

LOUIS
Hamlet? Who is her Hamlet?

EDMOND
She... is her Hamlet.

LOUIS
I do not take your meaning.

EDMOND
She is playing Hamlet.

LOUIS
She is? Sarah Bernhardt? A woman. Playing Hamlet? You saw this?

EDMOND
A rehearsal.

LOUIS
Any good?

EDMOND
It was a rehearsal.

He is getting irked now, and defensive on her behalf.

LOUIS
A woman playing Hamlet. Yes of course she can do it, but one does need to ask, why? What's the point.

EDMOND
It is the greatest part ever written and she the greatest actress ever born.

LOUIS
There are people who will argue that for you.

EDMOND
Not you, I hope.

LOUIS
Not I, of course not. She is our divine Sarah, she is our queen! Getting a little old I suppose. Can't play Ophelia anymore. Why not Gertrude?

EDMOND
It's not much of a part.

LOUIS
It's not a bad part.

EDMOND
It's not Hamlet.

LOUIS
Can't she keep playing Camille? She dies so beautifully.

EDMOND

You just said...

LOUIS

Don't argue with me about this, you don't like it either.

EDMOND

I haven't said that.

LOUIS

You haven't said you do like it. So they're rehearsing it?

EDMOND

Yes.

LOUIS

To open when?

EDMOND

She didn't say.

LOUIS

I imagine she's rehearsing in breeches? I mean, she couldn't rehearse in a skirt, it'd make no sense.

EDMOND

She is using costume pieces for rehearsal.

LOUIS

So breeches. You've seen her legs then.

EDMOND

Yes. As have you.

LOUIS

Lorenzaccio, quite. Beautiful. Her legs.

Louis thinks about that.

EDMOND

You can come get a look at them again when she opens her Hamlet.

LOUIS

Someone needs to talk her out of it. She's a great actress, but Hamlet? It's grotesque. If Shakespeare meant for Hamlet to be a woman, he would have named the play Hamlet princess of Denmark. That's not what he wrote.

EDMOND

The men played the women for all those years. If it's all right for a man to play a woman, why not a woman play a man?

LOUIS

It was the custom. Men playing women, that's all right. Women playing men. It doesn't work.

EDMOND

How do you know?

LOUIS

Don't argue with me about this. I've already won this argument. It's a disgusting idea and you know it.

EDMOND

"Disgusting?"

LOUIS

Most men will find it so. The women too! The women will be the worst. We accept all manner of eccentricity from her. Her fashion? I know many people admire it but there's no question, it's extreme. That bat hat. What is that? And all those lovers. You have to admit it's unseemly at best. And those pets. She actually kept a panther as a pet, that's not a rumor, I saw it! It scared the wits out of me. But here's my point. We accept all of it. This however--

EDMOND

Playing Hamlet is no eccentricity.

LOUIS

Don't be ridiculous of course it is. It's a gimmick. It's unnatural.

EDMOND

I disagree.

LOUIS

And you need her for your play!

EDMOND

My play is not finished and it is irrelevant.

LOUIS

A playwright who thinks his play is irrelevant, that's a new one.

EDMOND

You mistake my meaning.

LOUIS

What is your meaning?

EDMOND

I have no meaning other than my dedication to our greatest actress. She commands our loyalty.

LOUIS

Oh is that what she commands.

EDMOND

And now I do not take your meaning.

LOUIS

Oh don't you.

EDMOND

No I do not.

LOUIS

Oh now, you can't get offended because we all want to

EDMOND

I am offended!

LOUIS

Why? She's not.

EDMOND

I beg your pardon. I am tired. The new baby is... it cries.

LOUIS

Does it?

EDMOND

A lot.

LOUIS

No one told you to have children.