

(*Bontemps ushers the King into Cabinet L, and conceals himself in the other, R*). (*Enter de Houdancourt and Chamaranthe, meeting*).

DE H.—Accept my thanks, Monsieur Chamaranthe, for this punctuality.

CHAM.—Lady! I fly to your presence on the wings of—

DE H.—You forget!

CHAM.—Of respect!—(*aside*) a word the king invariably substitutes for one more tender.

KING.—(*aside*). The puppy imitates me in manner and expression.

BOX.—(*aside*). Bravo! Chamaranthe!—thy doom is sealed.

DE H.—I was about to speak, when we were interrupted, of the efforts of the Countess to compromise me with the king, whose assiduities of late render my further residence at Fontainebleau impossible. As a sovereign, I honour him; as a gentleman, respect him; but as a—oh heavens! the bare idea makes me shudder—I shrink from him.

KING.—(*aside*). Singularly complimentary! the Countess has deceived me.

CHAM.—(*aside*). She is coming to the point. (*Aloud.*) I understand you cannot reciprocate his—his—respect.

DE H.—He incessantly repeats the word *respect*, in a manner that offends me. But enough of this. The service I require, demands entire confidence on my part. In spite of my confusion, I must confess it (*hesitates*) my affections are—(*holds handkerchief to face and weeps*.)

CHAM.—Proceed, enchanting creature!

KING.—(*aside*). She, surely, cannot be going to confess that she prefers my Valet de Chambre to me!

BOX.—(*aside*). The place is mine.

DE H.—Alas! I have been sensible of his merits.

CHAM.—His merits!—whose, I pray you?

DE H.—The companion of my childhood—the friend of my youth—the Count De Lauzun!

CHAM.—The Count De—

KING & BOX.—De Lauzun! (*aside*).

DE H.—He is unconscious of my preference. (*weeps*.)

CHAM.—(*aside*). Then I am a mere stalking horse after all. What a fool! Well I must make the best of it, or I shall be the laughing stock of the whole Court. (*Aloud.*) I begin to perceive! you would have me give him a—a—what shall I call it—a hint in short.

DE H.—(*suddenly*). Not for the world! De Lauzun must never know—never even suspect the secret of my heart! Alas! he is privately affianced to another, and has made me—me—his confidante.

KING.—(*aside*). Privately affianced! without my consent!

CHAM.—But, the king! is he aware?

DE H.—For reasons of the greatest importance, he must for a time be kept in total ignorance.

KING.—(*aside*). Indeed!

DE H.—He is deeply interested in the lady's welfare; but her name—

CHAM.—(*interrupting*). I guess!—Madlle de—

DE H.—(*stopping his mouth*.) Hush! her name must not be uttered, even in a whisper.

KING.—(*aside*). Who can she be?

CHAM.—A mysterious affair, truly! But the service you require?

DE H.—Your assistance to fly the Court—the world—for ever.