

Triffina and the Queens of Conomor, ACT I, Scene 3 - “The Compromise”

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From the Play: *Triffina and the Queens of Conomor, ACT I, Scene 3*

Genre: Drama

Author: Justy Fairfield

Characters:

Triffina – Princess of Vannetais and heir to her father’s throne. Although in her early 20s, she is already astute in matters of politics and court intrigue.

Bishop Gildas - A leader of the Church in Brittany and personal confessor to King Conomor of Cornwall and Domnonée. Middle-aged.

Setting: *Antechamber off the Great Hall of Castle Vannetais in Brittany, 548 CE.*

Background: *After delivering Conomor’s proposal of marriage three months earlier, an anxious Bishop Gildas now presses Princess Triffina for her answer by any means at his disposal.*

*(TRIFFINA and BISHOP GILDAS enter the Antechamber
from the Great Hall at STAGE LEFT.)*

TRIFFINA

Did our dance not please, Excellency? Or perhaps I fail in my role as host? Our modest court must pale in comparison to Domnonée!

BISHOP GILDAS

On the contrary, Your Highness, I would tell the world that Princess Triffina is the most gracious host, her entertainments elegant, and Vannetais matches from wine to rug the splendor I’ve known at home!

TRIFFINA

(Laughs, more at ease) Now you play the diplomat, Bishop!

BISHOP GILDAS

The role comes easily on such a stage! Yet I am pensive. For three months my king has waited, an anxious suitor, for my return with his new bride.

TRIFFINA

Surely Conomor realizes that, in the question of marriage, the power rests with she who answers, not with he who asks! Like a gladiator, he must await a “Thumbs up” or “Thumbs down” from the Empress!

BISHOP GILDAS

His Majesty prefers dealing from a position of power.

TRIFFINA

(Smiles) Yet he pursues a princess who is her father's heir! *(Pause)* But I am pleased he's impatient for my response.

BISHOP GILDAS

Your Highness?

TRIFFINA

By now he should be imploring his sentries on the hour to learn if his long-awaited bride comes yet his way! And when they answer, ‘Sire, she does not!’ he should storm the ramparts, himself, in hopes to catch but a glimpse of me riding over the glen!

BISHOP GILDAS

(Laughs) The Princess is a romantic, as well befits your youth! But remember, Conomor is nearly fifty years old —

TRIFFINA

— And I would be his *sixth* queen.

BISHOP GILDAS

His *last*, I'm sure.

TRIFFINA

How can you be sure? You come to court like any emissary — wanting to gain some advantage for your liege. In this case, *I* am the prize!

BISHOP GILDAS

So young and yet so cynical!

TRIFFINA

I am a king's daughter.

BISHOP GILDAS

And I, Godde's anointed minister!

TRIFFINA

As well as Conomor's! Which master are you serving now, I wonder? *(Pause, she sighs)* Still, it's time for me to think of marriage, and your sovereign does hold the most land in Brittany.

BISHOP GILDAS

Soon he will hold it all! Your position as King Waroc's heir is not so secure as you may wish. Conomor has his eye on *acquiring* Vannetais, in one way or another.

TRIFFINA

So the giant reaches for my father's realm at last!

BISHOP GILDAS

Unite with Conomor, and you assure your father's safety. Refuse him, and you make a powerful enemy.

TRIFFINA

Did your king win all his queens by coercion?

BISHOP GILDAS

I swear to you, Princess, Conomor loved each and every one of those ladies!

TRIFFINA

(Slowly and steadily) And yet they are all dead!

BISHOP GILDAS

(Pause, then slyly) You speak as if you believe a *curse* has been placed upon his marriages.

TRIFFINA

(Startled by his frankness) It would be heresy to think so!

BISHOP GILDAS

(Slyly) If you refuse His Majesty's proposal, the Ecclesiastical Court could be persuaded that heresy was the reason.

TRIFFINA

(Horried) Is Conomor as monstrous as the servant he sends?

BISHOP GILDAS

Conomor would have you as his queen. By what method is of little concern to him!

TRIFFINA

The Devil shepherds the Church in Domnonée!

BISHOP GILDAS

(Stung by her words) -- A reluctant minion!...still, tis enough.

TRIFFINA

(Understanding) You fear your king, Bishop!

BISHOP GILDAS

I must not fail him!

TRIFFINA

You must not fail *Godde*! *(Pause)* You needn't walk a ruinous path. Stay here with us!

BISHOP GILDAS

You offer me sanctuary? – after I've threatened you?

TRIFFINA

Fear can cause a person to do dreadful things! How can I call myself a Christian if I fail to forgive?

BISHOP GILDAS

(Kisses her hands) May Godde show me such tender mercy as you do! — But I can't accept your offer. Conomor would march against this court at once. It would mean the end for both of us — and for Vannetais.

TRIFFINA

What's to be done then?

BISHOP GILDAS

Marry Conomor and no one will have to die!

TRIFFINA

Except the sacrificial lamb?

(BISHOP GILDAS pulls the ring out of the pouch.)

BISHOP GILDAS

Here. I've obtained this ring for your protection. It's gem will glow if you be in danger.

TRIFFINA

You ask me to surrender my immortal soul to save my temporal life! Accepting such a talisman truly would be heresy!

BISHOP GILDAS

If you do not accept it, you condemn your father and your people to death. – Violent death in battle...or its aftermath.

TRIFFINA

Either choice damns my soul!

BISHOP GILDAS

Damnation is no one's fate!

(BISHOP GILDAS takes TRIFFINA by the hands.)

BISHOP GILDAS

The path of a princess is strewn with rose petals; that of a queen, with thorns. Age demands us to make compromises undreamt of in our youth. I, too, have accepted this talisman, not knowing if its power be magic or miracle. But if we desire to use it for good, I trust that God will be merciful to us.

TRIFFINA

Amen to that!

(BISHOP GILDAS slips ring on TRIFFINA's finger.)

BISHOP GILDAS

Take with this ring my pledge to try to protect you as you would have tried to protect me!

(TRIFFINA looks circumspectly at the ring on her finger.)

TRIFFINA

Queen Triffina of Vannetais...and Domnonée! *(TRIFFINA looks at GILDAS. Resolutely)*
May Godde protect us both!

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