

To Doña María Leonor de Villacampes y Zaragoza  
Most Noble and Most Beloved Lady  
CORDOBA

13<sup>th</sup> of May, Anno Domini 1615  
In the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Don Felipe III's Kingship

My dearest and most blessed light,

I write these words, though my hand rebels, and my heart lies broken, for there are truths which love alone cannot preserve, and oaths which love itself must shatter to remain pure.

Last evening, as I stood upon the old battlements of the Alcázar, where once kings of Castile held counsel with the stars, I beheld a thing which I know was sent for me — and for us.

The sun was bleeding itself into the horizon, slow and gold and sorrowful.  
The moon, pale and tender, was ascending as is her right, a gentle sovereign rising in the hush of a dying day.  
And then —  
even as the sun lowered its gaze, the moon, who had barely begun to reign, vanished from the heavens.

No cloud obscured her.  
No mist seized her.  
One moment she was — and the next, she was not.

Thus the day ended without a night to follow.  
Thus the heavens forgot how to conclude.

I trembled as I gazed, for I understood:  
it was not wrath that had sent this sign.  
It was love — the love that chooses to tear itself away, lest it destroy that which it most adores.

Dearest soul, beloved of my breath and my sorrow, hear me now:  
It is not for lack of devotion that I say farewell.  
It is not weariness nor betrayal nor waning affection.

It is love, María Leonor.  
It is because I love you beyond all measure, beyond fear, beyond life itself,  
that I must withdraw.

My house bears ties of blood to His Eminence, Cardinal Don Bernardo de Sandoval y Rojas.  
The eyes of the Holy Office are not easily deceived.  
Nor could your noble lineage, so closely watched by the Court of Don Felipe the Third, escape untouched were our bond to be uncovered.

To remain would be to invite ruin upon you.  
To depart is to carve my heart from my breast and set it aflame before Heaven —  
but to do otherwise would be to love you falsely.

Therefore, I choose to love you rightly.

I shall bear the silence.  
I shall bear the loss.  
I shall offer my soul in exile, if only your path remains unsullied before God and men.

Bury this letter where only your heart may find it.  
Seal it among your prayers, beneath the flowers of your hope.

Let it be known:  
*In the sixteenth year of His Majesty King Don Felipe III, when the moon vanished at sunset over the Alcázar Gardens, Don Alfredo Hernando Buenrostro de Altamirano, Knight of Santiago, sanctified his love through farewell, lest honor be lost.*

And tell the world:  
*There were once two souls who wove a sun between them,  
and when the stars forgot how to turn, they did not betray their love —  
they sanctified it through parting.*

Yours until the last star falls silent,  
**Don Alfredo Hernando Buenrostro de Altamirano**  
Knight of the Order of Santiago,  
TOLEDO