

in presence of a petticoat, even on the person of the meanest *paysanne*; remember the *jardiniere*. This sort of deference therefore goes for nothing, rest assured!

MAD.—I confess your incredulity reassures me, but—

COUN.—Rely upon it—a mere passing fancy! Besides, we have ample resources to ensure fickleness! The maids of honour! De Houdancourt, Montalais, Chalais! All charming girls—ready to dispute the palm with such a rival—or indeed, with any other.

MAD.—True! I remember he has evinced something like partiality for De Houdancourt, of late. A thought strikes me: may she not cause a diversion in our favour. She must be instructed.

COUN.—I have already done my best to induce Louis to notice her. But here comes your faithful swain, De Guiche—the best informed of men in all the gossip of the court: let us hear what he says!

*Enter De Guiche.*

DE G.—Ah, fair ladies! so unexpected a happiness! I was almost in despair. Seeing the King, as he left the chateau, surrounded only by minor satellites, I was beginning to apprehend that the royal excursion would have been deprived of the brilliancy your refulgent presence is ever certain to impart. His Majesty will be delighted.

COUN.—Not perhaps so much so as you fancy.

MAD.—Does the Queen accompany him on the water?

DE G.—No! Her Majesty is as usual indisposed.

COUN.—Or rather ill disposed to witness her husband's gallantries. Apropos! at whose feet does he deign to throw the handkerchief this evening?

DE G.—But for the deference the present company inspires, I should say her Highness' new attendant would be the favoured fair.

MAD.—(To Coun.) I told you so.

DE G.—Oh! ha, ha! this reminds me of a story—a very singular story—related to me just now, by Bontemps.

COUN.—Unquestionable authority for scandal! This prime minister of Louis' innocent recreations! But what says Monsieur Bontemps?

DE G.—He is amusing as well as instructive. Listen! After the ball in the pavilion last evening—the night being warm—the King fatigued with his exertions in the *courante*, wandered forth to breathe the gentle zephyrs of the park, accompanied only by the identical Bontemps.

COUN.—Ha, ha! after the manner of the prince and the vizier in the new Arabian fairy tales.

DE G.—On approaching an arbour, overgrown with foliage, they overheard four ladies interchanging their impressions as to the merits of the dancers.

MAD.—Proceed—this indeed is interesting.

DE G.—More so, credit me, than you imagine. One of the fair speakers avowed her admiration of D'Arlincourt; another declared her preference for D'Armagnac: they both dance with tolerable grace, it must be owned. The third honored me in terms my modesty forbids me to repeat.

COUN.—Oh, De Guiche, your modesty is intolerable. And the fourth? for this I suspect is the cream of the adventure.

DE G.—The fourth! oh, the fourth—she merely sighed!

MAD.—Tantalizing.

DE G.—Remained for a time pensive in sweet insipid silence, until