

QUEEN

Arise, Don Cervantes! Believe me, the King has conferred upon me a favor as pleasant as it is unexpected.

CERVANTES

Your Majesty's gracious words make me very happy. I am happy to obey the King's request.

QUEEN

Then you are devoted to his service? For that may heaven bless you. He is a noble man who can achieve great things with his kingdom, even if he does not— *(She stops short.)*

IRENE

... even if the King does not love you.

QUEEN

Irene!

IRENE

Your Majesty, we have learned upon the best authority that the Prime Minister is conspiring against your husband. It is his intention to deliver Portugal into the hands of Philip II of Spain after the King's death. To accomplish this purpose, he encourages His Majesty in the follies and dissipations in which he indulges... so that he continues to be judged unfit to rule. This is why he has poisoned the King's mind against you, Your Majesty, and why this court is full of spies and enemies. It is our desire that the King learn again to love his loyal Queen, and then to love his people, and to that end we have set our hand against the regent and his whole Camarilla.

QUEEN

For this cause, my friends, I could fight with you.

CERVANTES

My worthy Queen, you can. The King must deliver the speech we have prepared and declare the regency at an end during the meeting at the Cortes tonight, and assume the duties of his noble station. Then the bandage will fall from his eyes, and he will behold you as the most amiable and the most devoted and beautiful of wives.

QUEEN

*(aside)* He is indeed a poet. *(aloud)* I place myself in your hands, Don Cervantes. Do battle for the rights of royalty! Let us prepare our own reading that will encourage a King's gallantry.

CERVANTES

I am at your service, Your Majesty.

IRENE

*(refers to the parchment)* Leave the details to me. I will undertake to teach the King his speech during the usual dance lessons.

QUEEN

You are a noble man, Don Cervantes. You shall teach your worthy pupil and tell me entertaining stories, will you not?

CERVANTES

I am Your Majesty's humble servant.

QUEEN

Then tell me, sir, how can one compose a love sonnet?

CERVANTES

Your Majesty, when one loves, one composes such poems in one's dreams.

QUEEN

But no one has ever addressed a sonnet to me.

CERVANTES

Would your Majesty like to be the subject of a poem?

QUEEN

Oh, yes! Since you have been a subject in my dreams, dear poet, indeed I would.

*(The Queen turns away from Cervantes, surprised by her own forwardness.)*

IRENE

*(pulling Cervantes to the side)* Oh, you abominable rascal, you have absolutely ignored my existence! I could shake you.

CERVANTES

Shake me? You are the only girl I have ever loved; but business before pleasure.

IRENE

Your Majesty, it is time to go to Mass. I will gladly escort you.

QUEEN

*(to Cervantes)* Will you escort me?

*(Cervantes bows to Irene.)*

QUEEN

You are mistaken in directing any attention toward this court lady it is rumored you like. A poet should always cast his glances to higher conquests. *(gives Cervantes her hand)* Come, sir.