

PREVIEW

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, 16th 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, as long as the character's gender does not change. 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 16th 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 16th 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 16th 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 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 thought you would surely 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, your life 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 mooney. 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 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 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...

GERALDINE: 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!!

END PREVIEW

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