

CHAM.—But the king!

DE H.—Is too magnanimous to insist on my return, when he learns the motive for my flight.

KING.—(*aside*). Magnanimous! she is right.

DE H.—For me in reality his Majesty cares little.

KING.—(*aside*). I begin not to be quite certain on that head! Her sorrows interest me.

DE H.—He is misled by the Countess, (*weeps*) and I am betrayed!

CHAM.—Why not appeal to the Queen?—or, the Queen mother?

DE H.—Delicacy towards the King, whom I most truly honour; fear of compromising De Lauzun, the consequences of which would be dreadful: persecution on all sides.

KING.—(*aside*). Persecution! at my Court! never!

DE H.—I have no resource but flight! The abbess of Chaillot is my relative—a dear friend of my deceased mother—to her will I fly for refuge.

CHAM.—(*aside*). De Pons already in the convent; she, too, going; the maids of honour all becoming devotees; and the Court a mere nursery for nuns.

DE H.—See! I have prepared a letter in which I explain my painful situation. (*Gives letter*). Cause it, I beseech you, to be conveyed, with all secrecy and despatch, to the dear Abbess. She will sympathize in my sorrows, and open her arms to me.

CHAM.—(*taking letter reluctantly*). But the King's displeasure!

DE H.—Fear nothing! when I am gone His Majesty will be informed of all the particulars. He will forgive you, and pardon me.

KING.—(*rushing from cabinet*). He will! he does!

DE H. & CH.—(*kneel*). The King!

BON.—(*emerging slowly*). He will not be disgraced then, after all.

KING.—(*taking De H's hand*). Rise, exemplary girl! Chamarante, you may retire.

DE H.—Pardon him, Sire! I am alone, to blame.

KING.—Be re-assured—we will not deal harshly by him! (*Chamarante bows, and exits*). As for myself, Madlle, your conduct commands our respect; your sufferings, our sympathy. Remain at the Court. We will protect you, and your secret shall be sacred. Bontemps! withdraw. (*Exit Bontemps*).

DE H.—(*agitated*). Sire! this clemency! this consideration!

KING.—Retire to your apartment. We will resume this conversation another time. Come, be comforted. (*takes her hand and leads her off respectfully*). She is really a very estimable person, and very beautiful; but what is her beauty now to me. A singular story! De Lauzun affianced! his love returned! a lady in whose welfare—I—ha! a horrible suspicion is suggested. Affianced! can it be La Valliere? it must—whom else? distraction!

VOICES.—(*without*) Madlle. Montalais!

KING.—The maids of honour! They must not see me. When they have retired, I will return—my heart in the mean time racked with doubt—despair! (*Exit*.)

VOICES.—(*without*) Madlle. Montalais!

*Enter Montalais.*

MONT.—Ha, ha! I have outstripped them all! Let me obey the Countess, and reconnoitre. She suspects that the King came hither. Ha! the cabinets