains of silver. I will send you ships filled with mountains of gold. I will send you ships filled with meatballs and ready-to-assemble furniture! Just please, my beloved, say you will be mine! I have also included gifts of furs and jewels for all of your ladies.

ANNE: He sent gifts for us?!

BESS: Bribing the friends... Smart man.

ERIC: My life is incomplete without you by my side, my dearest. Put me out of my misery and say you will be mine! I eagerly await your reply, my angel on Earth. Yours forever, your faithful Eric. *(He bows and exits.)*

KAT: I like him, Elizabeth. I really do.

HELENA: He's my favorite!

BESS: Yeah, yeah, he's great. Now where are the presents?

ELIZABETH: *(Elizabeth talks as she goes to her closet.)* When his letters arrived, so did these packages.

*(She emerges with a few packages and Bess and Geraldine dive into them. The girls begin to "Ooh" and "Ah" as they try on the furs and jewels over their pajamas. Kat hangs back. Elizabeth grabs a fur shawl and puts it over Kat's shoulders.)*

ELIZABETH: There's plenty for everyone.

KAT: What would I do with something so fine?

ELIZABETH: Wear it to please your queen! *(She smiles warmly at Kat.)*

HELENA: *(She strokes the fur she's wearing.)* This is so soft!

ANNE: *(She admires a tiara.)* This is so sparkly!

GERALDINE: *(She wraps a fur around herself.)* And this is divine! Eric gets my vote.

BESS: I'm pretty sure you've voted for Eric, Henry, and Charles. She can't marry all of them.

GERALDINE: I say if Liz wants to form a harem, who are we to stop her?

ELIZABETH: A harem? I can barely get my head around marrying one man.

KAT: That's why we're here. To help you pick the right one. The one you're looking for. *(She looks to Geraldine.)* Emphasis on ONE. *(Geraldine shrugs.)* Read this one next. *(She hands Elizabeth a letter.)*

ELIZABETH: It's another letter from Philip.

BESS: Wait. I don't think I can listen to that damned Spaniard blather on again without some wine.

HELENA: *(She pulls a bottle and some glasses out from behind the bed.)* I snuck some sweet wine from the kitchens. *(The ladies hoot and cheer.)*

GERALDINE: Innocent little Helena! I didn't know you had it in you.

BESS: Let's get our drink on! *(Helena and Anne pass out the empty glasses.)*

ELIZABETH: *(She stands regally.)* As your sovereign, I forbid it, ladies. *(The girls stop and freeze.)*

HELENA: Oh, I'm so sorry. I...

ELIZABETH: I forbid the drinking of that swill. *(She goes to one of her cabinets and winks.)* I have the good stuff.

GERALDINE: Yes, queen!!

ANNE: Now there's the Liz we know and love!

ELIZABETH: *(She takes out a bottle of wine and begins to pour.)* The Italian ambassador gave me this dry red on his last visit. The Italians have it all figured out, ladies. Great wine, great food...

GERLADINE: Great lovers...

BESS: I'll drink to that. *(Bess and Geraldine clink their glasses.)*

KAT: Ladies, please!

BESS: Lighten up, Kat. Have some wine. *(She takes the bottle from Elizabeth and pours Kat a rather large glass.)*

ELIZABETH: *(She picks up Phillip's letter.)* Are we ready?

BESS: One second. *(She holds up a finger and takes a very large gulp of her wine, nearly draining it.)* Ok, Phillip. *(She raises her glass.)* Do your worst!

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Phillip enters.)*

PHILLIP: Elizabeth. I find myself writing to you a second time, without a reply. That's simply bad manners. It's rude to keep a king waiting. I thought you knew better than that. My ambassador tells me you've been avoiding him as if he were the devil.

ANNE: Are we sure he's not?

PHILLIP: I've heard your parliament is against our marriage, unless I become Protestant. *(He laughs without humor.)* Me, a heretic? I am Phillip II, defender of Catholic Europe against the Ottoman Empire and the Protestant Reformation. I will not change my religion for all the kingdoms in the world, much less would I do it for a woman.

But I will have you for my wife, Elizabeth, and I will see England restored to the true faith. Never forget it is to me that you owe your throne. I await your reply... One I expect you to give with all due haste. Yours impatiently, Phillip. *(He exits.)*

BESS: Well, I was right. That was the worst.

ANNE: He's the worst.

GERALDINE: At least I didn't vote for him.

ELIZABETH: I still can't believe he had the audacity to ask me to marry him.

KAT: Neither can I. Does he really think this country would welcome him back with open arms?

ANNE: He's delusional.

HELENA: He's dangerous.

BESS: And he's killing my buzz, onto the next!

GERALDINE: Here, here!

KAT: Here's another one from France. *(She hands a letter to Elizabeth.)*

ANNE: Uh oh, gird your loins, ladies.

GERLADINE: Never!

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Henry enters.)*

HENRY: My darling Elizabeth. I poured my heart out to you on the page. And yet, I have heard not a peep from England. I think you are playing hard to get, my naughty little amour. If you want me to chase you, then I will chase you. But I must tell you, I am quite the hunter and I've never had such beautiful prey.

England is a wet, gray little island. You deserve the sun. I can be your sun king, ma choupette. I will brighten your mornings. I will warm your afternoons. And I will scorch your nights... *(He winks touches himself with a finger, makes a sizzle sound, and acts as though he burned himself.)* Here in France, I am surrounded by beautiful women...

BESS: And men...

HENRY: But my only thoughts are of you! Please accept my proposal of marriage, sweet Elizabeth, and you will be the happiest and most satisfied woman in all of Europe. Waiting with great anticipation, your Henry. *(He exits.)*

ANNE: I'm moving Henry from the maybe pile to the yes pile. He's really growing on me.

BESS: Like a bisexual fungus.

KAT: Bess, enough! *(She turns to Elizabeth.)* Henry seems like a fine choice. Though I must say, I am still partial to Eric.

HELENA: Me too.

GERALDINE: If I had to pick, I guess I would say Charles. He has the most handsome portrait, and we'll just have to hope it's an accurate likeness.

ANNE: But does he fit Elizabeth's description of her perfect man?

BESS: We need more data. Do we have another letter from Charles?

ANNE: *(She searches the pile.)* Um.... Yes! Right here. *(She hands Elizabeth the letter.)*

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Ferdinand enters.)*

FERDINAND: *(He looks around for his son.)* Charles? *(He looks around again, impatient)* Charles! *(Charles still does not appear. Frustrated, Ferdinand goes offstage. He comes on again a few moments later dragging Charles behind him. He positions Charles in the correct spot and gestures for him to begin.)*



CHARLES: Elizabeth. My father had hoped we would hear back from you weeks ago. As we have not, he has bid me to write you another letter. *(He sighs and continues without much enthusiasm.)* Oh, dearest Elizabeth, how I long for you. I would be a most loving and faithful husband if you would only agree to be mine. My days seem never ending while I wait for your reply.

FERDINAND: Address the succession.

CHARLES: Speaking of your reply, if things progress for our match, my father would like a promise in writing that I, as your widower, would succeed you as king of England if you were to die childless.

BESS: That's a bold request.

CHARLES: But, of course, my father... I mean I... wish us to have many children.

FERDINAND: Good, good. Now onto religion.

CHARLES: Do you want to write this? *(His father glares.)* I also do not hold your Protestant faith against you or your people. But I require that I be allowed to practice my Catholic faith in public. I hope you will graciously accept these requests, and that they will not turn your heart against me. Write to me soon, Elizabeth. *(He turns to leave. His father turns him back around.)*

CHARLES: Oh, and I love you... or whatever... *(He exits. Ferdinand follows, shaking his head.)*

ANNE: He's a Catholic?

GERALDINE: And he wants to flaunt it in public?

BESS: Don't forget he also wants to be crowned king if Liz dies first.

ELIZABETH: See ladies? My perfect man is not amongst these suitors.

HELENA: But he did say he loves you. Don't you want love in your life? I can't wait to fall in love.

ELIZABETH: Being in love is well and good, Helena. I'm all for it. I love love! I just have no desire to ever marry.

ANNE: So you want, what... to remain chaste forever?

ELIZABETH: I'll be happy if my epitaph reads, "Here lies a gracious queen, having reigned long and well, lived and died a virgin." *(She rises and moves stage right.)*

GERALDINE: Oh, but all the wonderful things you would miss, Liz... Virginity isn't all it's cracked up to be.

KAT: Geraldine, hush!

BESS: Here, Kat, you need a refill. *(She pours more wine into Kat's glass.)*

HELENA: What if you do find your perfect man? Will you marry then?

ELIZABETH: *(She touches the box of Robert's letters and takes a moment before she answers.)* It's not that simple.

*(There is a soft click against Elizabeth's window, as though something tiny was thrown against it, like a pebble. All but Elizabeth miss it the first time as Elizabeth looks to the window. After the second click, everyone turns.)*

ANNE: What was that?

ELIZABETH: What was what?

ANNE: That noise.

ELIZABETH: Noise? I didn't hear a noise.

HELENA: I did, it's coming from your balcony window. *(Another click)* There it is again!

ELIZABETH: Oh, that noise It's... the... squirrels.

BESS: Squirrels?

ELIZABETH: Yes, the damn squirrels. Always throwing nuts at my window, the little devils.

ANNE: Want us to chase them away for you?

ELIZABETH: No! No... I want you to... uh... go to the kitchens?

ANNE: What?

ELIZABETH: Yes, the kitchens. I'm famished.

GERALDINE: Bess ate all the cookies, but we still have some chips.

ELIZABETH: *(Elizabeth takes the bottle of wine from Bess.)* No, that won't do. It's a dessert wine. It says so clearly on the label. We need... cakes!

BESS: I do love cake.

ELIZABETH: Yes, me too. Girls, will you go to the kitchens and get us some cakes?

ANNE: All of us?

ELIZABETH: Yes. We want as many as you can carry.

ANNE: Ok, you're the boss.

ROBERT: *(From offstage.)* Elizabeth!

*(All the ladies stop at the door and turn around, shock on their faces.)*

KAT: That's no squirrel.

BESS: Not unless our squirrels have learned to speak English.

HELENA: It's an assassin!

ANNE: Quick, call the guards!

BESS: HELP! HELP!

ELIZABETH: *(She covers Bess' mouth.)* NO! No, it's ok.

ANNE: How can it be ok? There's a strange man outside your window!

GERALDINE: Doesn't sound like a problem to me.

ELIZABETH: It's not a strange man. It's not a stranger at all. It's... well... my secret admirer.

ALL *(except Kat and Elizabeth)* WHAT?

ELIZABETH: I have a secret admirer.

GERALDINE: A secret admirer who comes to your window after sunset? Sounds more like a secret lover!

BESS: Liz, have you been holding out on us?

ELIZABETH: No, it's nothing like that. It's all completely innocent, I promise. I am still your virgin queen.

GERALDINE: For now...

KAT: Geraldine!

ANNE: Then what is going on, Liz?

ELIZABETH: I swear I'll explain everything later. Just give me a few moments with him, please.

KAT: *(She is displeased.)* Alone?

HELENA: Are you certain?

ELIZABETH: Yes, it's quite all right, I assure you.

BESS: We can't just leave! Not after you dropped a bombshell like this!

ELIZABETH: Please, go! Your... your queen commands it.

GERALDINE: Playing the queen card is cheating.

ROBERT: Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Ladies, please!

BESS: *(She crosses her arms and looks at Elizabeth.)* If we go now, you'll spill the tea when we come back?

ELIZABETH: Yes!

GERLADINE: Promise? Cause this is a story I've got to hear.

ELIZABETH: I promise.

GERALDINE: Ok, girls, let's give our queen her privacy. *(They begin to exit. She turns to Elizabeth.)* Just remember, it's not the size of the codpiece that matters, but how he...

KAT: Enough of this! Are you ladies of the privy chamber, or tavern wenches??

GERALDINE and BESS: Tavern wenches!!

KAT: Out! *(All girls, except Kat, exit to the kitchen but cast sly, smiling looks in Elizabeth's direction. Kat turns to Elizabeth and crosses her arms.)* So, it's him.

ELIZABETH: Who?

KAT: You know very well who. Mr. Squirrel.

ELIZABETH: It's fine, Kat. He's my oldest and dearest friend. We've known each other since we were children.

KAT: I didn't like him then and I like him less now.

ELIZABETH: Kat...

KAT: You told me you had ended things with him. You know I don't approve of this dalliance, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: I promise, I have no intentions of doing anything that would disappoint you.

KAT: It's not your intentions that trouble me. It's his.

ELIZABETH: Don't worry, he's harmless.

KAT: *(She hesitates.)* Elizabeth there's... There's something you should know.

ROBERT: *(He calls from offstage after throwing another pebble.)* Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Go, Kat. Get the cakes. I really am hungry.

KAT: Elizabeth...

ELIZABETH: It will be fine. You worry too much. *(Elizabeth all but shoves Kat out the door and shuts it behind her. Elizabeth then goes and opens her window. She looks down below.)* Hello?

ROBERT: *(He calls from offstage.)* It's me.

ELIZABETH: Climb up, quickly. And make sure you're not seen.

*(Elizabeth puts on her purple robe. She smooths her hair, straightens the robe, and primps. She then spots the letters and quickly shoves them all back in the chest just in time as Robert climbs through her window.)*

ELIZABETH: Robert! *(She runs at Robert, smiling. He picks her up and twirls her around. When he puts her down, she tosses her arms around his neck and kisses him.)*

ROBERT: *(He smiles.)* That was quite the welcome.

ELIZABETH: *(She giggles.)* We've had some wine.

ROBERT: Ah. I'm interrupting a party of some sort.

ELIZABETH: Girls' night. But I've sent my ladies on an errand. We should have at least twenty minutes.

ROBERT: Twenty minutes here. Ten minutes there. It's never enough, my love.

ELIZABETH: I know, but we have to be careful.

ROBERT: Of course. You're right. *(He takes off his hat and lays it on the bed.)* I've brought you something. *(From his belt he pulls a rose and hands it to Elizabeth with a little bow.)* An English rose for England's rose.

ELIZABETH: My sweet Robin. *(She smiles and kisses his cheek.)*

ROBERT: *(He goes to sit on her bed and almost sits on some nail polish. He picks up a bottle and inspects it, then notices the hunky portrait covering Elizabeth's portrait.)* What does girls' night entail, exactly?

ELIZABETH: Oh, a little of this, a little of that. Mostly painting nails, listening to music, gossiping...

ROBERT: *(He picks up the magazine off the bed.)* Reading trashy magazines...

ELIZABETH: That's Geraldine's.

ROBERT: *(He begins to flip through the magazine.)* The 50 Yummiest of Europe. Strange, they never came to interview me.

ELIZABETH: *(She laughs)* Alas, Robin, I'm afraid you didn't make the list.

ROBERT: Ridiculous.

ELIZABETH: I quite agree.

ROBERT: Well, I can overlook this insult as long as I'm number one on your list.

ELIZABETH: Always. *(She lays her head on his shoulder.)* I can relax around you and be myself. You don't pressure me or demand things of me. I love my ladies but even they seem to want more of me than I'm willing to give.

ROBERT: What are you talking about?

ELIZABETH: They won't leave me alone about my future marital status.

ROBERT: Ah, that... I saw the petition from the House of Commons

ELIZABETH: You did?

ROBERT: *(He nods.)* And Cecil tells me proposals are pouring in from all over Europe.

ELIZABETH: Is that all anyone can talk about?

ROBERT: So, it's true then? You've had offers.

ELIZABETH: *(She sighs.)* Yes. I was trying to keep them from you, but...

ROBERT: We don't keep secrets from each other.

ELIZABETH: No, we don't. *(She sighs and then opens the chest of letters. Robert whistles in response and picks up several, marveling at how many there are.)*

ROBERT: And how do you feel about all of this?

ELIZABETH: I feel like I want to change the subject.

ROBERT: Will you still love me after you marry some illustrious prince?

ELIZABETH: I'm not getting married. You of all people know how I feel. You've known since we were eight years old.

ROBERT: You were never quite the same after your father sent that poor girl to the block. I forget, was she his 4<sup>th</sup> wife? His 5<sup>th</sup>?

ELIZABETH: She was number five. I know everyone thought Kate Howard was just a silly young woman of no great consequence, but she was always kind to me. And her death reopened old wounds.

ROBERT: Your mother...

ELIZABETH: Yes.

ROBERT: And so you've turned your back on the whole idea of marriage. *(He kisses her hand.)* My poor, sweet Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: No, don't pity me. I am happy to remain single. As long as I still have you.

ROBERT: You'll always have me. But Cecil says a husband could...

ELIZABETH: Robert, I really don't want to talk about this. We're wasting time.

ROBERT: You're right. Here. *(He picks up the radio.)* Let's listen to some music. Lighten the mood.

ELIZABETH: I'd like that.

ROBERT: *(He fiddles with the nobs until he finds a song he likes.)* Well look at that... It's our song. *(He bows deeply and then offers Elizabeth his hand.)* May I have this dance?

*(Elizabeth smiles and places her hand in his. A volta plays, and they begin to dance. Slowly both the song and the dance transition to more modern fare. The song becomes a modern pop song, but in a renaissance style. At the end of the dance, Robert dips Elizabeth. The music fades out as he holds her in this position. He looks into her eyes.)*

ROBERT: Marry me.

ELIZABETH: What?

ROBERT: Marry me, Elizabeth.

*(Elizabeth scrambles out of the position and away from Robert.)*

ELIZABETH: So much for not demanding anything from me.

ROBERT: I am not demanding, I am asking.

ELIZABETH: Did you hear anything I just said?

ROBERT: Cecil tells me it is only a matter of time and choice.

ELIZABETH: Lord Cecil should mind his own business.

ROBERT: That's what I told him. But the petition contains some compelling arguments.

ELIZABETH: To hell with the arguments. I like our relationship exactly how it is. Why spoil it?

ROBERT: Exactly how it is? Stolen moments together, never daring to move beyond kissing, hiding our feelings from the world... This is perfection?

ELIZABETH: I didn't mean it like that, I... Oh, I don't know what I mean. This is all so confusing.

ROBERT: It seems rather simple to me. I love you. You love me. We should be wed.

ELIZABETH: It's not that simple and you know it. Marriage scares me, Robert. That's what I've tried to explain to my ladies, but they think they can help me find the perfect man to alleviate all my fears. I already have the perfect man *(she takes his hand)* and I'm still scared.

ROBERT: What exactly scares you?



ELIZABETH: If I were to marry, I'm scared I wouldn't be in charge of my own life anymore. I'm scared to lose my throne, even half of it, to a husband. I'm scared I would risk my life producing heirs who will spend their lives waiting around for me to die.

ROBERT: But you also want to be loved?

ELIZABETH: I do. But marriage... Does love have to equal marriage?

ROBERT: For most women, that's the ideal.

ELIZABETH: I'm not most women.

ROBERT: No, you certainly are not. *(He puts his arms around her.)* Maybe that's why I'm so crazy about you.

ELIZABETH: You're crazy if you think I'll marry you or anyone.

ROBERT: Then what about all of these? *(He gestures to the letters.)* Why are they on your bed and not tossed in some closet, forgotten?

ELIZABETH: I was just indulging the girls. They sort of forced my hand.

ROBERT: So, they were curious?

ELIZABETH: I suppose.

ROBERT: As am I. *(He grabs one of the letters before Elizabeth can stop him and begins to read while she tries to snatch the letter back.)* "Your beauty is beyond compare. You are like some red headed goddess descended from the heavens."

ELIZABETH: Robert, don't!

ROBERT: "I await your response with great hope and expectation. Yours forever, your most devoted servant and lover, Eric." You've certainly got this one wrapped around your little finger.

ELIZABETH: Stop, it's embarrassing!

ROBERT: Let's see what else he has to say.

ELIZABETH: Give it back!

ROBERT: *(He holds the letter high above his head. As Elizabeth jumps to grab it, he catches her waist and pulls her close. He looks into her eyes.)* Do you love me?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

ROBERT: Do I make you happy?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

ROBERT: Are you tired of hiding our affection for one another.

ELIZABETH: Yes, I am.

ROBERT: If you have to marry for the sake of England, can you honestly think of a husband who would love you more than I do? *(His lips move closer to hers.)*

ELIZABETH: No, I can't.

ROBERT: Then marry me. Your life will still be your own, I swear it. Though I may sit on a throne beside you, the country will be yours and yours alone. And we can have ten children or none; whatever you want. I won't care as long as we're together. I can make you happy, Liz. And each day I will endeavor to make you happier *(he kisses her left cheek)* and happier *(he kisses her right cheek)* and happier still. *(He kisses Elizabeth on her lips just as Kat comes barging through the door. Elizabeth and Robert break apart, Elizabeth looking guilty and Robert looking annoyed.)*

ELIZABETH: Kat!

KAT: Cecil is coming.

ELIZABETH: Now?

KAT: He says he has more letters from your suitors.

ELIZABETH: Damn it, I forgot. *(She whirls around to Robert.)* He can't see you, Robert!

ROBERT: Lord Cecil does hate me.

KAT: And why do you think that is?

ROBERT: I have a talent for making my enemies jealous.

KAT: You also have a talent for simply making enemies.

ELIZABETH: Kat, enough. Go stall Cecil for just a moment. *(Kat doesn't budge.)*  
Please!

KAT: You'll send this one away?

ELIZABETH: I will, just hurry! *(Kat looks at Robert with warning, then turns and stalks out of the room.)* Do you think Cecil knows about us?

ROBERT: Yes.

ELIZABETH: What? How?

ROBERT: I may have told him I intended to ask for your hand.

ELIZABETH: Robert!

ROBERT: What, Liz? Who cares what that old goatish clotpole thinks. You're queen of England!

ELIZABETH: You don't understand the delicate position I'm in. No one can know about us. You need to leave before he sees you.

ROBERT: *(He takes her hands.)* Everyone will know about us if you agree to marry me. *(He kisses her again. She puts her arms around him, lost in the moment.)*

KAT: *(From offstage.)* Right this way, my lord.

ELIZABETH: *(She breaks the kiss and begins to push him to the window.)* Robert, please, go!

ROBERT: Can I come back later tonight?

ELIZABETH: Fine, just go! Now!

ROBERT: I'm going. But remember what I said. I love you, Liz. I can make you happy and you know it. *(He kisses her hand quickly, turns, and scrambles out of the window, forgetting his hat on the bed.)*

*(At that moment, Kat enters with Cecil a few steps behind.)*

KAT: The Secretary of State, madam.

CECIL: *(Bowing)* Your Majesty.

ELIZABETH: *(She straightens her hair and smooths her robe.)* Lord Cecil, to what do I owe this late night visit?

CECIL: If you recall your majesty, I have more letters from your eager suitors.

ELIZABETH: Yes, so you said this afternoon.

CECIL: May I present them to you?

ELIZABETH: If you must.

CECIL: Yes, I must. It is my duty, but also my pleasure. Madam, my continual prayer is that God sends you a husband, and by and by a son, so that England may prosper under a male successor.

ELIZABETH: Is it so terrible serving a female queen, my lord?

CECIL: Yes. I mean no! No, no, your majesty. Of course not. I truly just want what is best for you, Madam. I hope God will direct your Highness to procure a father for your children so you can be as happy as other women.

ELIZABETH: Happy... *(She picks up Robert's rose off the bed.)* Hmm.

*(As Cecil says the following monologue, Elizabeth is lost in thought, staring at the rose. Eventually she smiles, smells the rose, and begins to hum the volta they danced to moments before.)*

CECIL: *(He begins to go through the letters.)* I am sure the man to make you happy can be found amongst these letters. Here. This first one is from Charles of Austria. An Austrian alliance would be quite beneficial. And the emperor is a great man. One can only imagine his son is as well. And here is a letter from Phillip. Of course, parliament is against the match, as well the country may be. Perhaps I'll put his letter at the bottom of the pile. Ah, a letter from France, surely from the Duke. His mother, Catherine de Medici, is quite in favor of the Duke taking you for his bride. It could heal the rift between our countries. And of course, I have saved the best for last. King Eric of Sweden has written you again. A fine Protestant king. Having Sweden for an ally could benefit England if war breaks out with Spain or France. *(Cecil sees and hears that Elizabeth is distracted.)* Your majesty, please pay attention!

ELIZABETH: *(Shaken from her reverie, she turns to Cecil.)* I spoke the truth to you earlier today, Lord Cecil, when I said I was not inclined to wed. But I... I find I may be persuaded that marriage could be a good thing. *(She smiles while looking at the rose.)* A... happy thing...

CECIL: *(He is surprised.)* Well yes, your majesty. It could be a happy thing indeed. For both you and the country.

ELIZABETH: Perhaps... *(She puts the rose in her hair, behind her ear.)* If you'll excuse me, my lord. We will continue this conversation tomorrow.

CECIL: I'd be delighted, your majesty. *(He bows as Elizabeth begins humming again and exits to her dressing room.)* I knew it! I knew she would come around! This is a wonderful day for England, Mistress Kat.

KAT: Master Secretary, I wouldn't be too excited.

CECIL: Whatever do you mean?

KAT: I don't think you will like her choice. *(She points to the hat discarded on the bed.)*

CECIL: *(He slowly walks to the bed as the information sinks in. He picks up the hat and looks both worried and disapproving.)* Robert Dudley?

KAT: Yes.

CECIL: *(He pauses and his face tightens.)* Does she know?

KAT: Not yet.

*(Blackout.)*

## ACT II

### SCENE I

The Queen's Bedchamber at Whitehall Palace

*(Lights come up on Elizabeth sitting on her bed. She smells the rose Robert gave her and holds his hat. She tucks the rose behind her ear and dons the hat. She retrieves her box of Robert's letters from her dresser. She pulls out the most recent letter. As she reads, Robert enters and stands where the other suitors have stood, and recites his letter to the audience.)*

ROBERT: My Dearest Liz, I am writing to thank your Majesty for the wonderful gift you sent to my home. Never has a Dudley owned so fine a horse. I am eager to go riding when the weather clears. Will you join me, my love? Nothing makes me happier than riding through the countryside with you. In truth, nothing makes me happier than simply being with you.

I was thinking about our childhood the other day. I was watching my brother's children playing in the meadow and was transported to the days we spent running around the gardens of your father's court. Who would have guessed then that you would one day sit upon the throne as the Queen of England? And now, thanks to your boundless generosity, lowly Robert Dudley is Earl of Leicester. My affection for you is as great now as it was then. Perhaps even greater.

Never forget I am your faithful servant, as well as your most devoted friend. I pray God keeps you in good health and happiness always. Yours now as much ever, your Robert

*(Robert turns to Elizabeth and bows. He then exits. Elizabeth holds the letter to her heart, as she did in Act One, Scene Two. She then crosses to her desk and sits. She extracts a quill and parchment from a drawer and begins to write.)*

ELIZABETH: My dearest Robert, though I saw you just moments ago and anticipate seeing you again later this evening, you are never far from my thoughts. And so, I have found a moment to respond to your most recent letter.

I appreciate your gratitude, but your thanks are not necessary. My Master of the Horse should have as fine a mount as the loftiest Englishman. And it is only proper that an earl should have a mighty steed.

I too often think of our childhood and the extraordinary twists and turns fate has delivered us to bring us to our present states. God is truly wondrous. I feel the same affection for you as I did in our youth. And you have never given your queen or your Liz cause to doubt you.

Your queen loves you as she loves all her people. Your Liz loves you as she loves no other man. *(She looks at the rose Robert gave her. She smells it and smiles. She then returns it to behind her ear.)* I promise I will consider your proposal most carefully. It has

never been my intention to marry, as you well know. But when I envision you by my side at court, by my side at parliament, by my side... in the marriage bed... I find my earlier intentions somewhat clouded.

But what is clear is my love for you. You have my heart always, my sweet Robin. As for my hand... I shall give you an answer anon. Love, Liz. *(She looks at the letter. She then crosses out her closing and writes new words.)* Love, your Liz.

*(Elizabeth seals the letter in an envelope, and then kisses it. She rises and places the letter and Robert's hat on the dresser. The ladies then enter just outside of the queen's door, carrying many, many cakes.)*

GERALDINE: Did you see the way that steward was looking at you, Anne?

ANNE: He wasn't looking at me.

BESS: Oh, he definitely was.

GERALDINE: As soon as we get Elizabeth married off, you're next, Anne!

HELENA: Wait, girls.

BESS: What, do *you* want to be next?

HELENA: No, it's not that. Listen, we all know it's a big deal that Elizabeth is finally interested in someone. So, let's not jump all over her as soon as we walk in the door. Let her tell us about this secret admirer in her own time. Got it?

BESS: She steals one bottle of wine and all of a sudden she thinks she's in charge.

HELENA: I'm serious!

GERALDINE: Ok, ok, we'll play it cool.

*(The ladies enter through the door.)*

HELENA: We come bearing sugar.

GERALDINE: And lots of it!

ELIZABETH: *(She laughs.)* Are there any sweets left in England?

ANNE: Well, you said you were famished.

GERALDINE: The bakers have outdone themselves. Where should we put them?

ELIZABETH: How about on the bed?

BESS: But then you'll get crumbs in your bed.

ELIZABETH: Luckily, I have ladies of the privy chamber who will change my sheets for me.

BESS: Wait... that's us! *(She crosses her arms at the thought of extra work.)*

*(Elizabeth laughs heartily, full of joy over Robert's visit. The girls begin to dig into their treats.)*

ANNE: Where's Kat?

ELIZABETH: She was called to an audience with Lord Cecil in his study.

GERALDINE: At this late hour? Without a chaperone? Ooo...

BESS: And she called us tavern wenches!

ELIZABETH: It's nothing quite so scandalous, I assure you.

GERALDINE: *(She glances at Helena, but cannot help herself.)* Speaking of scandalous, who was the mystery man?

HELENA: So much for playing it cool!

GERALDINE: Oh, come on, like you aren't desperate to know.

ANNE: I am!

BESS: Yeah, Liz, spill it!

GERALDINE: You promised.

ELIZABETH: And I am not one to go back on my promises. What do you want to know?

GERALDINE: Um, everything!

BESS: Wait, pour me another glass of wine, Anne. *(Anne does so.)* Ok, I've got cake, I've got wine... Spill the tea!

ANNE: Who is he, Liz?

GERALDINE: A handsome prince?

ANNE: Or a king?



BESS: I bet he's rich.

GERLADINE: I bet he's hot.

ANNE: Come on, Liz, tell us!

ELIZABETH: I'm not ready to divulge who he is yet. For now, we'll refer to him as my secret admirer.

BESS: Secret to us, not to you.

ELIZABETH: Fine, my paramour.

GERALDINE: Liz, you have to tell us who it is!

ELIZABETH: Not yet. Soon, but not yet.

GERALDINE: Then what CAN you tell us.

ELIZABETH: Well... *(She smiles and blushes.)* I can tell you that I'm in love.

*(The girls all shriek and squeal with delight.)*

ANNE: You're in love?

BESS: I can't believe you've been keeping this from us!

HELENA: I'm so excited for you!

GERALDINE: Our little Lizzie is in love!

ANNE: Tell us about tonight.

GERALDINE: Yes! Leave nothing out.

ELIZABETH: Well, first, he called to me from beneath my balcony, and then climbed to my window.

HELENA: It's like a scene out of a play!

ANNE: Someone should write that down.

GERALDINE: And you two were here, alone in your bedchamber?

ELIZABETH: Yes, but I assure you my virtue is still intact. We just talked and kissed...

GERALDINE: Kissed? Oooo!

ELIZABETH: *Just* kissed. And then we danced.

HELENA: This is all so romantic!

ANNE: How long has this been going on?

ELIZABETH: Oh, a little while.

BESS: How long is “a little while”?

ELIZABETH: Long enough to fill this. (*She retrieves the box of Robert’s letters from her dresser.*)

HELENA: What’s in there?

ANNE: More letters?

ELIZABETH: Letters, sonnets, poems... A love story in a box.

GERLADINE: You have to let us read one!

BESS: Yeah, if I had to listen to Phillip blather on like an imbecile letter after letter, at least let us hear from someone you actually like.

ELIZABETH: Ok, but I’ll have to do some editing to keep his identity secret. (*She pulls out a letter and begins to read.*) My dearest Liz...

BESS: Liz? I thought only we were allowed to call you Liz.

ANNE: Shh, I want to hear this!

ELIZABETH: My dearest Liz. I am writing you yet another letter. I can’t seem to help myself. Not a day goes by that I do not think of you. I long to see you again soon. Every day without you feels like perpetual night. I dread I will fall asleep and then wake to find that our courtship had been but a dream, and that you were never mine. But every day I get to be in your presence I am reminded that the dream is true. You are mine and I am yours.

My heart is full of so many things to say to you, but I fear my mind cannot translate the language of my heart. So let me just say this: I love you. Three simple words, yet never have I spoken or even penned in ink these words to another. Only to you, my darling. Not only do I love Elizabeth the queen, but I love Liz, the woman. You could be a housemaid and my love for you would be as true.

I wish I was now in your arms, or you in mine, for I think it long since I kissed you. Forever yours... *(She looks at the girls and smiles.)* Your paramour.

*(Some of the girls are dabbing the tears from their eyes, others have their hand over their heart.)*

HELENA: Oh, Liz!

GERALDINE: That was beautiful.

ANNE: He sounds like everything you want in a husband, Liz.

ELIZABETH: You know, you just might be right, Anne.

GERALDINE: What?

ANNE: I am?

GERALDINE: Is it the wine going to my head, or are you finally opening up to the idea of marriage?

ELIZABETH: I don't know yet if I'll marry, but I do know I can't say yes to anyone else when I'm in love with another man.

HELENA: You have to follow your heart.

GERALDINE: She's right, you know.

BESS: *(To Geraldine.)* What would you know about following your heart? Unless your heart is located in your....

HELENA: Enough! Not to sound like Kat, but enough! Liz has a big decision to make.

ANNE: Yeah, Liz. *(She picks up some of the suitors' letters.)* What are you going to do about all of these?

ELIZABETH: I truly don't know.

HELENA: *(She goes to Elizabeth and puts her arm around her.)* What is your heart telling you?

ELIZABETH: That it's time to turn down the rest of my suitors.

GERALDINE: Are you sure?

ELIZABETH: *(She takes a moment to think, then comes to a decision.)* I am.

GERALDINE: Well, then, we better get to it. *(She grabs a letter from the pile.)* Here, start with this one.

ELIZABETH: Ah, another letter from Phillip.

BESS: *(She shakes her head and pours herself more wine.)* This guy again... *(She takes a big gulp.)*

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Phillip enters, quite angry.)*

PHILLIP: Several letters have I now sent you, and have I received even a single reply? No. No, I have not. I find myself perplexed... And so, I have questions for you, Elizabeth. An *inquisition* if you will...

Do you think it is wise to stay single in the face of Catholic Europe? You hold your throne by tenuous strings, my dear. There are enemies all around you, hungry for your crown and your lands. Your sister saw the sense in taking a strong husband as quickly as possible. Rumors said that you were smarter than Mary, but that does not seem to be the case.

Do you think it is safe to reject me? Perhaps you didn't know; I have been working on something new here in Spain. My armada. The most spectacular naval fleet the world has ever seen. King Phillip II and his Spanish Armada will be remembered for all of history! My new ships are glorious, as glorious as Almighty God Himself. And I am sorely tempted to turn my ships in the direction of England if you do not agree to be mine.

Do you think yourself such a prize that you can afford to turn down my offer? You are not, my lady. Believe me, if it was not to serve God, I would have not gotten into this mess with you. Nothing would make me propose to an illegitimate English heretic except the clear knowledge that it would gain England for God's service and faith.

ANNE: Did he just say illegitimate?

BESS: That bastard!

Phillip: Your time grows short, Elizabeth. I gave you your crown and I can take it away again. You WILL respond to me with all due haste, and you WILL agree to be my wife. England and Spain will be aligned once more, and England will return to the true faith. Mark. My. Words. Signed, Phillip.

GERLADINE: How dare he!

ANNE: Who does he think he is?

BESS: Let me at him! I'll teach him some manners.

HELENA: Don't worry, Liz. I'm sure he was just bluffing about the armada.

ELIZABETH: *(She stands calmly.)* I am not worried. And I am not afraid. Helena, take down my reply.

HELENA: *(She nods, holding the parchment and a quill. She writes as Elizabeth speaks.)* Whenever you're ready.

ELIZABETH: King Phillip, I have received your many letters. My delay in responding was only due to how thoroughly I considered your offer. I do not owe my throne to your influence, sir. I owe it to my people. And it is with my people's interests at heart that I emphatically reject your proposal. I am proudly Protestant and could never change my views.

The English Protestants remember all too well the human bonfires you and my sister lit, fueled by men and women, priests and peasants. Perhaps you never heard the song my people sang during your joint reign. Allow me to enlighten you, your majesty. *(She turns to her friends.)* Ladies?

LADIES: *(Reciting.)*

"God, save the faithful of your land,  
We are not well treated in Phillip's hands,  
When these with violence were burned to death.  
We wished for our Elizabeth!"

*(On the last line, they smile at Elizabeth and raise their glasses.)*

ELIZABETH: They wished for their Elizabeth. Well, here I am, and here I will stay! My people are against this match. My parliament is against this match. And, most importantly and most vehemently, I am against this match.

It is time you learn I am not my sister. Do not think to threaten me with your inquisition or your precious armada. Men fight wars, Phillip, but women win them! Signed, the undoubted, true queen of England, Elizabeth I.

*(The ladies clap and cheer for Elizabeth standing up for herself and England.)*

PHILLIP: The audacity to talk to *me* in such a manner! I am near speechless at your brazenness! Puta ilegítima! *(He controls his anger with difficulty. He turns menacingly to*

*face Elizabeth directly and warns her...*) You have not seen the last of me, Elizabeth Tudor. *(He whirls around, his cape flying behind him, and stalks offstage.)*

BESS: Ding dong, the Spaniard's dead!

ANNE: If only.

BESS: Well, at least his pursuit of our Lizzie is dead.

ELIZABETH: Dead and gone. It was never in question, ladies.

GERALDINE: Good.

BESS: Onto the next!

HELENA: *(She grabs a letter.)* Ok, this one is from Archduke Charles.

GERALDINE: What a shame. He is really handsome.

ANNE: And really reluctant.

ELIZABETH: Let's be honest, ladies. Charles and I were never meant to be.

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Ferdinand enters. Charles enters, looking bored as ever. Ferdinand smiles broadly and gestures to Charles.)*

CHARLES: Look are we doing this thing, or...? *(He makes an inquiring gesture, moving his hands back and forth. Ferdinand stares at him, his mouth agape.)*

ELIZABETH: *(After a pause)* Is that it?

HELENA: *(She turns the paper over, looking for more writing.)* Yep. That's the lot.

FERDINAND: *(He exits slowly, shaking his head.)* Have kids, they said... It'll be great, they said...

ELIZABETH: *(She chuckles.)* Well, I don't think this one will be too difficult to reply to. Helena, if you will? *(Helena nods and retrieves another piece of parchment.)* Though you seem oh so eager to marry me, dear Charles, I'm afraid I must let you down. I currently have no desire to marry, though God may change my heart in the future, because through Him all things are possible. Until then, I must politely decline your proposal. I hope you are not too disappointed.

I trust that you and the emperor will respect my honesty. I wish you all the happiness in the world, and I hope England and Austria can maintain a long-lasting alliance. Yours in friendship, Elizabeth.

CHARLES: Oh, thank God! *(He makes a squeal of glee and skips off happily.)*

ELIZABETH: Well, that was easy.

GERALDINE: And another one bites the dust.

ELIZABETH: Pass me the next letter.

BESS: Here. *(She passes Elizabeth another letter.)*

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Henry enters, wearing an elaborate gown and covers his face with a fan.)*

ELIZABETH: Who is this one from?

*(Henry lowers his fan and winks and blows a kiss at the audience.)*

BESS: The Duke of Anjou.

HENRY: Ma chere, why do you toy with your Henry in such a way? I have sent you letter after letter, and yet not a whisper from England has reached my ears. I am a sensitive soul *(he fans himself)* and I cannot take this silence. Why have you not written to me, mon amour? What could be the reason? Is it our age difference? I already told you, ma belle, that is of little importance to me! I have enough youth and vigor for the both of us.

ELIZABETH: I'm twenty-five. Not exactly over the hill...

HENRY: Perhaps you have heard rumors about me? If we are to be wed, we should have no secrets between us, oui? Yes, it is true, I enjoy the company of both women and men. Why only sample one dish when you can try the whole buffet? And yes, from time to time, I enjoy wearing gowns. But how can I resist when these dresses are nearly as beautiful as I am? *(He twirls.)* If you wish, we could share!

ANNE: See? I told you.

HENRY: But not even the prettiest gown can compare to your beauty. I look at your portrait every day and sigh, wondering why I have yet to hear from you *(he sighs and fans himself again)*. Write to me, my darling Elizabeth, and say you will be mine. You can call me your little French frog. Your petite grenouille! I will hop out of bed every morning with my only thought being how to make you happy. And I will hop into bed each night determined to make you happier still. *(He twirls the fan.)*

The entire French court eagerly awaits your reply. I hope to hear from you very, very soon. Adieu, ma chere. Signed your hopeful Henry.

ELIZABETH: He does have quite a way with words.

BESS: I guess the dress thing isn't so bad. It is the 16<sup>th</sup> century, after all.

GERALDINE: Shakespeare's boys do it all the time.

BESS: Let me see his portrait again. *(Elizabeth passes her the portrait.)* He has more rings than I do!

GERALDINE: *(She takes the portrait.)* Hmm... Small hands... You're better off, Liz.

HELENA: But turn him down gently. *(She picks up a quill and parchment.)*

ELIZABETH: Dearest Henry, as you are the son of Catherine de Medici and heir to your brother the king, trust that I took your proposal as an honor. But alas, I find I must humbly decline. Your affections would be better placed elsewhere. I'm sure all the princesses of Europe will be lining up to become your bride. I simply find I am not inclined to marry.

There is also the problem with you being Catholic, as so many of my suitors are. I must insist that, if I were to ever take a husband, he abide by my country's Protestant laws. I fear a great Catholic prince such as yourself could never abandon his faith.

As I end this letter, let me assure you, mon ami, your lifestyle choices have nothing to do with my reply. However, I fear the English people may be more conservative in their views. I hope you take no offense to my rejection. Please give my regards to the king and your dear mother. Yours in friendship, Elizabeth.

HENRY: Reject me? The beautiful Henry, Duke of Anjou? Frigide, étroit d'esprit prude! You're just jealous that I look better in this than you ever could! *(He twirls the skirts of his gown, tosses his head, and makes an angry gesture with his fan before gliding off stage.)*

ANNE: Well... Last but not least, it's time to respond to Eric.

HELENA: I feel bad. He was my favorite.

GERALDINE: We could always send him your portrait, Helena.

HELENA: Oh, stop!

GERALDINE: You would be the envy of Europe!

BESS: Look, she's blushing!



*(Helena hides her face behind a pillow.)*

ELIZABETH: Leave poor Helena alone, girls. Read me Eric's letter, Bess.

*(A spotlight comes up stage right. Eric enters, smiling.)*

ERIC: Knock, knock. Who's there? Me again! Eric, King of the most glorious country of Sweden. Why oh why have I not heard from you, my Elizabeth? Are you not receiving my letters? This thought occurred to me the other day, so I decided the best way to woo you would be in person! I assembled my fastest ships and set sail for England.

ELIZABETH: *(She is taken aback.)* What did he say?

GERALDINE: He's coming here?

ELIZABETH: Oh, God!

BESS: Hold on, there's more.

ERIC: On I sailed to your distant shores, eager to meet my future bride. But alas, we were driven back by storms in the North Sea and had to return home. *(Elizabeth looks relieved.)* Although fortune has been hard and cruel and prevented me from coming through stormy seas to claim you, I am undeterred!

We will be together, I have no doubt! We will start a Protestant empire that will wash over Europe and cleanse the church of its evils. All I need is you by my side, Elizabeth. You are the only one for me. I could never even look at another while you have hold of my heart. Please say you love me too.

If you do not marry me, I fear I will go mad! Do not leave me to such a fate. My life is in your very hands. Send me your acquiescence to my proposal, my love, and not even the greatest tempest Neptune could conjure would stop me from sailing to your side this time! Yours so ever faithfully, I love you and you alone, I really mean it, cross my heart, Eric. P.S. I really, really love you.

GERALDINE: He's got it bad.

BESS: And he's certainly nice to look at.

GERALDINE: What a shame.

ANNE: But our Liz is in love, remember?

ELIZABETH: Thank you, Anne. Take this down, please. *(She turns toward Eric.)* My long-suffering Eric, I believe the love you have towards me is true, but I am grieved that I cannot satisfy your Serene Highness with the same kind of affection. Please do not go

mad. I simply find I do not have the heart to take a husband, at least not at the moment. And so, I hope your majesty will no longer waste your precious time pining for me.

I am saddened to hear of your troubles at sea, but perhaps it is a sign from God that we are not meant to marry. After all, I could never leave England for any consideration in the world, and it is not realistic for you to permanently abandon your kingdom. We would have to live apart, dear Eric, and that is no fit state for man and wife.

I therefore beg you to please set a limit to your love. Do not let it advance again beyond the laws of friendship. In fact, I would rather you love me like a sister, and I will consider you my dear Protestant brother. God keep your majesty for many years in good health and safety. From your royal sister and friend, Elizabeth.

ERIC: *(He cries, full of woe.)* Gustav!

**(\*Note from the playwright\*** Gustav is an optional character. If you wish to omit him, please contact Lauren Grove for an alternate final Eric letter.)

GUSTAV: *(He enters.)* I am here, your majesty.

ERIC: Gustav! She has rejected us.

GUSTAV: Who, sire?

ERIC: Queen Elizabeth of England.

GUSTAV: I am sorry to hear of it, your majesty. I'll add her rejection to the others.

ERIC: Ja, ja... Wait, what others? Mary, Queen of Scots?

GUSTAV: *(He checks his list.)* She also said no.

ERIC: Princess Renata of Lorraine?

GUSTAV: Non.

ERIC: Anna of Saxony?

GUSTAV: Nein.

ERIC: Surely Duchess Christine of Hesse did not turn me down...

GUSTAV: I'm afraid you are incorrect, sire.

ERIC: But I am Eric, King of the most glorious country of Sweden!

GUSTAV: Yes, I know, your majesty. Do not fret. Remember your delicate mental state. *(He puts an arm around Eric and begins to guide him offstage.)* How about we get you some meatballs with lingonberry sauce. They're your favorite.

ERIC: I do love a meatball...

GUSTAV: And then you can assemble a bookshelf. Won't that be nice?

ERIC: Oh, goody! *(They exit.)*

ELIZABETH: Well, that's that.

BESS: I kind of feel bad for some of them. I mean, NOT Phillip, but the rest.

ELIZABETH: I'm sure they'll each find love in due time.

ANNE: Speaking of love, it's time to tell us who your paramour is!

ELIZABETH: Haven't you guessed by now?

GERALDINE: Let me think... It can't be someone foreign; it would be too difficult to plan a secret rendezvous to England for a foreign nobleman, especially a prince or a king.

BESS: Yeah, we would have heard something.

GERALDINE: Ok, so if he's not foreign, he's domestic.

BESS: An Englishman.

GERALDINE: That narrows it down considerably.

ANNE: Is it the Earl of Arundel?

ELIZABETH: Of course not!

BESS: What about the Earl of Devonshire?

ELIZABETH: Nope.

GERALDINE: Sir Christopher Hatton?

ELIZABETH: Wrong again.

HELENA: The Duke of Norfolk?

ELIZABETH: Not even close.

BESS: *(She groans in frustration.)* I give up! Just tell us Liz! *(She throws a pillow at Elizabeth.)*

GERALDINE: Yeah, tell us! *(All the ladies begin tossing pillows at Elizabeth as she laughs and tries to defend herself.)*

ELIZABETH: All right, all right! *(She takes a beat, and then answers, smiling.)* It's Robert.

ALL LADIES: Robert?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

GERALDINE: Robert who?

ELIZABETH: Sir Robert Dudley, of course.

BESS: The horse guy??

ELIZABETH: The Master of the Horse, Bess. And also Earl of Leicester.

GERALDINE: *(There is a beat as all the ladies absorb this, disappointed. Then Gerladine speaks.)* Is this a joke?

ELIZABETH: What, no, of course not!

BESS: I knew you two were close, but I thought you were just friends

GERALDINE: I thought you had better taste.

ELIZABETH: How can you say that?

GERALDINE: Well, he's... he's...

ELIZABETH: He's my dearest friend.

BESS: Uh, rude!

ELIZABETH: You know I adore you all. But I've known Robert since I was a child.

*(Kat enters, unseen by Liz or the ladies.)*

ANNE: So that was Robert calling to you earlier? The one who came to your room? He was the one you were alone with?

ELIZABETH: Yes, but as I said, it was all rather innocent. We danced, we kissed, and then... well... And then he asked me to marry him.

*(Before any of the ladies can respond, Kat slams the door shut, surprising everyone.)*

KAT: He WHAT?

ELIZABETH: *(Elizabeth stands quickly, alarmed.)* Kat... I didn't expect you back so soon.

KAT: *(She crosses to the girls and begins to hand them the magazines, nail polish, radio, etc.)* Time to go, ladies.

HELENA: But it's girls' night.

ANNE: Come on, Kat.

KAT: Out, now. And dress yourselves. The party is over.

BESS: Don't be such a bummer, Kat.

KAT: *(She speaks forcefully for the first time.)* Enough. *(The girls are silent.)* You need to leave. I require a word with our queen.

GERALDINE: *(The ladies begin to exit but Geraldine hangs back a moment. She whispers to Kat.)* Everything she said about Robert... Doesn't she know?

KAT: I'll handle it.

*(Geraldine nods and exits.)*

ELIZABETH: Was that really necessary, Kat?

KAT: Apparently so. Up until tonight I thought you had ended this foolish liaison with Robert. You promised me. And then he shows up at your window. Evidently you flirted, danced, kissed, and now that cad has asked you to marry him! This is exactly what Lord Cecil and I feared. He's no good for you Elizabeth. Why can't you see that?

ELIZABETH: I never said I was marrying Robert.

KAT: Then you're rejecting his proposal?

ELIZABETH: I... I don't know.

KAT: You must set him aside, Elizabeth, before he ruins you.

ELIZABETH: The thought of giving up Robert is too much to bear. I've had so much sorrow and such little joy in my life. I don't want to deny myself the happiness of his company.

KAT: I am begging you to see reason. If you marry Robert, you will know true sorrow. Not only will your reputation suffer, but you could plunge our country into civil war. He has powerful enemies. I don't know what they would do if you place Robert on the throne by your side.

ELIZABETH: My people would never rebel against me. They love their queen.

KAT: But they despise Robert. Marry someone else. *(She takes some of the letters and puts them in Elizabeth's hands.)* Anyone else.

ELIZABETH: You sound like Cecil.

KAT: Lord Cecil is a good man. He only wants what's best for you and the country. He truly cares for your wellbeing.

ELIZABETH: Robert is good for my wellbeing.

KAT: I assure you, he is not. I don't even know what you see in him.

ELIZABETH: Loyalty

KAT: Loyalty?! Of all the people to think of as loyal...

ELIZABETH: He has been my constant companion, Kat. We had the same tutors in our youth, we spent time together at my father's court, and we shared so many wonderful afternoons riding at Hatfield. *(Beat.)* And he never abandoned me. Even when I was deserted by everyone else during Mary's reign, his kindness didn't lessen a single degree. You don't understand what that means to me.

KAT: I don't understand? I was the one who never abandoned you. I was the one who raised you after the passing of your poor mother. I was the one who was there with you every step of the way, through good times and bad. When you became queen and asked me to be your chief lady in waiting, I didn't hesitate. That is loyalty, Elizabeth. Robert knows nothing of loyalty.

ELIZABETH: I know all you have done for me and I thank you, Kat, but when it comes to Robert, you just don't...

KAT: *(At her wits end, she yells out the truth.)* Damn it Elizabeth, he's sleeping with someone else!

*(The words hang heavy in the air for several tense moments.)*

ELIZABETH: No, that's not possible.

KAT: Where do you think he goes when he's not with you? How do you think he spends his time? Robert is no saint.

ELIZABETH: You're lying.

KAT: The only lies I'm guilty of are the lies of omission. I should have told you sooner, but I didn't want to hurt you. And I thought you would choose a fit consort sooner or later and this Robert nonsense would be forgotten.

ELIZABETH: This is absurd.

KAT: *(She picks up the box of Robert's letters.)* All these letters you cherish from him; he's written similar sweet letters to another. I know. I've seen them.

ELIZABETH: I don't believe you. You're just trying to get me to turn on Robert. You never liked him.

KAT: But I love you. Elizabeth. *(She takes Elizabeth's hands and looks her in the eye. Her voice softens.)* And I would never lie to you. Never. I'm so sorry, but it's the truth. There's someone else.

*(Elizabeth lets Kat's words sink in. She slowly walks to the bed and sits upon it.)*

ELIZABETH: Who knows?

*(Kat sits softly on the bed and takes Elizabeth hand.)*

KAT: Everyone.

ELIZABETH: So I'm the last fool to know. I see. How long has this been going on?

KAT: Months.

ELIZABETH: Who is it?

KAT: It doesn't matter.

ELIZABETH: That bad?

KAT: No, just... don't do that to yourself. It doesn't matter who it is, it matters that it happened.

ELIZABETH: So it's that bad. Who is it, Kat?

KAT: Elizabeth...

ELIZABETH: Tell me.

KAT: Your cousin, Lettie Knollys.

ELIZABETH: My own cousin.

KAT: I'm so sorry.

ELIZABETH: *(She rises from the bed and begins to pace.)* And everyone knows... How dare he... I never even wanted to marry. But he got into my head and... No! *(Elizabeth retrieves Robert's letters from their special box. She begins to tear them up, ripping through each one.)* All the time I wasted... All the lies he made me believe... All he wanted was to be king. I bet that was his goal from the start. I don't know if he ever even truly loved me. I was just his ticket to the throne. That bastard! That... *(She throws the box)* LIAR! *(Her rage rushes out of her and she sinks to her knees, exhausted and heartbroken. She quietly laments.)* My heart... it feels like it's breaking into a million pieces. I can't breathe.

KAT: *(She goes to Elizabeth and holds her in a maternal embrace.)* I know, I know...

ELIZABETH: How could he do this to me? I'm his queen.

KAT: Then be a queen.

ELIZABETH: What do you mean?

KAT: *(She wipes the tears from Elizabeth's eyes.)* Don't let Cecil or Robert or any man tell you what to do. You are strong, Elizabeth. Strong and intelligent and capable. You know it and I know it. It's time for you to show everyone else.

ELIZABETH: *(She takes a moment, and then takes a deep breath.)* You're right, as always. *(She wipes her eyes and slowly rises.)* There's no time to mourn. I have a country to run. England needs a queen, not a sad, scared little princess.

KAT: I wouldn't call you a scared little princess.

ELIZABETH: No, I have been. I've been so unsure of myself, a woman in a man's position. But I am no longer afraid.

KAT: And what about marriage?

ELIZABETH: I have never been inclined to marry, and so I won't. Ever. *(Kat begins to protest.)* No, Kat, my mind is made up. In fact, here. *(She begins to gather the remnants*



*of Robert's letters. Kat bends to help.)* Take these and burn them. I never want to see them again.

KAT: Are you sure?

ELIZABETH: Yes, as sure as I will be England's virgin queen. Their Gloriana. And it starts now.

*(Just then, the sound of pebbles hitting the balcony window is heard.)*

KAT: His timing could not be worse. Allow me to get rid of him for you.

ELIZABETH: No need. His spell on me has been most assuredly broken. I'll see to it myself.

KAT: If you're sure...

ELIZABETH: I am. Thank you, Kat. For everything. *(She takes Kat's hands.)* I now see I had a best friend all along. *(They embrace.)* Go fetch Lord Cecil for me, if you would, and then gather the court in the throne room.

KAT: I don't want to leave you alone with him.

ELIZABETH: I will be fine. *(She takes Kat's hands.)* You raised me well. Send me my ladies so they may dress me.

KAT: Your majesty. *(She smiles at Elizabeth and gives her a courtly curtsy, full of reverence.)*

*(Kat exits. Elizabeth takes a deep breath and gathers herself. She goes to the window and opens it. She calls down to Robert.)*

ELIZABETH: Come.

*(While she waits for him to scale the wall, Elizabeth removes the poster from her wall the girls put up in Act One, revealing her self portrait once again. Though she is in pajamas and a robe, she removes her purple crown from her dresser and places it atop her head.)*

ROBERT: *(He scrambles through the window.)* You really must get better guards, darling. That was the second time tonight I was able to sneak up to your balcony.

ELIZABETH: I will make a note of that. Trust me, my lord.

ROBERT: My lord? Why are you speaking as though we're at court. It's just us, Liz.

ELIZABETH: Have you come to inquire about an answer to your proposal?

ROBERT: Well, yes, but what is this? Why are you being so proper?

ELIZABETH: I am a queen. This is how I speak to my subjects.

ROBERT: And how will you speak to me when I'm your husband?

ELIZABETH: *When?* You presume too much.

ROBERT: But I asked you to marry me.

ELIZABETH: On that, I find I must disappoint you, sir. I am declining your proposal.

ROBERT: What? No... Elizabeth, what has gotten into you?

ELIZABETH: The truth. The truth about you, and the truth about myself.

ROBERT: I don't understand.

ELIZABETH: You of all people should understand.

ROBERT: You need to start making some sense.

ELIZABETH: My answer is no.

ROBERT: I can make you happy. You know what we have been to each other, Liz. Don't say no.

ELIZABETH: Our shared childhood has blinded me to your faults, but no more. I will not marry you, Lord Dudley.

ROBERT: (*His dismay turns to anger*) Who will you take as your husband, then? That pumpkin Eric? Or will you repeat your sister's mistakes and marry Phillip?

ELIZABETH: I shall marry no one. I will be a queen without a consort.

ROBERT: I see, so you're determined to break all the rules. Just like your mother.

ELIZABETH: Watch yourself, Robert.

ROBERT: You play the shy maid with me but then turn around and gossip about your gallant suitors with your friends behind my back.

ELIZABETH: And what have you been doing behind my back?

ROBERT: Excuse me?

ELIZABETH: Tell me, how is Lettie?

ROBERT: *(He is shocked for a moment, but then tries to quickly recover.)* Lettie? Lettie who?

ELIZABETH: Are there so many Letties in England, sir? *(She glares at him.)* Lettie Knollys, my dear cousin.

ROBERT: How should I know?

ELIZABETH: Come now, we don't keep secrets from each other, remember? Though you seem to have been keeping a big one for many months. Exactly how long have you been sleeping with Lettie?

ROBERT: Who told you these lies? Kat Ashley?

ELIZABETH: They are not lies. And it could have been anyone. You have so many enemies, as you have said, and I'm beginning to see why.

ROBERT: It was that damned Cecil, wasn't it?

ELIZABETH: Be careful how you address Lord Cecil in the future. He may be old and a bit uptight, but he wants what's best for me and this country. You're not even half the man he is.

ROBERT: Even IF I were courting Lettie, could you blame me? How much longer was I supposed to commit to this... this... *unfulfilled* dalliance with you, Liz? I'm a man, and I have needs!

ELIZABETH: I am a queen. My current need is for you to shut up with your excuses. The way I see it, you couldn't bed the real thing, so you found yourself a double. Lettie is like me in so many ways, another pretty redhead, and my cousin! Well done, my sweet Robin.

ROBERT: You can't talk to me that way!

ELIZABETH: I can talk to you any way I please. I am queen of England. And your queen is demanding the truth!

ROBERT: *(He paces and runs his hand through his hair before finally coming clean.)* Fine. I may have been seeing Lettie behind your back, I won't deny it any longer, but that is nothing compared to what you have done to me!

ELIZABETH: What have I done to you?

ROBERT: You wounded my pride. No woman should do that to a man.

ELIZABETH: I wounded YOUR pride?

ROBERT: You strung me along, like a puppet. You would send me sweet letters, whisper that you loved me, grant me kisses when the mood struck you... But nothing more. You toyed with me just like you're toying with all your foreign boyfriends. Did it ever once occur to you that I could be your husband before I broached the subject? Of course not. Men are mere playthings to you, just like your whore mother.

ELIZABETH: *(She slaps Robert across the face, her eyes blazing with anger)* How dare you.

ROBERT: *(He rubs his cheek and scowls.)* And there it is. The famous Tudor temper! It was only a matter of time before it surfaced. All you've ever really been is a Tudor. A damned Tudor!

ELIZABETH: Yes, I am a Tudor, through and through.

ROBERT: And just like all the Tudors before you, your arrogance is showing.

ELIZABETH: What arrogance?

ROBERT: You want to be loved, but you don't want to get married. You want to be wooed, but you don't want to lose your independence. You want my utter devotion, but you won't allow me to share your bed. You can't have it all.

ELIZABETH: Why not? I'm the queen of England. If I can't have it all, what woman can?

ROBERT: That's my point. It's a man's world, Elizabeth. You're a woman. You're not your father and you're not your father's son. You are one of the fairer sex and you need a man to guide you and protect you. Forget Lettie and let that man be me, damnit!

ELIZABETH: I need no man! Least of all you!

ROBERT: *(He throws up his hands in frustration.)* You're impossible!

ELIZABETH: You're a cheat!

ROBERT: And you're cold hearted!

ELIZABETH: You're a liar!

ROBERT: You are the most stubborn woman I have ever met!

ELIZABETH: Then why did you even want to marry me?!

ROBERT: *(He yells loudly.)* Because I love you!

ELIZABETH: *(She yells right back.)* And I love you!

*(The truth of their feelings hangs in the air. The tension begins to lessen as they each catch their breath, trying to control their temper. Robert sighs and sits on the bed.)*

ROBERT: Then how did we get here?

ELIZABETH: Your wandering eye.

ROBERT: We were in trouble before Lettie.

ELIZABETH: *(She also sighs and sits.)* I know. I think... I think the moment I was made queen of England, our fates were sealed.

ROBERT: I used to think nothing would ever come between us.

ELIZABETH: Well now something has... A crown

ROBERT: And there's no getting around it?

ELIZABETH: *(She puts a hand on his knee.)* No, Robert.

ROBERT: I swear I'll never even look at another woman. I...

ELIZABETH: *(She takes his hand and speaks firmly but not unkindly.)* Robert... it's over.

ROBERT: *(He nods and takes a moment before he speaks.)* I never meant to hurt you.

ELIZABETH: Nor I you. *(She rises and hands him back the rose he gave her.)* But I think it's time for you to go.

ROBERT: *(He looks at the rose, hurt, but eventually nods. He stands and bows sadly.)* Your majesty. *(He crosses the stage but stops just before he goes through the window.)* Tell me one last thing. Who will love you as much as I have?

ELIZABETH: My people.

*(Robert nods sadly and exits. Elizabeth lets out a long breath. For a moment she is alone on stage, lost in her thoughts. She almost cries again, but is able to gather herself. She goes to her portrait and stares up at it.)*

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth, Queen of England in her own right. We don't need a man, do we? *(She smiles to herself. Geraldine, Bess, Helena, and Anne enter, dressed in renaissance attire.)* Good, ladies, I need you to dress me. *(The ladies get right to work and begin to redress Elizabeth in a beautiful white gown. After a few moments, Bess is brave enough to be the first to speak.)*

BESS: So, the party really is over?

ELIZABETH: Yes, Kat has gathered the court, and I don't want to keep my people waiting.

GERALDINE: Are you going to tell them about your engagement to Robert?

ELIZABETH: No. There will be no more talk of me and Robert Dudley.

GERALDINE: Oh, thank God! I have to tell you, Liz, I thought you had gone off the deep end when you...

ELIZABETH: *(Firmly)* Enough.

GERALDINE: Sorry, I just...

ELIZABETH: Ladies, I thank you for your friendship. I truly cherish you all. But from now on, you must remember I am not just your friend, but, most importantly, your queen. Our relationship may change now, but I will always hold each of you in my heart.

ANNE: Yes, your majesty.

HELENA: Of course, your majesty.

BESS: Will there... will there still be girls' nights? *(She remembers herself and quickly adds a curtsy.)* Your majesty.

ANNE: *(She hits Bess on the arm.)* Did you hear what she just said?

ELIZABETH: It's quite all right. Yes, I think we can still find time for frivolity now and then. But no more talk of suitors. After all, today is my wedding day.

GERALDINE: Your what?

*(Kat enters, interrupting the conversation, with Cecil behind her. By now, Elizabeth is done up as the virgin queen in a glorious white gown, jewels, and a gold and pearl tiara.)*

KAT: Lord Cecil for you, your majesty.

ELIZABETH: Thank you, dearest Kat. You are dismissed, ladies. *(Kat and the girls bow and exit. Elizabeth turns to face Cecil.)* Master Secretary.

CECIL: You summoned me, your majesty?

ELIZABETH: Yes. I have glorious news.

CECIL: I am eager to hear it.

ELIZABETH: You should be, as it seems this very subject has been a great concern of yours for many months.

CECIL: Majesty?

ELIZABETH: I am married.

CECIL: Married? How?

ELIZABETH: Do you see this ring?

CECIL: Yes, it is your coronation ring.

ELIZABETH: It was placed on my finger as I was anointed queen of our great nation. I have not taken it off since, nor will I ever.

CECIL: As is proper, madam.

ELIZABETH: Yes. It is my coronation ring, but also my wedding ring. You see, Lord Cecil, I am married... to England. And the people of this country are my children. I am wife and mother, as you always wished.

CECIL: But, your majesty.

ELIZABETH: A servant does not question his queen. I will have but one mistress here, and no master. The matter is settled.

CECIL: *(He bows his head.)* Of course. My apologies.

ELIZABETH: I have recently been told that I cannot have it all, as I am a woman. My father tried to have it all during his reign. You were a great admirer of his, were you not, Lord Cecil?

CECIL: Your father was a lion.

ELIZABETH: I may not be a lion, but I am a lion's cub and I have a lion's heart, and it's time for England to hear me roar. If I can't have it all, then I will be a shining beacon, a fierce example of all a woman can be. And maybe, one day, there will be a world where a woman can have it all. She can be whatever she wants. She can choose her own path for herself. And perhaps, in my own small way, I will have helped move the cause along.

CECIL: I have no doubt, Your Majesty. There was never so wise a woman born as Queen Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: You are a true friend and advisor. *(Scene I transitions to Scene II.)*

## SCENE II

### The Throne Room in Whitehall Palace

*(Scene I transitions directly to Scene II, mid conversation. Elizabeth and Cecil step forward, With Cecil taking Elizabeth's arm, and the curtains close behind them. Crew members dressed in Tudor livery bring on two thrones, matching the thrones from the coronation scene, and place them in front of the curtain. Trumpets announce the arrival of the queen. Elizabeth's ladies and her former suitors gather on both sides of the twin thrones.)*

ELIZABETH: *(Aside to Cecil, quietly.)* Oh, and Cecil?

CECIL: Your majesty?

ELIZABETH: I don't want to see Lettie Knollys at court for a long, long time.

CECIL: *(Cecil smirks and nods. He then helps Elizabeth to her throne. He bows deeply and humbly to Elizabeth. He then turns to face the audience and cries out in a booming voice.)* God save Queen Elizabeth, the SOLE reigning sovereign of England!

ALL: God save the queen!

*(Everyone bows. Elizabeth sits on her throne much more relaxed than in the first scene. The lights slowly tighten until there is just a spotlight on Elizabeth and the empty king's throne. She looks over to the second throne for a moment, turns and smiles at the audience, and then pushes it over without even looking back at it. As it crashes to the floor, blackout.)*

-End Play-

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