

COUN.—Pshaw! Some valet de chambre! perchance that handsome fellow, Chamaranthe, a man of growing reputation among the soubrettes of the Court.

DE N.—No, Madame—a personage of rank—richly attired, of noble aspect, closely enveloped in a cloak.

COUN.—Can't you describe the figure of this interloper—this fox in your Grace's preserve?

DE N.—About the middle height—rather taller, if anything—of graceful bearing.

MAD.—(*apart to Coun.*) I begin to suspect!

COUN.—(*apart.*) So do I! (*aloud.*) And the heroine of the adventure? for there must be a heroine.

DE N.—Impossible to conjecture! The intruder paused, it is true, for sometime at the door of de Houdancourt's apartment, but—

MAD.—Tell me! does not La Valliere occupy the adjacent chamber?

DE N.—She does! But surely you cannot suspect that little simpleton?

COUN.—For my part I always have misgivings of your very demure people.

DE N.—So recently from the country!

MAD.—The Country! ha! ha! Coquetry, my dear Duchess, unlike the small pox, is engendered as readily in the rural districts as the Court: pastoral purity, believe me, affords no protection.

DE N.—How exceedingly perplexing is my position. But, at all events, the king must instantly be made acquainted with the circumstance.

COUN.—The King! May not his Majesty know more of the affair than he will condescend to own?

DE N.—What an insinuation!

DE G.—Ha, ha! Leze majeste, or something very like it.

COUN.—You say that the incognito was rather above the middle height, of graceful carriage, and richly dressed!

DE N.—Even so—what mean you? your gestures awaken suspicion. It cannot be—and yet how shocking! A personal interview can alone decide: if he listens patiently, he must be absolved; if not—if he evades—suspicion is confirmed, and a plan I have in contemplation must at once be put in execution.

MAD.—A plan! Oh, let us hear your plan, by all means.

DE N.—In consequence of an attempt, some nights ago, to enter the apartments, I have already caused extra bars to be affixed to the windows overlooking the terrace.

DE G.—I trust your Grace has not neglected the chimnies: they are capacious and of easy access.

MAD.—(*archly.*) How! de Guiche, you appear to have inspected the assailable points of the citadel.

DE G.—He! he! I have served his majesty in so many capacities that I cannot be accused of utter ignorance of strategy.

DE N.—Moreover, a grated iron wicket is prepared, to be placed, at a moment's notice, before the principal entrance of the suite of private apartments. And unless fully convinced of the king's innocence—

COUN.—(*to Madame.*) Innocence—the King's innocence! what *naivete*.

DE N.—It shall be fixed at once.

COUN.—A most laudable resolution, excellent Duchess!

DE G.—(*to Madame.*) The king will be outrageous.

DE N.—(*apart*) Not a single avenue shall remain unguarded. (*walks up.*)