

AY NOT BE BORROWED

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**"INTRIGUE"**

BY

**HARRY TIGHE**

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CHARACTERS IN PLAY

LOUIS XIV.....KING OF FRANCE  
ARNAUD COMTE DE GUICHE.....  
MARQUIS DES VARDÈS.....  
CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE.....  
MARECHAL DE GRANMONT.....  
DUC DE MAZARIN.....  
MONSIEUR DE LA TAINE.....Cousin to LOUISE DE LA  
VALLIERE.  
HENRIETTE - DUCHESSE D'ORLEANS.....Sister to Charles II of  
England.  
COMTESSE DE SOISSONS.....  
LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE.....MAID-OF-HONOUR TO HENRIETTE  
JULIE DE MONTALIS.....MAID-OF-HONOUR TO QUEEN OF  
FRANCE  
DOWAGER QUEEN OF FRANCE - Anne of Austria  
QUEEN OF FRANCE - Marie-Therese  
DUCHESS DE NAVAILLES.....Guardian of Queen's Ladies.  
MILLE. DE FIENNES.....Maid-of-Honour to Henriette.  
SEÑORA MOLINA.....Spanish Lady-in-Waiting to  
Queen.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF COURT.

ACT I.

SCENE I: Garden of Louvre  
SCENE II: Apartment of Madame de Soissons.

ACT II.

SCENE I: Private Apartment of Dowager Queen.  
SCENE II: Apartment of Henriette, Duchesse d'Orleans.

ACT III.

SCENE: A Room in the Queen's Apartments.

ACT I.

SCENE: Garden of Louvre.

A Terrace crosses stage. Three steps lead up to it. On Terrace R. is a seat. C. Stage, below Terrace, is a fountain playing into large basin.

The click of Bowls is heard off L.

Battens and lights full up for sunshine.

JULIE DE MONTALIS and Guiche discovered on seat R.

Guiche Julie, why so thoughtful?

Montalis It is all so wonderful; Armand, Comte de Guiche loves me - loves me. Isn't that enough to stir a woman?

Guiche The wonder lies in Julie de Montalis loving the Comte de Guiche.

Montalis You will love me always?

Guiche You are to me what sunshine is to the roses.

Montalis To me your love is the kiss of life.  
(They embrace and rise from seat)

Guiche Four o'clock. I must attend on the King.

Montalis (holds him to her) I would you could rest for ever by my side.

Guiche In half an hour I will return - and find you waiting?

Montalis I will not fail you.  
(Exit GUICHE. MONTALIS goes to fountain and feeds fish, singing softly. Enter DUCHESSE DE NAVAILLES.)

Navailles It is scandalous, Madlle. de Montalis.

Montalis Feeding goldfish, Duchesse de Navailles?

Navailles Stuffing Court gallants with insincere smiles.

Montalis The courtiers are nimbler at winning smiles and stealing kisses than these fish the crumbs I drop into this cool water.

Navailles Sharks.

Montalis Gold fish, Madame.

Navailles I speak of the gallants.

Montalis You flatter them.

Navailles You silly maid-of-honour flutter round them like moths round a candle.

Montalis Butterflies round flowers would be more appropriate.

Navailles Butterflies! Mon Dieu! You play an innocent game.

Montalis To play games as an innocent maid, Madame, is easier than to feign innocence when innocence has long flown out the window.

Navailles Tiens!

(KING'S laugh heard off)

- Montalis (goes up stage) The King's laugh is merry. (Looks off).  
He plays bowls with Louise de la Valliere.
- Navailles Poor Louise!
- Montalis 'Tis to be rich when His Majesty smiles.
- Navailles Royal smiles are as fleeting as April sunshine.
- Montalis The Duchesse d'Orleans is not among the King's party.
- Navailles Never mind Madame d'Orleans. You were in this garden  
at midnight.
- Montalis Gossip has a restless tongue.
- Navailles The Queen will stop those midnight revels.
- Montalis 'Tis a dangerous topic to mention to Her Majesty.  
The King is fond of moonlight in a garden - not  
alone. The Queen is wise to close her eyes.
- Navailles Her Majesty is so recently from the Court of Spain.
- Montalis They tell me the Spanish Court plays more brilliant  
games than we in France. I am learning Spanish.
- Navailles All the Court is learning Spanish to gain favour  
with the Queen. An empty gamble!
- Montalis The Queen! Tush, Duchess! There is an attache  
at the Spanish Embassy. He has eyes like the  
wondrous secrecy of night.
- Navailles The Queen shall hear of this new folly.
- Montalis In the twinkling of an eyelid. She comes this way.
- (Enter MARRIE-THERESE attended by a few ladies.  
MONTALIS curtsays before Queen)
- Queen Mille de Montalis - always gay. (QUEEN kisses her)  
May all your dreams of happiness come true.
- Montalis Madame, may joy be your playmate!
- Queen Queens are not born for joy. They are political  
pawns in a political game. (QUEEN sits on seat  
on terrace) My cloak. (Puts it on) Duchesse,  
a frown sits upon your brow.
- Navailles Mille de Montalis was in this garden at midnight.
- Queen You protect my ladies too closely.
- Navailles My position, Madame, as guardian to your ladies.
- Queen Que picardial! Duchesse, you talk too much. What  
has Mille. to say?
- Montalis Madame, I was with the Comte de Guiche.
- Navailles Alone?
- Montalis Alone by Monsier's side - not alone in the garden.
- Navailles Who else was in the garden?
- Montalis The most beautiful Princess in France. The night  
was monstrous fine. Twinkling stars in a wondrous  
purple sky.

- QUEEN Henriette, our English Princess, was in this garden!
- NAVALLES (to MONTALIS) Who else? Her Majesty awaits your answer.
- MONTALIS One - even you, Madame, dare not disobey.
- QUEEN The King!
- MONTALIS Was not alone.
- QUEEN His Majesty is not over fond of solitude.
- MONTALIS Mlle de la Valliere was attending the Duchesse d'Orleans.
- QUEEN (wearily) It is enough.
- (Enter MOLINA)
- Senora Molina!
- MOLINA (hands QUEEN a letter) Madame, a courier from Spain has just arrived.
- QUEEN (looks at letter) From my father! (Drops wrapper)
- MONTALIS (up stage, looks off) The King is going to play another game of Bowls. The Marquise des Vardes seems in rare good favour.
- NAVALLES Your eyes are everywhere.
- MONTALIS They are said to be a remarkably handsome pair. You agree, Duchess?
- QUEEN (to MOLINA) Senora Molina!
- MOLINA Madame!
- QUEEN When does the courier return to Spain?
- MOLINA His Excellency the Spanish Ambassador told me important dispatches go tonight.
- QUEEN I will send an answer to this letter, Duchesse.
- NAVALLES Mlle. de Montalis! Mlle. de Montalis!
- QUEEN I only need you, Duchesse. (TO MONTALIS) When the King has finished his game, should he inquire for me tell him I have gone to my apartment to write to His Majesty of Spain. (touches MONTALIS tenderly) My no disillusion dim your happiness. Remember merry laughter carries joy to the weary. I am sometimes very weary.
- (Exit QUEEN and LADIES OF COURT)
- MONTALIS How delicious it is to idle the hours on a summer afternoon. The sun caresses the soft cheeks of youth. To age, Duchesse, the dimness of Palace rooms is kinder.
- NAVALLES Some day you will eat your own tongue.
- MONTALIS I have heard of a strange country in the East where nightingales' tongues are a great delicacy.
- NAVALLES Nightingales?
- MONTALIS You tell me my tongue is over-fond of singing in a moonlit garden.

- NAVAILLES           Tiens! 'Tis no soft place to guard you flippant maids-of-honour.
- MONTALIS           Maids-of-honour are logically honourable maids.
- NAVAILLES           Scandalous maids of scandalous love affairs.
- MONTALIS           Faith, Duchesse, it is sad the little Cupid has no smiles for medlars clinging to Autumn trees. (looks off) The Queen is waiting.
- NAVAILLES           Parbleu! You think you have a sharp wit.
- MONTALIS           And sometimes a truthful tongue. The Queen looks this way.
- NAVAILLES           'Tis well I had your window barred.
- MONTALIS           Her Majesty grows impatient.
- (Exit NAVAILLES)
- (MONTALIS laughs, dances round stage. Picks up basket of cut flowers. Enter MDLLE. DE FIEMMES from terrace R. MONTALIS, laughing begins to throw flowers at FIEMMES)
- MONTALIS           Hortense, Mdle, de Fiemmes, take care.
- FIEMMES            You're in a gay mood.
- MONTALIS           Happy as a bird on the wing.
- FIEMMES            In love?
- MONTALIS           Right up to the top of my head.
- FIEMMES            He loves you?
- MONTALIS           Right down to my toes.
- FIEMMES            You are the richest heiress at Court - the King's ward.
- MONTALIS           I wouldn't care if I were a beggar - so long as love is kind.
- FIEMMES            It is easy to say the day is fine if you don't look out of the window.
- MONTALIS           (Rises, dances round stage) Oh, I'm so happy, happy. I'm in love. I'm loved, and love is - is wonderful. Hortense, in Madame de Soissons' apartment tonight there is to be a special lottery. The King will afterwards announce the betrothal of Mdle. Julie de Montalis - the happiest and the richest marriageable heiress in France to the brave, handsome Armand Comte de Guiche. Isn't it glorious news?
- (Enter MME. DE SOISSONS)
- MONTALIS           Mme. de Soissons (takes Soissons' arm, points off) The King plays a serious game with Louise de la Valliere.
- FIEMMES            Louise thinks she is in heaven.
- SOISSONS           Some mistake hell for heaven till they find it a trifle too warm to be pleasant. (to MONTALIS) I heard the Duchesse de Navailles has had your window barred.
- MONTALIS           The Marquis des Vardes could tell you the reason if you ask him.
- (Enter DES VARDDES)

MONTALIS

Bon jour, Monsieur des Vardes. Madame de Soissons is anxious to hear the story of a certain barred window. Treat her gently as befits her age. Come, Hortense, let us join the King and Louise.

(Exit FIBBES and MONTALIS, laughing)

SOISSONS

Little parrot!

VARDES

I have news, thank the gods! For three whole days there has been no whisper of scandal.

SOISSONS

Save a barred window.

VARDES

A barred window! An escapade. I climb through a window for that little parrot! Are you jealous? Olympe, I am the devoted friend of a clever woman.

SOISSONS

Who are friends at this fickle Court?

VARDES

Rumour says you and the Duchesse d'Orleans have buried old quarrels and are - almost friends. The age of miracles is not dead!

SOISSONS

The Stuarts are a proud Scotch race.

VARDES

The sudden friendships of women are usually based on jealousy. The jealousy of a woman - where does it end?

SOISSONS

In someone's downfall. I'll debase la Valliere. I hate her. She ousts me from the King's favour. I'm not over fond of the Duchesse. If she could share la Valliere's fate!

VARDES

Trap her.

SOISSONS

Just a little more pressure and she works with us.

VARDES

Quite so. The Duchesse has a flimsy dream - a marriage between Mdlle. de Montalis and de Guiche.

SOISSONS

With the King's consent.

VARDES

I have the King's right ear. The money bags of Mdlle. will go to old Monsieur de la Taine. A merry jest!

SOISSONS

Louise de la Vallier's drunken hunch-backed cousin. (Tis a pretty revenge for a barred window.

VARDES

It will be easy to persuade the Duchesse it is the work of la Valliere. I think we have trapped the proud Stuart Princess.

SOISSONS

She will no longer hesitate to dismiss la Valliere.

VARDES

Frick the Duchess's vanity, rouse her jealousy, touch her pity and she is like wax.

SOISSONS

At last we shall win her to our side. You have further plans?

VARDES

To work through the Queen.

SOISSONS)

How?

VARDES

By writing a letter - as if it come from her father. She is a dutiful daughter. They are somewhat out of fashion.

SOISSONS

We need the King of Spain's handwriting before we indite a letter to the Queen.

- VARDES Spanish kings' letters are not plucked like flowers in a garden. You are superintendent of the Queen's household. Are there no letters locked in secret drawers?
- SOISSONS Yes - yes. One my flutter into my hands - on the wings of chance.
- (SOISSONS goes to seat on terrace, sees letter dropped by QUEEN, picks it up, looks at it.)
- VARDES A silly maid-of-honour dropped her beloved's letter.
- SOISSONS 'Tis no love letter - these seals - mon Dieu! See, they are the seals of Spain.
- VARDES Sacre Coeur! A pretty play of yours, Olympe.
- SOISSONS 'Tis no play of mine. (opens letter) Parbleu! From His Majesty of Spain. Fate is kind to us.
- VARDES An omen of victory. What says it?
- SOISSONS (reading) Your letter received at this moment by your trusted courier. Your position is no doubt a delicate one. My interference is impossible at this moment of strained relations between Spain and France. We must await developments. The life of a Queen is ever a sacrifice to her country, her country's good. Remember you are no longer Spanish. You have become a Frenchwoman. I add these hasty lines to enclose with a letter already written. Be brave, my child, above all be discreet! I will write more fully in a day or two.
- VARDES Truly the gods smile on us.
- SOISSONS (looks off) Hush! The Duchess' Orleans.
- (Enter HENRIETTE by steps back of terrace.)
- HENRIETTE You await His Majesty?
- VARDES When you appear, Madame, even Kings are forgotten.
- Henriette You have a courtier's tongue, Monsieur.
- VARDES And a man's eye for a woman's beauty.
- HENRIETTE His Majesty comes this way.
- (Enter KING, LA VALLIERE, MONTALIS, FIEMMES, DE GUICHE and COURT by back of stage.)
- KING You played a subtle game, Madlle. de la Valliere.
- LOUISE You flatter me, Sire!
- KING By my oath, 't'was all I could do to win. You are a practised hand at bowls.
- LOUISE I played much with my stepfather.
- KING If you play the game of love as well, there will be little chance of success for the ladies of the Court. We shall see. Henriette, am I not a better prophet than the famous Primi Visconti?
- HENRIETTE Sire, your words are ever wise.
- KING (TO LA VALLIERE) What say you?
- LOUISE I have no wish, Sire, to play at love.
- KING Not play?
- LOUISE True love, Sire, is beyond our control. It is no game.
- KING



- KING Faith, your words ring true. Love is no game. That pleases me. Love is no game. I warrant you have not learnt that pretty scrap of wisdom from your Paris friends.
- LOUISE I have learnt many things since I came to your Majesty's Court.
- KING Come, I'll be a better confessor than the Archbishop of Paris. What other wise thing have you learnt?
- LOUISE That love, Sire, is a woman's awakening.
- KING (to HENRIETTE) How love awakened your maid-of-honour?
- HENRIETTE Mdlle. de la Valliere has ceased to make a confidante of me - since she hopes to win wiser counsel from one who is a better prophet than the famous Primi Visconti.
- KING (TO LOUISE) You have a good friend in Madame.
- LOUISE To Madame, Sire, I owe all my happiness, all my friends, all the pleasures of your Majesty's Court. Even in deeper things I am a debtor to Madame.
- KING You will yet be a deeper debtor. (TO HENRIETTE) Come, Henriette, you will challenge Mdlle. in a bout at archery.
- HENRIETTE Sire, I beg to be excused. I am not well.
- KING Faith, I never saw you looking healthier.
- HENRIETTE It is a passing faintness.
- KING A little play with Cupid's bows drives away a woman's migraine.
- HENRIETTE I beg, Sire, you will excuse me.
- KING So be it. If your faintness requires rest tonight you will be excused attending Her Majesty's circle. As for the bout of archery, I will take your place - and pierce a heart with Cupid's bow.
- (KING laughs sarcastically at HENRIETTE as he gives his hand to LA VALLIERE. Exit, followed by Court. There remain HENRIETTE, DE GUICHE, SOISSONS, DES VARDI)
- (HENRIETTE half swoons. GUICHE helps her to seat.)
- GUICHE Madame, your faintness is not pretense.
- HENRIETTE I am insulted - insulted openly by one whose protection I have the right to claim. My husband leaves me much to myself. I am so alone.
- GUICHE Not alone!
- HENRIETTE I sometimes wish I was a child of the people - free to live, free to love, free to be loved.
- SOISSONS You feel better?
- HENRIETTE 'Tis nothing serious.
- SOISSONS Isn't it serious when the King leaves your side and calls one of your ladies to play bowls with him - then archery?
- HENRIETTE His Majesty has the right to choose his partners.
- SOISSONS You were the acknowledged Queen of the Court revels. Your place is now taken in the ballets you adorned by a mere country girl.

- HENRIETTE            You speak light of Mlle de la Valliere. She has done me many kindnesses - sat up with me on nights when I was ill.
- SOISSONS            She is double-faced.
- HENRIETTE           She speaks no evil of anyone - always excuses their faults. She bears no malice.
- SOISSONS            Tiens! You are as blind as the Queen.
- GUICHE              Mlle. has done you no harm.
- SOISSONS            'Tis of Madame I am thinking.
- HENRIETTE           'T'was not always so.
- SOISSONS            'Tis possible to realise one's mistakes.
- HENRIETTE           Some have warned me of your friendship.
- SOISSONS            Am I not proving it's worth? What have I to gain by la Valliere's downfall? Perhaps much to lose. For my friendship for you I am willing to risk my position as superintendent of the Queen's household.
- HENRIETTE           So much for me! I can scarcely believe - so much.
- VARDES              Madame de Soissons has your interests at heart. The King forgets many things - even his promises.
- HENRIETTE           Kings have short memories.
- SOISSONS            His Majesty begins to openly disregard you - his sister-in-law - sister to Charles II of England.
- HENRIETTE           Madame!
- SOISSONS            'Tis for your good I speak openly. Mlle. de la Valliere -
- HENRIETTE           'Tis true His Majesty admires her.
- SOISSONS            At your cost. A big price. You have long held the King's favour. You still will - if -
- HENRIETTE           IF?
- VARDES              You play the cards you hold in your hand.
- SOISSONS            La Valliere plots deeper than you suspect.
- VARDES              The affair began at Fontainebleau. When we praised you, Madame, in the ballet, Mlle. said she was surprised anyone could be noticed besides His Majesty. It rained later and by chance -
- SOISSONS            Was it by chance?
- VARDES              Mlle. de la Valliere took refuge under the trees with the King.
- SOISSONS            That was only the overture to her Comic Opera love.
- HENRIETTE           The overture?
- VARDES              Afterwards she rode with His Majesty, was invited to the exclusive parties at Versailles. She now acts the chief parts in all the ballets - roles you adorned with wonderful charm - your beauty - your -
- GUICHE              Mlle. acts her roles with grace.
- SOISSONS            Last night she went a little too far - taking precedence over Madame la Presidente in the Queen's salon.

- HENRIETTE She told me she did not see her.
- SOISSONS I always knew la Valliere was slightly lame, but I never before knew she was blind.
- HENRIETTE I took her as my maid-of-honour because she was poor, friendless, lonely. You say she plots — No! No! I am unjust.
- SOISSONS It is an open secret, she wormed her way into your favour to gain access to the King. It is an insult to you.
- VARDES His Majesty dare not forget you have served France in her relations with England.
- HENRIETTE I placed a trustworthy spy — Louise de Querouelle — at the Court of St. James. My brother can resist no pretty woman's smiles.
- GUICHE His Majesty is grateful.
- SOISSONS He shows it well by fawning on la Valliere. Non Dieu! This is the greatest of all his follies.
- HENRIETTE Hush!
- SOISSONS Remember what France has said of those who have silently bowed to the King's disfavour.
- VARDES Insults filter through Courts to the scum of the streets. The rabble of Paris are not slow in crying down a fallen favourite.
- HENRIETTE The rabble of Paris! This morning driving in the Rue de la Poissonniere a dirty woman spat at me, bhouted vulgar words.
- VARDES There will be more than one to shout infamous words — should these insults to you go further.
- HENRIETTE Am I not a Stuart Princess wedded to France?
- VARDES 'Tis not pleasant to be called 'the cast-off mistress of the King.'
- HENRIETTE (Rising in anger) Who dares to call me the cast-off mistress of the King.
- VARDES The Court has a venomous tongue, Madame, against one who is out of favour. Next week — tomorrow — the rabble of Paris slurs will repeat these infamous scandals.
- HENRIETTE They dare not tell such lies.
- VARDES There is little France will not dare.
- HENRIETTE It is vastly monstrous — 'cast-off mistress'.
- VARDES There is a remedy.
- HENRIETTE A remedy?
- SOISSONS Madame, my friendship.
- HENRIETTE What of that? Friends are often disguised enemies. Cast off — what would you have me do?
- SOISSONS I half unfolded a plan to your yesterday.
- HENRIETTE I refused.
- VARDES Madame, you still refuse?
- HENRIETTE You talk of plans to stop gossip — no easy task.

- VARDES The King insults you, Madame, by his absurd infatuation for a silly country girl.
- SOISSONS Who by Madam's own kindness is not a woman of the streets.
- GUICHE Mdlle. de la Valliere is no common country girl.
- HENRIETTE I remember you once wrote sonnets to her charms.
- VARDES She is so innocent, so naive - a milk white pattern of virtue. 'Tis said she yesterday refused 20,000 pistoles which His Majesty placed at her disposal. A pretty move in her game.
- HENRIETTE I do not forget, Monsieur, you were once in love with this milk white pattern of virtue.
- VARDES Faith, a pretty face has a pretty mouth. Wise bees sip the honey, then fly to more beautiful blossoms.
- GUICHE Mdlle. de la Valliere is clear of selfish ambitions.
- VARDES To gain the King's affections. 'Tis nothing.
- SOISSONS He has an insane desire to be loved for himself - not for the benefits he can bestow.
- VARDES The impossible desire of kings has a rare humorous flavour.
- HENRIETTE They pay the penalty in lonely hearts.
- VARDES His Majesty favours neither loneliness nor a solitary heart.
- SOISSONS He insults one who has the right to --
- VARDES We await the final word.
- SOISSONS It is for Madame's lips, not mine.
- VARDES These insults will collect the clouds of mistrust - France and England -- then the carrions of war will be let loose.
- GUICHE Were he not King, he would taste the point of my sword.
- VARDES Were he not King there would be no call for swords.
- HENRIETTE No more! You make too much of things.
- VARDES My God! Madame, we make too little. (TO GUICHE) Monsieur, you have my sincere sympathy.
- GUICHE Though ignorant for why, I thank you.
- VARDES 'Tis hard to lose the woman one loves.
- HENRIETTE Speak plainer, Monsieur des Vardes.
- VARDES His Majesty told me tonight he announces the betrothal of Mdlle. de Montelis to Monsieur de la Taine.
- HENRIETTE (stops GUICHE from speaking) Impossible! I have the King's word.
- VARDES His Majesty told me himself. He can deny nothing to Mdlle. de la Valliere.
- HENRIETTE This is true?
- VARDES I swear it.
- HENRIETTE It is enough. You have plans?

- VARDES To remove Mdlle. by opening the Queen's eyes.
- HENRIETTE It has been tried. I can bear my own insults, but to see a sweet girl sacrificed is beyond endurance. You propose to open the Queen's eyes - how?
- VARDES By writing a letter.
- HENRIETTE From who do we write - ourselves? A vastly pretty plan!
- VARDES From His Majesty of Spain.
- HENRIETTE Your game runs high.
- VARDES The stakes are higher still.
- HENRIETTE The risks --
- VARDES Do not equal the stakes.
- GUICHE We are not familiar with the handwriting of His Majesty of Spain.
- VARDES Madame de Soissons does not make plans without materials.
- HENRIETTE Oh, but -- this plan is impossible.
- VARDES I have lately had a little holiday in Holland - where I had the seals of Spain carefully copied. They would fetch a good price in a secret market.
- GUICHE You have the seals?
- VARDES Under lock and key.
- SOISSONS Madame, it rests with you.
- HENRIETTE Forgery - I like it not.
- GUICHE It is conspiracy.
- VARDES Call it a comedy, a farce - a jest.
- (HENRIETTE goes to fountain)
- VARDES (TO GUICHE) Your love for Mdlle. de Montalis is vastly deep. (TO HENRIETTE) You cannot sacrifice the sweet girl to a debauched hunch-back?
- HENRIETTE It is inhuman. It must not be - it shall not be. Your plans?
- VARDES The Spanish Ambassador has business outside of Paris. When the letter is written we shall have a boy dressed in the livery of the Spanish Embassy. He will give the letter to Senora Molina with instructions to give it privately to the Queen.
- HENRIETTE You will warn the Queen against la Valliere?
- VARDES A warning - call it a warning.
- GUICHE (TO HENRIETTE) This plot is treachery. Be careful!
- VARDES 'Tis not pleasant to be called the cast-off mistress of the King. Madame, you have aided France - not even the King dare forget it!
- (KING crosses back stage, alone)
- VARDES Sacre Coeur! The King!
- HENRIETTE His Majesty!
- VARDES He wore a charming smile. Pierced a heart with Cupid's bow. I warrant la Valliere was a willing victim.

HENRIETTE Sweet Julie, sacrificed to a drunken hunch-back!  
Never!

VARDES Tonight we gather in the salon of Madame de Soissons.  
We will remain when the King goes to play cards in  
the Queen's rooms. His Majesty graciously excused  
you, Madame, on account of your faintness. There is  
danger in every bush of a Court garden.

SOISSONS (TO HENRIETTE) You will honour my salon tonight?

HENRIETTE I will not fail.

VARDES (TAKES HENRIETTE'S HAND) Till tonight. I ask no  
greater favour than to serve one of the fairest  
flowers of the gay Court of France.

(Exit SOISSONS and VARDES)

CURTAIN.

ACT I.

SCENE II.

An apartment of Madame de Soissons.

(LOUISE and MONTALIS discovered)

- MONTALIS Louise.
- LOUISE Weep no more, Julie.
- MONTALIS Not - not marriage with de la Taine, Louise! I won't marry him.
- LOUISE Poor Julie! I would I could help you.
- MONTALIS Speak to the King - beg him to let me marry the man I love.
- LOUISE I have no influence.
- MONTALIS I wish I was far from Paris.
- LOUISE I have a great longing for the woods of Fontainebleau. You and I were happy there. The birds sang at our windows, waking us on summer dawns.
- MONTALIS In Paris one sleeps, wakes, lives among treachery. You and I only ask for love. Love - a little word, yet so great in meaning.
- LOUISE Fontainebleau - Fontainebleau - it seems so far away.
- MONTALIS We played such happy games. Yet I did think the open fields stupid. Now Paris is duller than the country.
- LOUISE Where one is happy one is never dull.
- MONTALIS Someone has poisoned the King against me.
- LOUISE There are evil tongues against me. Madame was my friend, none dearer. What have I done to merit her anger?
- MONTALIS They say you stole a smile that pleased the Duchesse.
- LOUISE I am no thief.
- MONTALIS Stealing kisses is not thieving. Dear Louise! (EMBRACES HER) Two sad hearts are ours. I love. Armand. You love the King.

(Enter DES VARDES)

- VARDES A pretty picture - sisterly affection a la bourgeoisie. Mlle. de la Valliere, the King is asking for you - in the Red Salon.
- LOUISE Asks for me? For me!
- VARDES That drives the cloud from your brow. Why sigh, when all Paris is at your feet?
- MONTALIS She sighs for love.
- VARDES When Mlle. de la Valliere is near, we courtiers weep for love denied. There is only one man in France Mlle. deems worthy of her smiles.
- LOUISE You speak hard words with a light heart.
- VARDES Were I to offer you my heart you would call me unkind. Were I to offer you more you would scorn me.

(Enter LORRAINE)

- VARDES Chevalier de Lorraine. (TO LOUISE) Here is an old play-mate. No doubt he is drawn to Court by the fame of Mdle. de la Valliere's beauty - her success - her (LAUGHS). The toast of the day seems to have reached soldiers' camps. They ever love a tale of love.
- LORRAINE No recent news of Mdle. has reached my ears.
- VARDES Then there is a pretty story for Mdle.'s lips to whisper. Mdle. de Montalis, will you not join the dancing?
- MONTALIS I have no heart for dancing.
- VARDES (LAUGHS) The Court misses your gay laughter.
- MONTALIS I am too sad for laughter.
- VARDES Faith! Then I'll say au revoir. I like not clouded faces.
- (Exit VARDES)
- LORRAINE (TO LOUISE) What is all this mystery?
- LOUISE Many tongues speak against me.
- LORRAINE I warned you the last time we walked through the gardens at Fontainebleau.
- LOUISE I wish I were at Fontainebleau.
- LORRAINE Away from Court?
- LOUISE 'Tis true I should be lonely away from -- from -- someone.
- LORRAINE You are trapped by the glitter of this idle life?
- LOUISE I follow a voice. I must stay where it is heard.
- LORRAINE Some gay fellow! Please God, he is worthy of you.
- LOUISE 'Tis I who am not worthy.
- LORRAINE Speak, Louise - the truth. We are old friends.
- LOUISE I seek no honours -- and all the world turns against me.
- LORRAINE Not all.
- LOUISE You were ever like a brother to me. I am sick at heart - and afraid.
- LORRAINE You have many friends.
- LOUISE I fear there are plots against me.
- LORRAINE Caught by some rascally fellow, I'll warrant. My advice is - stick to your guns - refuse to be frightened by the rumble of an enemy artillery. Tell me - is the Duchesse d'Orleans still powerful with the King?
- LOUISE She is his sister-in-law.
- LORRAINE By my oath, that is no guarantee.
- (Music heard off)
- (They go up stage, meet HENRIETTE)
- HENRIETTE Chevalier de Lorraine! This is a surprise.
- LORRAINE Ever Madame's faithful servant.
- HENRIETTE 'Tis not often you favour the Court.
- LORRAINE I am no courtier, Madame.
- HENRIETTE Yet it seems there is one face you remember.



- LORRAINE           It would be unjust to myself, Madame, to deny there is one face. It is present with me on the battlefield to spur me on to victory.
- HENRIETTE           Your speech has not grown rusty in soldiers' camps.
- LORRAINE           Looking at great beauty unlooses my tongue.
- HENRIETTE           ( TO LOUIS ) I will not detain you from the pleasure of Madame de Soissons' salon. The dancing is nearly over.
- (Exit LOUISE)
- Chevalier, have we not well polished our little country jewel?
- LORRAINE           She seems no longer the happy girl I knew.
- HENRIETTE           If she were she would not — It is not wise to paint every passing emotion on a face so beautiful.
- LORRAINE           Louise has a great heart. But, Madame, there are other matters. I wrote to you.
- HENRIETTE           There was more of the harsh rumble of war than soft words in those letters.
- LORRAINE           I am a rough soldier.
- HENRIETTE           Then why at Court? I thought you came to win some lady's smile.
- LORRAINE           Madame, were the object of my affection free I would declare my admiration, my allegiance. I need tell you no more.
- HENRIETTE           Virtue is a dull game — seldom played at Court.
- LORRAINE           God! Madame! Neither virtue, nor honest are in fashion here. By my oath! 'Tis a foul atmosphere.
- HENRIETTE           Hush! This is no battlefield.
- LORRAINE           Many a life is taken — many ruined in the riot of the hubbub of Paris. Pardon me, Madame, I beg your answer to my letters.
- HENRIETTE           I have spoken to the King.
- LORRAINE           I am to have command of the troops at Nancy?
- HENRIETTE           His Majesty will consider the matter.
- LORRAINE           My heart is set on gaining that appointment. War clouds are dark to the west with England, to the south with Spain. (Takes HENRIETTE'S hand and kisses it) My grateful thanks to you, Madame, for speaking to His Majesty.
- (LORRAINE goes to door)
- HENRIETTE           Chevalier, I met you with your hand on the arm of one who has the favour of the King.
- LORRAINE           I — I do not understand.
- HENRIETTE           Louise de la Valliere — the King.
- LORRAINE           Good God! No!
- HENRIETTE           Good God! Yes!
- LORRAINE           Louise — the King.

HENRIETTE You spoke to her about commanding the troops at Nancy?

LORRAINE Not a word.

HENRIETTE 'Twas unwise to miss so good an chance.

LORRAINE I am content to place my fate in the hands of one whose face I carry in my mind's eye as a talisman to victory.

HENRIETTE You're a wise man, Chevalier. Your speech has a pretty flavour. I will secure you the command on which your heart is set.

LORRAINE Madame, I will prove my gratitude.

HENRIETTE I promise. My promises are not lightly broken. (PUASE) My news of Louise is not to your taste?

LORRAINE Truth, I wish her affections were not so highly placed. I look on her as a sister - on you as her protector.

HENRIETTE Then, Chevalier, tell her - tell her....

(Enter FIEMMES)

FIEMMES The King comes to draw the lottery.

HENRIETTE Later we will talk of this matter.

(Enter COURT: the KING and LA VALLIERE, smiling, followed by DE SOISSONS and DES VARDES.)

KING (GOES TO LORRAINE) Great soldier, in spite of your virtuous sentiments I warrant some fair face has tempted you for one night to desert your rough camp bed. I wonder who the fortunate lady chances to be!

LORRAINE Among so many, Sire, it would be difficult to choose.

KING Yet the eye selects and the fingers pluck an exquisite blossom.

LORRAINE I have long chosen the musket for my amours.

VARDES Parbleu! That is a scant compliment to the ladies.

LORRAINE They, Monsieur des Varde, have long learnt I am a soldier - not a Court fashion plate.

VARDES Mon Dieu! A Philistine - a Goth - a wild savage!

KING We will now draw the lottery.

(KING goes to table. He picks up a bracelet. HENRIETTE is by his side.)

KING Your English goldsmiths could not equal this.

HENRIETTE 'Tis beautiful, Sire. (PUTS OUT HER ARM ON WHICH IS A BRACELET) 'Tis almost a facsimile.

KING Almost, Madame, Almost is not quite.

(The lottery is drawn amid murmuring of voices and light laughter)

COURT The King has won! The King has won!

SOISSONS (TO VARDES) To whom will the prize be given?

- VARDES 'Tis almost a facsimile.
- SOISSONS Almost, but not quite! You think etiquette is wiser than love?
- VARDES The wise man never thinks. He waits till he knows.
- (The KING looks round group - his eyes resting on HENRIETTE. SHE advances with a smile. The KING looks at her and motions her away with a sarcastic smile. He half holds out bracelet, HENRIETTE half holds out her hands; KING laughs and passes to LOUISE. He gives her the bracelet.)
- KING (TO LOUISE) The workmanship is good?
- LOUISE Exquisite, Sire! (LOOKS AT HENRIETTE) It will no doubt adorn an arm equal in beauty - only beautiful hand should touch such an exquisite work of art.
- KING In that case, Mademoiselle, it is in hands too beautiful to resign it.
- (A suppressed murmur passes through Court, LOUISE curtsays, KING bows. HENRIETTE is angry, but controls it.)
- LOUISE You honour me beyond my value, Sire.
- KING Modesty becomes you well, Mademoiselle.
- LOUISE Sire, I deem myself unworthy of your goodness.
- KING There have been ladies at my Court who have not been so modest. 'Tis a rare virtue when a king smiles.
- LOUISE Your Majesty humbles me.
- KING (LAUGHS) Will you permit me to humble myself to beg you hand in a Gavotte?
- LOUISE Your wishes, Sire, are my commands.
- (A circle is made)
- KING (TO HENRIETTE) Madame, Monsieur de Guiche desires your hand.
- HENRIETTE Sire —
- KING This is no game of archery. We play not with Cupid'd bows.
- HENRIETTE Sire, the hot air makes me faint.
- KING It is my command. It seems your gigraine is becoming chronic. I will cure it. Have no fear. (HENRIETTE TAKES GUICHE'S HAND) Madame de Soissons, Monsieur des Vardes casts inviting eyes - few ladies can resist their charm.
- (SOISSONS and VARDES join hands. The six dance. At the end the KING bows to LOUISE.)
- KING (TO LA VALLIERE) Tomorrow we go early - to Versailles. (TO COURT) I have some news. I announce the marriage of Mademoiselle de Montalis to Monsieur de la Taine. Come, Mademoiselle, you are my ward. Monsieur de la Taine (HE COMES FORWARD) comes of an ancient race.
- DE LA TAINÉ Sire, my words cannot express my gratitude.

- KING Prove it in deeds - not words. Come, at your age you have learnt the ways of love.
- DE LA TAINE Sire, I have know many beautiful women in my time.
- KING Seal your love on yet another.  
(LA TAINE kisses JULIE DE MONTALIS)  
Good! though a little broken-backed.
- HENRIETTE Sire --
- KING Your faintness excuses your joining the Queen's circle. I am a considerate brother-in-law. Monsieur de Guiche.
- (Exit KING and COURT. HENRIETTE, LA VALLIERE, VARDES AND SOISSONS left on stage.)
- HENRIETTE (TAKES HOLD OF VALLIERE'S ARM, LOOKS AT BRACELET, THEN CASTS ASIDE HER ARM.) Tiens!
- LOUISE Madame, I did not ask to receive His Majesty's gift. Yet since he gave it it is very precious.
- HENRIETTE You seek his kisses, his love -- your dishonour.
- LOUISE (TO HENRIETTE) I displease you, Madame?
- HENRIETTE Vastly.
- LOUISE Madame, I beg --
- HENRIETTE Go. Leave me. Join the Queen's circle. Mademoiselle de Ficmes will attend me. His Majesty has little notice for tired faces. (LOUISE WEEPS) Eyes red with weeping will win no smiles in the gardens at Versailles.
- LOUISE 'Tis cruel to say such things.
- HENRIETTE Tears! (LAUGHS; GROWS SERIOUS) You humiliated me before the Court. You -- you -- Had Her Majesty been present the King would not have dared insult me. There is something more important against you. Your own conscience will inform you. Leave me. Leave me.
- LOUISE Madame --
- HENRIETTE Leave me. (Exit LOUISE) Julie waits for me in the Blue Salon. (LISTENS AT DOOR) Hush! Poor little Julie's heart is breaking.
- VARDES The King made a bold move.
- HENRIETTE One he will regret.
- SOISSONS (TO HENRIETTE) You cannot now refuse.
- VARDES Cast-off mistress!
- HENRIETTE I no longer hesitate. You plans - plans! Can't someone speak?
- SOISSONS Monsieur des Vardes awaits your pleasure.  
(Enter DE GUICHE)
- HENRIETTE Eh, Monsieur (TO VARDES) Plans - what are your plans? Remove la Valliere from the King's side. I will do it. I - I - Will no one help me? Will no one pity me?
- VARDES Madame, we are all your humble servants.
- HENRIETTE This is no time for pretty speeches. Action! Action! The letters.

- SOISSONS Here is the King of Spain's letter. This is a rough copy I have indited to the Queen.
- HENRIETTE (SNATCHES LETTERS FROM SOISSONS) Yes - Yes.
- VARDES Here are the seals of Spain. I have a boy already dressed in the livery of the Spanish Ambassador.
- HENRIETTE Yes - yes - the boy later. You are ever wont to put the cart before the horse. Who will copy the King of Spain's writing? Who?
- VARDES There is one who is clever at such things.
- HENRIETTE Who? Who? Can't someone speak?
- VARDES Monsieur de Guiche is a master hand.
- GUICHE I? I?
- VARDES Am I mistaken? I fancy, in jest, you have copied handwriting in such a way that the devil himself was deceived.
- GUICHE I will stoop to no such damned treachery to my king.
- VARDES For ladies' ears you should study a politer dictionary, my friend.
- GUICHE I will write no such letter - not for any king.
- VARDES Nor I - for a king. To save a beautiful woman I would face all the devils in hell.
- GUICHE This is treason.
- VARDES To your protestations of devotion to our English Princess, 'tis treason indeed. Your love for Mademoiselle de Montalis - A woman's heart is easily broken - by a faithless lover.
- GUICHE My god! You'll cross swords with me. You go too far.
- VARDES And you, Monsieur, do not go far enough.
- HENRIETTE There must be someone else who can copy handwriting.
- VARDES No doubt. But none so cleverly as our friend. No one who would rouse less suspicion - do it more delicately.
- GUICHE I will win my wife by more honourable means.
- VARDES In that case, Madame, we must let our ears be offended by the evil words of gossip. 'Cast off mistress' - pardon me, Madame. My thoughts took wings and escaped their prison walls.
- HENRIETTE Insult upon Insult.
- VARDES Tonight clenched the matter.
- SOISSONS His Majesty openly acknowledges la Valliere's position.
- VARDES To-morrow Paris will smile on the new favourite.
- SOISSONS (TO HENRIETTE) You and I, Madame, will bear the insults of the mob.
- VARDES The scum of Paris will see to that. It will soon spread to the provinces. All France will ring with the news. Next week it will cross the Channel to great London - to the Court of St. James.
- HENRIETTE Mon Dieu! It is too much! I have promised to help Julie, poor child.
- GUICHE Be cautious.

- HENRIETTE           Talk not of caution to an outraged woman. If t is let er is written, you believe it will do its work - remove la Valliere and leave Mademoiselle de Montalis free to marry?
- VARDES               Once la Valliere is beyond the king's influence, I have some weight with his Majesty.
- GUICHE               (TO HENRIETTE) I beg you to be careful for your own safety.
- HENRIETTE           This letter will reach the Queen?
- VARDES               Through Senora Molina. She shares the Queen's secrets — being her own countrywoman.
- HENRIETTE           (TO VARDES) You are mighty in favour with His Majesty.
- VARDES               We are like dear brothers.
- HENRIETTE           He has spoken to you of la Valliere?
- VARDES               He has spoken, Madame. Out of admiration, out of pity for you, I cannot repeat His Majesty's words. Mlle. de la Valliere's wishes are his commands. The engagement of Mlle. de Montalis is a proof.
- HENRIETTE           The letter must be written.
- VARDES               At once.
- GUICHE               It is not light matter to be taken up in a moment of anger.
- HENRIETTE           It shall be done.
- VARDES               Delay is dangerous.
- HENRIETTE           It shall be written tonight.
- GUICHE               Not by my hand.
- VARDES               Monsieur, your protestations of love are well watered by your cowardice.
- GUICHE               Not cowardice.
- VARDES               Faith! 'Tis no coward who leaves a lonely woman to suffer!
- GUICHE               I protect her in my own fashion.
- VARDES               Heigh ho! 'Tis a favourite fashion with some men.
- (HENRIETTE signs to VARDES and SOISSONS to exit)
- Madame, we leave the letter in your hands.
- SOISSONS            It must be written tonight.
- HENRIETTE           It shall be written tonight.
- (Exit SOISSONS and VARDES)
- (HENRIETTE sits in chair by table, takes up pen and toys with it.)
- GUICHE               It is for your afety I refuse to write this letter.
- HENRIETTE           What is an unhappy woman to a man! Julie's heart is breaking.
- GUICHE               It is my privilege to fight for her happiness.
- HENRIETTE           Words come easier than actions.
- GUICHE               I am willing to lay my life at Julie's feet.

- HENRIETTE A coward is always ready to die.
- GUICHE I am no coward.
- HENRIETTE Yet you refuse to write a letter - to risk a little Royal anger for a woman's love.
- GUICHE I will find means to save her.
- HENRIETTE I, a woman, feel for a woman.
- GUICHE I love her and will protect her.
- HENRIETTE 'Tis easier to talk about protection than to secure it by writing a letter.
- (HENRIETTE plays with pen, looking at GUICHE)
- GUICHE You play with me - taunt me with want of affection.
- henriette 'Tis nothing to you - in spite of your protestations of sincere friendship - I am a lonely woman, insulted by the King - a jest for courtiers - jeered at by the scum of Paris streets - deserted by my husband. You care not that I am called the cast-off mistress of the King.
- GUICHE I hear your insults.
- HENRIETTE Without a murmur.
- GUICHE My God! It is a bitter draught.
- HENRIETTE Which you drink without making a face.
- GUICHE It is for your own safety I hesitate. Mon Dieu! You taunt me.
- HENRIETTE Not I. Your own cowardice speaks. Monsieur des Vardes is ready, for my sake, to risk a passing frown on the King's brow. Yet he is His Majesty's greatest friend.
- GUICHE You torture me.
- HENRIETTE You forget I am tortured beyond endurance. (LAUGHS) I am apt to forget Julie is only one of many in your long list of passing amours. You loved Louise de la Valliere - she repulsed you. Perhaps you love her still.
- GUICHE I swear it is not true. I love Julie with my soul.
- HENRIETTE We give our souls to God. They have no commercial value - to be bought or sold at the French Court.
- GUICHE Madame, there is danger to you in this plan.
- HENRIETTE To you there is greater danger in silence.
- GUICHE 'Tis for you I refuse.
- HENRIETTE Your solicitude is touching.
- GUICHE I will speak to the King - please for Julie.
- HENRIETTE There is only one way - remove la Valliere's influence.
- GUICHE My devotion to your interests forces me to counsel prudence.
- HENRIETTE My devotion goes where a man's honour lies - in his brave deed. It is not easy for a proud woman to tell her secrets. Armand, I loved you - as a woman loves. I believed you loved me till Julie caught your heart. I could have dismissed her from Court. I was powerful at that moment. Because of my love for you, I took Julie to my heart. I stood aside. I let your love mature. It was not easy. I am a woman. I could hasten this marriage with Monsieur

de la Taine. I am willing to stand aside - to stake my position at Court to bring your romance to a happy end. I ask a little reward - the copying of a letter.

GUICHE You drive me to a hard corner.

HENRIETTE I beg you to be cautious.

GUICHE Madame --

HENRIETTE (PLAYS WITH PEN IN HER HAND) You are willing to prove your love for Julie - your friendship for me?

(HENRIETTE goes to table, picks up another pen, tries it by pressing point on her finger. GUICHE sits in chair. HENRIETTE holds out pen.)

I think this is a good one. The pen is mighty in proving a man's gratitude.

GUICHE Be it so. Since it is your wish. Fortunately it involves my life. Should this plot be discovered nothing, save the scaffold, will expiate such a crime. Be it your pleasure, for your sake I am ready to write this letter, to become an anonymous assassin - to lose my self-respect -- to risk losing for ever the woman I love.

HENRIETTE (TOUCHES HIS HEAD WITH HER HANDS) We'll talk about honour - assassins - respect, when time hangs heavy. Write as I dictate. (OPENS SOISSONS' COPY OF LETTER. GUICHE WRITES AS SHE DICTATES) "The King is involved in an intrigue of which your Majesty alone is ignorant. Edlle. de la Valliere is the object of this unworthy passions" -- stay, this won't do -- yes - (HENRIETTE SCANS LETTER, THEN GIVES HER OWN WORDS) "This information is given to you by your Majesty's faithful servants. You must decide if you can love your husband in the arms of another - or if you will prevent a circumstance whose duration cannot tend to your honour." (GUICH LOOKS UP). You will copy that at your leisure. I will keep the original in Madame de Soissons' own writing. You see I possess some caution. (HANDS LETTER) This is His Majesty of Spain's letter - for copy. Destroy it when you have used it.

(GUICHE rises, bends to kiss her hand. She raises him and looks at him.)

You will never know what this hour costs me.

(HENRIETTE goes to door, calls) Julie!

(Enter MONTALIS)

Go to him, Julie. Love him always.

MONTALIS Armand!

GUICHE Julie!

HENRIETTE (WIPES A TEAR FROM HER EYE)

(HENRIETTE exits as Curtain falls.)



ACT II

SCENE I:

Private Apartment of Dowager Queen.

A day later than Act I. Time - Afternoon.

THE KING and DOWAGER QUEEN discovered.

- D. QUEEN            Louis, it must not be.
- KING                My mother, you magnify the whole affair.
- D. QUEEN            I but echo the Court. Gossips talk about your absurd infatuation for Louise de la Valliere. 'Tis well the bad weather kept you from going to Versailles this morning.
- KING                Let the vicious tongues find I am king. I will have no scandal woven about those I choose to love.
- D. QUEEN            It must not so far as love.
- KING                It will go so far as I will.
- D. QUEEN            It is an insult to Henriette.
- KING                It is entirely my own affair.
- D. QUEEN            'Tis said you smiled on Henriette to come closer to her Maid-of-honour.
- KING                Gossip sometimes comes remarkably close to truth.
- D. QUEEN            To insult Henriette is to insult Charles of England.
- KING                Gossip says so, eh! Charles is over fond of money. I pay him well.
- D. QUEEN            The English Ambassador wears black looks.
- KING                Faith, they are like the skies of his native land.
- D. QUEEN            Insult France, if you choose, but not England.
- KING                English bulldogs snarl better than they fight.
- D. QUEEN            England rules the seas. England has an army ready for the field.
- KING                France also has an army.
- D. QUEEN            Un prepared for war. I hear from Nancy of want of discipline. Our troops cry out for arrears of pay.
- KING                I am sending/<sup>the</sup>Chevalier de Lorraine to take the command at Nancy. Henriette suggested him. He is the finest soldier in Europe.
- D. QUEEN            One soldier does not make an army.
- KING                A little leaven to said to leaven the whole. You are fond of priests and priestly words.
- D. QUEEN            Louis, take care ere your folly carries you beyond reason.
- KING                Love is never reasonable.
- D. QUEEN            Wars have grown out of flimsier material.
- KING.                Set into flames by a woman's kiss aswell as a woman's venom.
- D. QUEEN            We are not prepared for war.

- KING I prefer the pleasure of a Court.
- D. QUEEN You cannot close your eyes to the clouds across the Channel.
- KING England! You magnify her strength. Holland is sapping it.
- D. QUEEN You dare not risk testing it.
- KING You call me a coward.
- D. QUEEN Heaven forbid, Louis, my son. I would plead for Edlle. de Montalis.
- KING You are presuming too much.
- QUEEN I am your mother - an Austrian Princess - the widow of a French King.
- KING So be it. If my solicitude considers change of air beneficial to your health I would not hesitate to deprive myself of your motherly advice.
- D. QUEEN Banish me?
- KING I did not use so strong a word. Your health is naturally important to me - a devoted son.
- D. QUEEN I have worked for your welfare - smiled on your amours - sealed scandalous tongues - ruled your kingdoms till you were of age to take your place. You threaten me.
- KING I only threaten those who stand in my way.
- D. QUEEN Once more I appeal to you. Give up la Valliere - appease Henriette. Poor Julie de Montalis! Be merciful to her.
- KING I appease no one. I am merciful when I choose. I am king. My subjects bend to my will. - not I to their foolish fancies.
- D. QUEEN Henriette and Madame de Soissons are friends. They are powerful in combination. Louis, think ere it be too late.
- KING A king is neither too early nor too late.
- D. QUEEN Marie-Therese - your wife - grows jealous.
- KING Parbleu! 'Tis a Spanish legacy.
- D. QUEEN Should it grow beyond jealousy there will be danger across the Spanish frontier. The affair spreads war-clouds southward and westward.
- KING It is a personal matter - not an international affair.
- D. QUEEN I beg you to hid your passion for la Valliere from Marie-Therese. She is in a delicate state of health.
- KING Enough. I am King of France - and King I'll be. I will hear no more. Should you gossip - there are palaces little less than fortresses where the air is beneficial to those jaded by a Paris atmosphere.
- D. QUEEN You dare not banish me.
- KING I dare dispose of those who thwart me. My mother, your cheeks grow pale

- D. QUEEN With anxiety - not only for you, the dearest of my sons, but for France.
- KING 'Tis strange how small France becomes when seen through prison walls.
- D. QUEEN You forget yourself.
- KING Possibly. I am in love.
- D. QUEEN I have heard that tale before. You were young when Madame de Bauvais caught your fancy. It ended by a jest of the Comte de Guiche who was infatuated by Madame's daughter. He told you you had taken an unfair advantage of so loyal a subject as himself by adding to the respect he owed you as a monarch that which he must render to a parent.
- KING Stop. I will hear no more.
- D. QUEEN You love the brilliant Madame de Chatillon - Mademoiselle d'Houdencourt - Madame de Scissons - Henriette. There were others in between - others since.
- KING Old hags who wanted me for the benefits I could bestow. Madlle. de la Valliere seeks no honour.
- D. QUEEN Not now. Later.
- KING Speak but one word against her and you'll go to the Fortresse de Pignerolle. It is monstrous; I, King of France, imprisoned by the mad words of jealous women. I will listen no longer. Remember, it may be as well to remind those who come to you with women's talks, I bear no pity where I hate. I do not listen twice to the laughter of scorn. No, by God! This goes beyond endurance.
- QUEEN Louis, once more I --
- KING Not another word. Since you are a woman and cannot control your tongue I leave you for those who do not weary me with idle tales.
- (Exit LOUIS in anger)
- (DOWAGER QUEEN moves across stage)
- (Enter Molina)
- D. QUEEN Senora Molina.
- MOLINA His Majesty?
- D. QUEEN You seek an audience with the King?
- MOLINA I have an important letter to deliver.
- D. QUEEN (SEES LETTER IN MOLINA'S HAND) Important? I can trust you. From Louise de la Valliere?
- MOLINA No, Madame.
- D. QUEEN From whom? (CATCHES HOLD OF MOLINA) From who is the letter.
- MOLINA I know not.
- D. QUEEN Speak. How comes it into your hands?
- MOLINA It is in truth addressed to Her Majesty. 'Twas given me by a page of the Spanish Ambassador - as if it came secretly from His Majesty of Spain. Yet --

- D. QUEEN                    Yet - you doubt its origin?
- MOLINA                    Yes, Madame. The Ambassador is out of Paris. The Queen is ill with anxiety. There are stories afloat which hurt her deeply. I fear to give the letter to her direct, though it came as if from His Majesty of Spain. I know his writing - and doubt it. See (SHOWS LETTER) The T - the M - are not well done.
- D. QUEEN                    (TAKES LETTER) Senora, it is true; there are evil stories afloat. We must be cautious. You doubt the authenticity of this letter?
- MOLINA                    Yes.
- D. QUEEN                    That is enough. We will read it.
- MOLINA                    Madam!
- D. QUEEN                    Louis is my son. I will read the letter - then judge what is best to be done. Have no fear, Senora. I have ruled France. I understand when letters have a right to be read.
- MOLINA                    I beg of you, Madame, to give me the letter.
- D. QUEEN                    When I have scanned its contents. (OPENS LETTER, READS) "The King is involved in an intrigue. Mdlle. de la Valliere is the object of this unworthy passion. You must decide if you can love your husband in the arms of another." (PAUSE) Mon Dieu! (PAUSE) At last Louis will be forced to give up this insane escapade - the maddest of all his amours. At last he will be forced to listen to me. Senora, no word to the Queen or to anyone at Court. No word. You understand?
- MOLINA                    Yes, Madame.
- D. QUEEN                    I will send the King to you here.
- MOLINA                    The opened letter - how can I excuse it?
- D. QUEEN                    Your wit is equal to such an occasion. Caution, Senora. Silence - to the Queen. It is to save her. Silence. I will go to the Queen. Wait here for the King.
- (Exit DOWAGER QUEEN)
- (Enter Louise.)
- LOUISE                    Is the Queen Mother not here?
- MOLINA                    No.
- LOUISE                    I have a message from the Duchesse d'Orleans.
- MOLINA                    You must not remain here.
- LOUISE                    I must have an answer for the Duchesse.
- MOLINA                    Not from her. You will find the Dowager Queen -
- LOUISE                    Where?
- MOLINA                    Probably in the King's apartment.
- LOUISE                    I dare not go there.
- MOLINA                    You are his friend.
- LOUISE                    Are you against me?
- MOLINA                    No, Mademoiselle. I know what love is. I also know its dangers. Let me advise you to leave the Court - at once - today.
- LOUISE                    Leave the Court? Leave!
- MOLINA                    I speak as a friend.

LOUISE I cannot - I cannot go. You do not understand.  
 MOLINA I speak for your good. Leave the Court - leave Paris.  
 LOUISE Leave Paris?  
 MOLINA His Majesty comes here.  
 LOUISE The King? The King?  
 MOLINA Mon Dieu! Go! Go!

(Takes LOUISE by shoulders, pushes her to door)

Too late! The King's footsteps. Quick! His Majesty must not see you. (Hides LA VALLIERE behind curtains)

(Enter KING, L. Door.)

MOLINA Sire.  
 KING Mademoiselle de la Valliere?  
 MOLINA Sire, 'tis I who seek an audience.  
 KING They told me. Eh, you have a letter.  
 MOLINA To be delivered to your hands.  
 KING You speak in riddles. I would hear plainer words.  
 MOLINA Sire, this morning a page in the dress of the servants of the Spanish Ambassador brought me a letter addressed to Her Majesty - to be given to her secretly.  
 KING Her Majesty? You gave it to the Queen?  
 MOLINA Sire, it is said to be from His Majesty of Spain. I feared it might be bad news. His Majesty of Spain is in delicate health, Sire. I looked at the writing. I mistrust it.  
 KING This has nothing to do with me.  
 MOLINA Sire, I beg you to read it.  
 KING I have no love for prying into my wife's affairs. God knows I've enough of my own.  
 MOLINA Sire, this IS your affair.  
 KING Mine? (LAUGHS) Give it to me. (KING takes letter). The indiscretion be on your head.  
 MOLINA Read it, Sire - read it.  
 (KING reads letter)  
 KING Mon Dieu! This is treachery - treason! Let me get my hands on the assassins. They shall suffer. My God! This jest goes too far. You have shown this letter to no one?  
 MOLINA Only to one who has your welfare at heart.  
 KING Who? Speak! I command you.  
 MOLINA The Queen Mother, Sire. She opened it.  
 KING 'Tis her plot. She loves not Mlle. de la Valliere. I begin to see clearly.  
 MOLINA Sire, this letter comes from a more dangerous quarter.  
 KING Am I blind? Am I a fool's jester?  
 MOLINA No, Sire.  
 KING You have suspicions from whence it comes?

- MOLINA None.
- KING Yet methinks my Court knows more than their King. By God! The perpetrators of this insult will suffer by their heads - some carrions of my bounty, I'll warrant.
- MOLINA Sire!
- KING Silence. I will show who is King of France. And Mlle. de la Valliere is the woman I choose to honour. Am I to ask Paris who I am to love? Beg their leave to kiss a fair cheek? Or dance with a pretty woman?
- MOLINA No, Sire. But —
- KING But - there are no buts. I swear by the Virgin I'll trace this foul treachery. I will find some means. Let me see! Good God! That I should be thwarted by evil-tongued parasites.
- (LOUIS walks up and down stage in anger.)
- Let me get my hands on them. Senora, you must know - you must have some suspicions.
- MOLINA None, Sire.
- KING Someone to unravel this mystery. Who, Senora, who?
- MOLINA Some friend, Sire.
- KING Who is my friend? Faith! It seems a king has more enemies.
- MOLINA It seems to me like a woman's quarrel, Sire.
- KING A woman's? Speak on.
- MOLINA I believe a woman's jealousy is at the root of this matter. It is against a woman.
- KING Well - well! That's not original. You have more to say.
- MOLINA I should seek a man's help - a man who is a friend to many women.
- KING There is wisdom in your words. The man?
- MOLINA A clever one, in whom you have confidence, Sire.
- KING The Marquis des Vardes.
- MOLINA He is a friend - to Madame de Soissons. She is clever. There are few scandals she does not read.
- KING Aye - Aye. Des Vardes - Madame de Soissons. We three will find these damnable anonymous assassins.
- MOLINA The Duchesse d'Orleans has a small dinner party at four of the clock, Sire. You'll find those you seek in her apartment.
- KING At four. (looks at clock) This matter will be sifted to the dogs. I'll show no pity. Mlle. de la Valliere's honour is my affair.

(LOUIS watches curtain tremble)

Who is hidden here? More evil tongues?

(LOUIS draws his sword and pulls curtainside.)

Mlle. de la Valliere!

- LOUISE Forgive me, Sire!
- KING Hiding?
- LOUISE I came, Sire, with a message to the Queen Mother. I was frightened and I hid, Sire.
- KING You came to see my mother - you find me. 'Tis a fair exchange. (TO MOLINA) Remember, no word to the Queen. (SIGNS TO MOLINA, WHO EXITS) (LOUIS TAKES LOUISE'S HANDS) Louise, you heard my words?
- LOUISE Forgive me, Sire. I had no thought of eavesdropping.
- KING 'Tis well you know the plots against you. We will have our revenge.
- LOUISE I seek no revenge.
- KING You have enemies?
- LOUISE Sire, no one is without them.
- KING You have some special enemies?
- LOUISE There are some who mistrust me.
- KING Now is your hour for revenge. Their names?
- LOUISE Do not ask me.
- KING I swear you shall have your triumph.
- LOUISE Sire, I wish no ill of anyone.
- KING Is there not one man, one woman whose insults you bear? Your King commands you -- speak!
- LOUISE Sire, I prefer to bear my insults in silence.
- KING You can whisper their names. I will be discreet. Tell me, Louise. (TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS; SHE PUSHES HIM GENTLY ASIDE)
- LOUISE Sire, for the respect you bear towards me, allow me to remain silent.
- KING Respect! 'Tis a priestly word. I respect you, I swear. I will prove it. There are plots against your honour. I will fight for you. Your triumph will be my reward.
- LOUISE I have only my love to give in return.
- KING 'Tis all I ask. Tonight we meet in the Queen's salon. Louise, you are like the sun to me.
- LOUISE 'Tis you who are called Le Roi Soleil - the Sun King.
- KING Eh! But you have played the Queen of Love.
- LOUISE Your Majesty honours me.
- KING Honour! 'Tis a cold word from your lips.
- LOUISE 'Tis a woman's fortune, Sire.
- KING A worthy one to your beauty.
- LOUISE Sire, I beg your leave to find the Queen Mother.
- KING I, too, have business on hand - pressing business. (KING takes LOUISE in his arms - kisses her)
- Till tonight, my love.
- LOUISE Till tonight, my king.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE II: Apartment of the Duchess d'Orleans.

A large curtained archway back of stage.  
Door R. and L. wings.  
Half an hour after Scene I.

(Louise and Feimmes discovered)

- FEIMMES You are the most envied woman in France.
- LOUISE Envied! The Duchesse will no longer have me near her.
- FEIMMES Jealousy is a cruel enemy.
- LOUISE Half an hour ago I kept silent when a word would have humbled her before the King.
- FEIMMES You are too generous.
- LOUISE (A BELL HEARD) The Duchesse! No, let me go.  
(Exit LOUISE through curtain.)  
(Enter MONTALIS, door L.)
- FEIMMES Julie, you are smiling!
- MONTALIS A smile covers a heavy heart.
- FEIMMES Courage! The Duchess is on your side.
- MONTALIS Courage! I'm afraid.
- FEIMMES They say every cloud has a silver lining. Yours may be golden.  
(Enter LOUISE)
- LOUISE The Duchesse calls me unfaithful - will not have me with her. Julie, Madame asks for you.
- MONTALIS For me?  
(Exit MONTALIS through Curtain.)  
(Knock at door L. LOUISE opens it.  
Enter LORRAINE)
- LOUISE Chevalier de Lorraine!
- LORRAINE Come, my old playmate - tears in your eyes, trembling lips.
- LOUISE Not now I have a friend - so close.
- LORRAINE I warrant those Court hags and fashion plates have opened Artillery fire against you! Put up a brave face. Who is the General? De Soissons? She looks like a bad smell.
- LOUISE She is beautiful.
- LORRAINE I pátrec below her mask of powder and paint. Bah!  
(LORRAINE stands close to LOUISE - he hold her chin on his fingers.)  
(enter HENRIETTE, stands between Curtains)
- LORRAINE They are jealous because the purity of your good nature shines in your face like honest sunlight on a hill above a dark valley.
- HENRIETTE A pretty speech, Chevalier. Who are they to whom you so poetically refer?
- LORRAINE The enemies of my playmate.



- HENRIETTE (COMES FORWARD) You look for enemies in the rooms of one who befriended your playmate when she was poor and like enough to have little sunlight in her life.
- LORRAINE Only in heaven, Madame, are we safe from evil tongues whipped by jealousy.
- HENRIETTE Ma foi! You're a brave man, Chevalier.
- LORRAINE I trust an honest one.
- HENRIETTE Rudeness is some men's idea of honesty.
- LORRAINE I am a soldier, used to bluff commands.
- HENRIETTE You think to command me?
- LORRAINE A soldier bows to the commands of his superiors.
- HENRIETTE Tiens! You sometimes fall into a pretty speech. I have good news for you. (THEY SIT) The King promises you command of the troops at Nancy.
- LORRAINE (kisses HENRIETTE'S hand) I thank you from my heart.
- ( (Enter DE SOISSONS and DES VARDES.  
HENRIETTE rises.)
- HENRIETTE Eh, my dear Madame de Soissons and Monsieur des Varde.
- VARDES Your devoted servants, Madame.
- HENRIETTE Talk not of servitude, Monsieur, where friendship is mistress of the day.
- LORRAINE 'Tis well to call friendship a mistress - feminine in its inconstancy.
- VARDES Women are beautiful, Chevalier. They are ever queens of Courts and rulers of men's hearts.
- LORRAINE Courts know few true friends - or brave hearts.
- HENRIETTE Come, Chevalier, you have no cause for complaint. (Enter DE GUICHE) Monsieur de Guiche - our dinner party is complete.
- LORRAINE In which case, I take my leave. (Kisses HENRIETTE'S hand) I beg one dance tonight.
- HENRIETTE Perhaps more than one, Chevalier.
- (CHEVALIER goes up stage with LOUISE)
- HENRIETTE One moment, Chevalier. (TO LOUISE) Mdle. de la Valliere, in the future I will dispense with your official services which are, under the present circumstances, no longer becoming to one so highly honoured. I will no longer keep you from one who is waiting - one who appreciates the purity and good nature shining in your face - like - like - what was it, Chevalier? Ah! like honest sunlight on a hill above a dark valley.
- LOUISE Madame, I beg of you to let me continue my services,
- HENRIETTE I deprive myself for one whom we all obey.
- LORRAINE Madame, Mdle. has the right to some explanation.
- HENRIETTE Are you, too, in love with the purity of a country girl? Beware of the Le Roi Soleil.
- LORRAINE Madame, you speak light words.

- HENRIETTE They come from a light heart, Chevalier. You will no doubt conduct Mlle. to rooms where she is welcome - as sunshine on a hill, was it not?
- LORRAINE If Mlle. will honour me.
- (Exit VALLIERE and LORRAINE)
- HENRIETTE The Chevalier becomes insufferable. I have a mind to make him lose his command of the troops at Nancy.
- VARDES An idea!
- GUICHE Madame, the Chevalier alone can reconstruct the Army - save France if England should send a challenge.
- HENRIETTE Monsieur, you are ever ready with light words.
- VARDES Eh, Madame, 'tis ever so. Man is but man, and what he most desires he throws awgy.
- HENRIETTE A woman's love is more faithful.
- VARDES The faithful are scorned. Those who would bind up broken wounds are thrust asde.
- HENRIETTE light words!
- VARDES 'TIS not I who have the confidence of the most beautiful woman in France.
- HENRIETTE The heart cannot always be easily read.
- VARDES Nor the tongue speak with words that burn the lips.
- SOISSONS Madame, our plot matures.
- HENRIETTE Eh! What has happened? I am anxious - though truth to say I looked too seriously on the King's behaviour. He is but a man - and Louise a simple fool. What has happened? 'Tis of Julie I am thinking.
- VARDES The letter was given to Senora Molina. It is now in the Queen's hands.
- HENRIETTE Eh! Poor little Julie weeping her heart away. In the Queen's hands - yes - details, details. Poor Julie!
- SOISSONS Molina went directo to Her Majesty's apartments - then to those of the Queen Mother.
- HENRIETTE Good. Good. How fares it with them?
- VARDES I daresay Her Majesty has a violent attack of indigestion.
- HENRIETTE Indigestion!
- VARDES It is a bitter pill to swallow. You look mystified. The Queen has deliberately closed her eyes to the King's amours. It is painful to have them forced open.
- HENRIETTE Her Majesty is not well.
- VARDES A happy family event.
- SOISSONS Ah heir to the throne.
- VARDES A queen's child is but a little pawn in diplomacy - something to juggle with - win some prize.
- HENRIETTE Love!
- VARDES Possible, but not probable.

- HENRIETTE I am impatient to know more.
- VARDES How it fares with the Queen?
- HENRIETTE Yes. How she takes the letter - whether she has read it - what is likely to be her next move. Will she speak to the King? Will she force his hand?
- VARDES Have no fear. The Queen is Spanish - the land of jealousy. Hot blooded, impetuous, quick to strike.
- HENRIETTE (TO GUICHE) Monsieur, go to the rose arbour where the Queen sits at this hour and see how it fares with her. Mlle. de Montalis may be in attendance on Her Majesty.
- GUICHE The whole plot is hateful.
- HENRIETTE As my wishes do not please you, I release you from further interest in my affairs - and from a wearisome attendance on myself. One other thing - I will take the post of Julie's protector.
- GUICHE Madame --
- HENRIETTE Should the dismissal prove distasteful bring me word of the Queen and I'll reconsider my words.
- GUICHE I am always at your command.
- (Exit DE GUICHE)
- HENRIETTE He grows tiresome.
- VARDES He worships a little foible he calls honour. For it he would sacrifice his friends. He must be watched.
- HENRIETTE You fear him?
- VARDES Fear - no! Mistrust - yes! The King is in my hands. He listens to my words. We are like twin brothers. I am the true ruler of France, and France shall know it soon.
- HENRIETTE His Majesty confides in you. You have the right to enter his presence without ceremony.
- VARDES I'm tired of his gossip. He sometimes bores me with his talk of Louise de la Valliere. I see him when the fancy takes me.
- HENRIETTE Bring me word of the King.
- VARDES Now?
- HENRIETTE I am too impatient to wait. Go now. See him - probe him. Do not delay. Can't you see I am impatient?
- VARDES But dinner --
- HENRIETTE It will be your payment. The sooner the news, the sooner the food.
- VARDES I go on winged feet.
- HENRIETTE (Puts hand on DE SOISSONS) A word with you.
- VARDES (AT DOOR) The King!
- HENRIETTE Comes here?
- (Enter KING)
- Your Majesty honours me.
- KING Eh! Honour to whom honour is due! (turns to VARDES)  
'Tis you I seek.

- VARDES Sire, you find me with two dear friends.
- KING I like not the dear friends of other people.
- VARDES In this case, they are faithful servants of your Majesty.
- KING Faithful servants! Eh! I have heard those words quite recently. (TAKES LETTER FROM POCKET) Read that. It comes from a faithful servant. It is monstrous! (VARDES TAKES LETTER) The writer will have no mercy from me. Faithful servant!
- VARDES A letter!
- KING Don't be a parrot, des Vardes; I said a letter to Her Majesty. Can't you see 'tis a letter? By God! The gallows will have work to do. Read it. You're not blind or deaf, are you? Read it, all three of you.
- (ENRIETTE, SOISSONS, VARDES read letter together.)
- VARDES (CLOSES LETTER) Sire - the ravings of a lunatic.
- HENRIETTE Calumny against my Maid-of-honour.
- VARDES Treason against His Majesty.
- KING Treason against the virtue of one who bears a proud name.
- VARDES Virtue is a rare flower, therefore the more precious. (HOLDS OUT LETTER) The letter, Sire!
- KING (TAKES LETTER) Well?
- VARDES 'Tis a monstrous forgery.
- KING The writer? Who wrote it?
- VARDES The writing is strange - yet I think I have seen it, somewhere.
- KING You are well primed in the intrigues of my intriguing Court.
- HENRIETTE Monsieur des Vardes is the confidant of many.
- KING The confidant of many is the friend of none. (TO VARDES) On whom do your suspicions lie?
- VARDES 'Tis no easy task to speak at random.
- KING Come! Come! No fencing with me, or my suspicions may take an awkward turn. Faith! This is a pleasant little party of faithful servants.
- VARDES Sire, the Duchesse de Navailles is careful of the virtues of the young ladies.
- KING (LAUGHS) A barred window - eh?
- VARDES I have heard the tale with many variations.
- KING You think the Duchesse de Navailles wrote the letter?
- VARDES Possibly Mdlle. de Montalis. She likes not Monsieur de la Taine as a husband.
- KING More likely the old hag - the Duchesse.
- VARDES It is strange the Chevalier de Lorraine should come to Court yesterday.
- KING Yesterday!
- VARDES I presume your Majesty received the letter - today?

- KING Take care I do not presume your reasons for accusing Lorraine.
- VARDES I speak as a philosopher. The Chevalier admires a little too openly the beauty we courtiers adore in silence.
- HENRIETTE The Chevalier is hereto beg command of the troops at Nancy.
- KING Come, Madame de Soissons, it is not often you are silent.
- SOISSONS Sire, I -- I was thinking.
- KING Let us hear the result?
- SOISSONS There is Madame de Chatillon, Mlle. de Hardencourt, Madame de Frontenc - they are jealous of your Majesty's favours.
- KING There are others more jealous who call themselves faithful friends.
- SOISSONS Like a wise woman, Sire, I accept the fruits of life.
- KING Get indigestion over those already eaten - eh?
- HENRIETTE One remembers much in dreams of a happy past.
- KING Past dreams form bitter realities. They are apt to make women jealous.
- HENRIETTE Madame de Soissons' heart is too full of gratitude for kind favours to allow jealousy to play with her, Sire. The only joy of many a woman's life is found in remembrance of happier days.
- KING 'Tis well said, Madame. The role of philosopher is a new one for so brilliant a woman as Madame de Soissons.
- SOISSONS My wit, Sire, is ever at your service.
- KING Then discover the writer of this letter. I have my suspicions.
- VARDES If we knew them we might aid Your Majesty.
- KING They might not be pleasant.
- VARDES They would test the loyalty of faithful servants.
- KING Good! I do not see Monsieur de Guiche among my faithful servants.
- HENRIETTE We await him. He is to dine with me.
- KING Maybe a King's presence keeps him away.
- HENRIETTE I warrant his devotion.
- KING You are ever ready to defend him.
- HENRIETTE I am always ready to defend honourable friends.
- KING He might prove more honourable away from Court.
- VARDES You mistrust him, Sire?
- KING Among others.
- HENRIETTE He and you were brought up like brothers. He admires your wit - your diplomacy. He is a devoted courtier.
- KING No man, in the hands of a woman, is devoted to any King. He might be safer away from Court - some provincial appointment.

- VARDES The command of the troops at Nancy.
- KING Command of the troops!
- VARDES A jest, Sire - a passing thought - a gossamer idea.
- KING 'Tis worth considering - the command of my troops.
- HENRIETTE He is a gallant courtier - devoted to his King.
- KING He bears a wound gained in fighting for France.
- HENRIETTE It is unwise, Sire, to place faithful servants where their services are unavailable.
- KING What say you, des Vardes?
- VARDES There is often much wisdom in a jest, Sire.
- HENRIETTE Monsieur des Vardes spoke light words.
- KING They are worth consideration. You are over solicitous for Monsieur de Guiche.
- HENRIETTE He is a friend.
- KING You forget he was in love with Mdlle. de la Valliere.
- HENRIETTE I have heard the same story with Monsieur des Vardes as the unfortunate hero.
- KING Faith! 'Tis true. Des Vardes is over generous. (LAUGHS) Gay dog!
- VARDES 'Tis a courtier's duty to admire beauty, as it is a courtier's duty to retire before the glamour of Le Roi Soleil.
- KING Take care, Monsieur des Vardes. I am in no need for flattery.
- HENRIETTE Sire, you are too wise to trust in feeble words.
- KING We wander from the reason of my visit. Come - you must find the writers of this infamy. (HOLDS UP LETTER) Or my suspicions may take the form of arrest. We will see.
- VARDES Sire - the Duchesse de Navailles is old. She is to be pitied.
- KING You cling to the Duchesse.
- VARDES To her guilt, Sire. I like not her bony person.
- SOISSONS The Duke of Anjou.
- KING My brother! Faith! Madame, you strike high. (LAUGHS)
- VARDES The Duke de Gramont owes some grudge to your Majesty.
- KING No fool like an old fool, eh?
- SOISSONS The Duc de Mazarin speaks against your pleasures, Sire.
- KING The dreamer who sees visions. (LAUGHS) Your wit has humour in it. The dreamer - I think not.
- VARDES The letter is a bad dream, Sire.
- KING It will yet be a nightmare to the writer.
- VARDES The Duchesse de Navailles is a big eater - they are the bad dreamers. She is a great friend of the Queen Mother.
- KING Stop! Now I come to remember - yesterday in the Queen's garden I passed, unseen, you, Henriette, Madame de Soissons, and you, Monsieur, all in earnest conversation. I heard mention of Madame d'Orleans' aid to France.

- VARDES                   And well she deserves it.
- KING                     I find the same three people of the garden herein  
solemn conclave.
- HENRIETTE               Awaiting dinner, Sire, and the arrival of Monsieur  
de Guiche.
- (Enter DE GUICHE)
- KING                     Ah, Monsieur de Guiche, Madame d'Orleans is hungry.
- GUICHE                   I, too, Sire.
- KING                     One piece of news may aid your digestion. I may yet  
see the wisdom of giving you the command of my  
troops at Nancy. We will see!
- HENRIETTE               Sire!
- KING                     It is my will. You will take instant command!
- GUICHE                   I am ready, Sire, to obey.
- HENRIETTE               It is not wise. Monsieur de Lorraine is a soldier -  
Monsieur de Guiche a courtier.
- KING                     Every man lives a double life. We will test our  
friend. If he fails - he knows his reward.
- HENRIETTE               Sire - I beg —
- KING                     I like not beggars. Am I not King of France! My  
will is law. (TO DES VARDES) Tonight we meet in  
the Queen's salon. There I will expect news of this  
dastardly letter. It is in your hands to unravel.  
Should it prove beyond your powers, we will see if  
there is not some provincial post better suited to  
your wits than an idle life at Court. I will not  
detrain you from dining. I too, am empty in the  
stomach.
- (Exit KING)
- (Pause)
- HENRIETTE               A pretty mess you have brought us to.
- VARDES                   An idle jest of mine!
- HENRIETTE               One that will cost you dear. Monsieur de Guiche  
will not go to Nancy.
- VARDES                   His Majesty is apt to change his mind. One word  
from em —
- HENRIETTE               Even so I will tell the truth rather than a friend  
should go into exile.
- VARDES                   To protect you, Madame, I would deprive myself of  
the companionship of a dear friend.
- HENRIETTE               'Tis for a dear friend I deprive myself of the  
company of you, Monsieur des Varde and Madame de  
Soissons at dinner.
- SOISSONS                Madame - I beg you be careful. Should the King hear  
of this folly it will arouse his suspicions.
- HENRIETTE               My friends are more to me than the King's suspicions.
- SOISSONS                The letter has miscarried. We are in a dangerous  
pass. If we do not stick together like leeches,  
no one can foretell the end.

HENRIETTE

As for your friendship - I begin to doubt its sincerity. You, Monsieur des Vardes, boast of your influence with His Majesty. It will be tested in favour of Monsieur de Guiche. Should your good intentions end in yet another jest - it will be a challenge of war. (TO DE GUICHE) Come, Monsieur. We will dine.

(Exit HENRIETTE and DE GUICHE through curtains up stage.)

SOISSONS

It was a fool's trick to send Monsieur de Guiche to Nancy.

VARDES

A jest! I have such a sense of humour.

SOISSONS

Madame will stop at nothing to keep him in Paris. The English have a way of sticking to their word.

VARDES

I will make light love to her.

SOISSONS

Eh! Now I understand. You get rid of de Guiche to clear your way?

VARDES

It is a little game I will play with the Duchesse.

SOISSONS

Tiens! I've heard of your games - rather too often. Parbleu!

(Enter HENRIETTE, who stands between curtains.)

You are in love with the Duchesse?

VARDES

Mon Dieu. That empty-headed butterfly.

SOISSONS

You whisper soft words to her.

VARDES

I make sport of her.

SOISSONS

She is in love with you.

VARDES

I should be very blind not to see that. There are many ready to take your place, Olympe.

SOISSONS

I'll not be pushed aside by Madame -

VARDES

I adore the cleverest woman in France.

SOISSONS

Prove it!

VARDES

I work with you to debase la Valliere. 'Tis your quarrel - not mine. Madame will fall - with her Maid -of-honour.

SOISSONS

Tiens!

VARDES

I will send de Guiche into exile. He will be safer out of Paris till the miscarried letter is forgotten.

SOISSONS

Settling an old quarrel with Monsieur de Guiche.

VARDES

I have drawn the Duchesse into our net.

SOISSONS

To make love to her. Tiens! I am neither blind nor deaf, nor yet a fool.

VARDES

I persuaded the King to court favour with la Valliere by giving the money bags of Julie de Montalis to her cousin, old de la Taine.

SOISSONS

Revenge for a barred window. It was a bold game to play. Should the Duchesse learn it was not la Valliere who persuaded the King to break his word and affianced Mlle. de Montalis to Monsieur de la Taine --



- VARDES Have no fear - a smile - a tender word - a touch of the lips, and Henriette is at my feet - like the King. Faith! 'Tis I who rule France. I am King in all but name, The Court knows it. Soon France shall learn it.
- SOISSONS Monsieur de Guiche -
- VARDES (INTERRUPTS) Chicken-hearted fellow - like all who carry a conscience. Had he been here when we parried suspicions with the King, we would have been lost. De Guiche is a clumsy liar. As to the Duchesse - pouf! I'd be happy to see her banished with de Guiche. Faith! I'll suggest it to His Majesty.
- HENRIETTE (ADVANCES) Your words are ever sweet to the nearest ears.
- VARDES Madame - you play an old role for a woman - the silent listener.
- HENRIETTE But not the silent actor. You forget I am the Duchess d'Orleans - a Stuart Princess of Great Britain - sister-in-law to Louis XIV. A trusted servant of France - a proud Frenchwoman - one who serves her adopted country as she serves her faithful friends.
- VARDES Madame, the brilliancy of your list of honours blind my eyes.
- HENRIETTE No doubt. You who have slandered me, you who came with light words, soft voice, while planning evil plots. You shall have your reward. And you, Mee. de Soissons, in truth the cast-off mistress of the King, came to me with words of friendship - stirred my jealousy. Mon Dieu! I am blind no longer - nor will His Majesty remain with closed eyes. I will show a little mercy - I will be silent till tonight. In the Queen's presence I shall speak.
- VARDES 'Tis a plan worthy of an English princess.
- HENRIETTE An Englishwoman's word is an honourable one. So it was you who plotted against Mdlle. de Montalis! It was a cruel jest.
- (Enter DE GUICHE)
- VARDES It was our friend (POINTS TO DE GUICHE) who wrote the letter.
- HENRIETTE Copied from one in Madame de Soissons' writing - though not exactly in her words. They were too bitter - even for the King. He is well acquainted with Madame's writing.
- SOISSONS You cannot prove your words.
- HENRIETTE (TAKES LETTER FROM DRESS) This will prove enough. I am not such a foolish butterfly as Monsieur des Vardes believes me to be.
- VARDES 'tis to be war.
- HENRIETTE It IS war.
- VARDES Good! I have my cards to play.
- HENRIETTE (HOLDS UP LETTER) I hold the ace of trumps. (VARDES TRIES TO SNATCH LETTER) Eh! Monsieur le Marquis des Vardes, you forget a Frenchman is a courteous gentleman. I play a fair game. Tonight we shall deal card for car. (TO GUICHE) Dinner is already served. (TO SOISSONS) It would be cruel to detain you longer from seeking to satisfy your large appetite.

VARDES

A pleasant dinner! It may be your last in Paris.

HENRIETTE

(Sees fan for which she returned to room, picks it up)  
This fan has opened my eyes. (EXIT SOISSONS AND V  
VARDES) Now we can dine. I have sent word for  
Julie to join us.

(CURTAIN - as they go up stage)

ACT III

SCENE: A room in the Queen's Apartments.

The Court is dancing. MON. DE LA TAINE is drunk and making a fool of himself. Dancing ceases. Court moves off.)

(SOISSONS and DES VARDES left alone.)

- SOISSONS (Carefully looks to see no one is listening) Quick, tell me of your interview with the King?
- VARDES De Guiche takes instant command of the troops at Nancy.
- SOISSONS His Majesty has signed the order?
- VARDES Before my eyes.
- SOISSONS Of his own accord?
- VARDES I hinted there are stories afloat concerning the Duchesse and de Guiche which were not fitting to the Duchesse's position as His Majesty's sister-in-law.
- SOISSONS Good.
- VARDES I hinted at a plot secretly to marry Mdle. de Montalis to De Guiche - in spite of the King's word.
- SOISSONS He has no patience with intrigues in which he is not chief plotter.
- VARDES I hinted it would be politic to give the impudent courtier command of the troops. To do so would lend a signal favour to his exile.
- SOISSONS 'Tis a slap in the face to Henriette. She is foiled in gaining the command for her ally the Chevalier de Lorraine. She loses her lover, who she pretends magnanimously to give to Julie de Montalis.
- VARDES Her pose is over generous.
- SOISSONS I have a card to pay - her honour - should she dare to speak of the letter. Mon Dieu! Tonight I'll have my long cherished reward - see her debased, exiled.
- VARDES Have no fear. I hold the King's ear. I have set the King's suspicions working. I rule France.
- SOISSONS Hush! Someone comes. Let us return to the card room. We must be cautious tonight.
- (Exit SOISSONS and VARDES as some of COURT enters. After a pause enter DE GUICHE and MDLE. FIEMMES.)
- GUICHE Faith! 'Tis no favour. An enemy has sent me to exile.
- FIEMMES You have not far to seek him.
- GUICHE You know him?
- FIEMMES One knows more than one dare say. Julie will tell you.
- GUICHE You speak no light words.
- FIEMMES Think of one who is vastly in the King's confidence. You will know him by the way he plumes his feathers.
- GUICHE I know the traitor.

(Enter DUCHESSE DE NAVAILLES, goes to DE GUICHE. Exit FIEMMES.)

- NAVAILLES                    Congratulations on your high appointment. 'Tis a signal mark of favour His Majesty has shown. I must add it is a surprise - this new role of yours - a soldier.
- GUICHE                        I thank you, Duchesse de Navailles. I would the King's favours were more suitable bestowed.
- NAVAILLES                    Your modesty becomes you, Monsieur de Guiche.  
(Enter DUC DE MAZARIN)  
The Duc de Mazarin would congratulate you.
- MAZARIN                      My congratulations on your appointment.  
(Enter DE SOISSONS and DES VARDES)
- SOISSONS                     My congratulations follow those of the Duc de Mazarin.
- VARDES                        (TO GUICHE) At last the King smiles with favour on your military prowess. 'Tis a pity the wounds you received fighting for France's honour should not have been rewarded long ago.
- GUICHE                        Monsieur le Marquis des Varde, 'tis to you I owe my favour with His Majesty.
- VARDES                        If any idle words of mine, Monsieur le Comte de Guiche, should have added to His Majesty's trust in your military prowess, 'tis I who am honoured. The King is wont to listen to my advice. He leans on my support.
- SOISSONS                     You will add lustre to your fame as Commander of the troops at Nancy.
- GUICHE                        I trust I shall do my duty.
- SOISSONS                     Come, monsieur, modesty is well in a virgin maid - to a soldier it is an ill-fitting coat.  
(Enter LORRAINE)
- LORRAINE                     My congratulations. (SHAKES GUICHE'S HAND) I would I were in your shoes.
- GUICHE                        They would fit you better than me.
- VARDES                        Courage, monsieur.  
(GUICHE turns his back on VARDES)  
Shall I inform His Majesty that his favours are not well bestowed on the noble Comte de Guiche? Are you afraid of the sound of guns? (LAUGHS AS HE MOVES ABOUT WITH DE SOISSONS).
- LORRAINE                     I was given the command today. Tonight my appointment is cancelled. 'Tis a bitter pill to swallow.  
(Enter HENRIETTE. She comes to DE GUICHE)
- HENRIETTE                    This news is true? Your appointment is confirmed by His Majesty's signature?
- GUICHE                        An hour ago.
- HENRIETTE                    (Looks round COURT, sees DES VARDES) Eh! I see a tell-tale face that speaks volumes. The Duchesse d'Orleans has yet a word to speak.
- VARDES                        His Majesty is always happy in the company of his beautiful sister-in-law.

- HENRIETTE For once, Monsieur le Marquis, your words savour of truth.
- VARDES You are a severe judge, Madame.
- HENRIETTE I have not yet passed sentence.
- VARDES I trust it will be as light as your heart.
- HENRIETTE Have no fear, monsieur, it will at least savour of justice.
- VARDES The case may be settled out of court.
- HENRIETTE Not without the chief witness.
- VARDES Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans?
- HENRIETTE And a letter. It was a little unwise of Madame de Soissons to write it herself. His Majesty was once well acquainted with her handwriting. I swear it was no easy matter to read her amorous epistles.
- VARDES You would not dare show the letter.
- HENRIETTE I have no fear.
- VARDES Nor I.
- HENRIETTE 'Tis well said. You will be put to the test. Ah! Dear Madame de Soissons, I did not see you. Yet methinks you were wont to shine in our midst with a blinding lustre.
- SOISSONS Madame, it may be your eyes grow somewhat dim. Is it age?
- HENRIETTE My eyes are never too dim to welcome friends, or to discover enemies. Her Majesty asked me if the clever witty Madame de Soissons was not among her guests. It seems you have not yet made your curtsy. Monsieur des Vardes would, no doubt, conduct you to Her Majesty. He is in such favour with the King. (HENRIETTE curtsies) We will meet later.
- (Exit VARDES AND SOISSONS.  
HENRIETTE is alone with DE GUICHE.)
- HENRIETTE It is war to the knife with that upstart Italian woman.
- GUICHE I beg of you not to risk too much for me.
- HENRIETTE My heart would answer you were we free to speak without restraint.
- GUICHE The King's favour means banishment - exile.
- HENRIETTE You have not yet departed.
- GUICHE I go at midnight.
- HENRIETTE So soon?
- GUICHE 'Tis His Majesty's command.
- HENRIETTE Half past eleven. Only half an hour. I must speak to the King - speak to him alone.
- GUICHE Caution. Our enemies have scored. Des Vardes is trusted by the King. He has so far held his own. The game is up for me.
- HENRIETTE Not till I have played the trump card. Am I, an English Princess, to be vanquished by the Masarin woman? A parvenue Italian, living on the money plundered by her uncle, the late Cardinal? Never!
- GUICHE There seems no redress.
- HENRIETTE There must be. There shall be. I swear by my oath you will not command the troops at Nancy.
- GUICHE My orders are already signed.

- HENRIETTE All the more reason you should keep close to the King. Show gratitude for his favour. Shower compliments on the Roi Soleil. Boast of your appointment. Accept - nay - demand - the congratulations of the Court.
- GUICHE 'Tis no easy matter. My very soul cries out in solitude.
- HENRIETTE Let your tongue cry louder.
- GUICHE It is goodbye to Julie.
- HENRIETTE I swear you will not leave Paris tonight. The Chevalier deLorraine will go in your stead. He alone can save France from the clouds of war.
- (Enter JULIE DE MONTALIS)
- MONTALIS Armand, is it true you leave Paris tonight?
- GUICHE The King's command.
- MONTALIS No, no! I will plead with His Majesty. I love you.
- GUICHE I have no words to answer you. I love you - Love you, my Julie.
- MONTALIS If you leave Court they'll force me to marry Monsieur de la Faine. (TO HENRIETTE) Madam, save me - save me! Let me, on my knees, beg of the King permission to leave Paris and follow the man I love. Oh, Madame - Madame - I beg of you to plead for me. (JULIE WEEPS) I cannot live without Armand.
- HENRIETTE Julie. (TAKES MONTALIS IN HER ARMS) Be brave. Trust me.
- MONTALIS I will not marry anyone but Armand. I would rather kill myself. Mon Dieu! Kill myself!
- HENRIETTE July, we have a difficult game to play tonight - requiring great caution. Drive back your tears.
- MONTALIS They are stronger than I am.
- HENRIETTE Draw forth your merry laughter.
- MONTALIS My tears drown my laughter.
- HENRIETTE Julie, you are prepared to fight for the man you love?
- MONTALIS I would die for him.
- HENRIETTE 'Tis easier to laugh than to die.
- MONTALIS 'Tis easier to die than to live without love.
- HENRIETTE Kings listen to light words; to weeping faces they look not twice. It is for your happiness I speak. Look at me - smile. It is for Armand you are fighting. For him be brave. That is better. (TO GUICHE) You have your role to play. Go to the King. There is no time for hesitation.
- (GUICHE goes up stage)
- MONTALIS Armand!
- HENRIETTE (Takes her in her arms) Not now, child. There must be no scenes in the Queen's apartments.
- (Signs to GUICHE to exit. HENRIETTE takes MONTALIS to sofa. She is weeping.)
- HENRIETTE Courage, Julie, courage. I know what it is to love - to have one's love torn to shreds. I am thinking what to do - to do. It is a difficult moment - full of danger. One false move and all will be lost.
- MONTALIS Life is cruel.

- HENRIETTE Julie, I was once in love - for my love I gave him - gave him to another. I must think of some plan. Mon Dieu! I see no way. There must be a way. (ENTER MARECHAL DE GRAMMONT) Hush, Juliet!
- GRAMMONT Madame.
- HENRIETTE (RISES) Marechal de Grammont.
- GRAMMONT What is this canard about my son?
- HENRIETTE His Majesty honours him with the command of the troops at Nancy. Monsieur de Guich receives the congratulations of the whole Court. The King's favour is not lightly won.
- GRAMMONT 'Tis no favour. 'Tis exile. You start, Madame?
- HENRIETTE You used an ugly word.
- GRAMMONT My son is no soldier.
- HENRIETTE He bears an honourable wound on his arm.
- GRAMMONT He is, thank God, no coward.
- HENRIETTE He is the best friend one woman ever had.
- GRAMMONT He is no commander.
- HENRIETTE He rules two women's hearts.
- GRAMMONT We all try that game. 'Tis easier than to command an army of raw soldiers crying out for arrears of pay - for food.
- HENRIETTE Not all succeed at subduing a proud woman.
- GRAMMONT I have come to you to know the truth. Who is my son's enemy?
- HENRIETTE For gaining the King's favour?
- GRAMMONT Banishment. 'Tis a woman who has done it?
- HENRIETTE Yes, Marechal, 'tis a woman against a woman.
- GRAMMONT Jealousy?
- HENRIETTE Against one who loves your son.
- GRAMMONT My son has played her false?
- HENRIETTE Your son dares fight a woman's battle - that is all.
- GRAMMONT He was always susceptible to a woman's beauty!
- HENRIETTE This time it goes deeper - to the heart.
- GRAMMONT At Nancy my son will be disgraced - ruined. He is no soldier.
- HENRIETTE He would do his duty.
- GRAMMONT Duty! Do you think duty alone makes a man a commander of men? Over France there hover the clouds of war. The King is anxious to take the field. For the honour of France, save my son.
- HENRIETTE Not only for France, Marechal, but for a woman's love, Monsieur de Guiche will not command the troops at Nancy.
- GRAMMONT Your words are light.
- HENRIETTE They are the words of a woman who knows what sacrifice means.
- GRAMMONT You will save my son?
- HENRIETTE For a woman, Marechal.
- GRAMMONT They are not often so generous to each other.
- HENRIETTE Sometimes a woman will give up all to secure a man's happiness.
- GRAMMONT Her lover.

- HENRIETTE 'Tis sometimes a deep friendship, Marechal.
- GRAMMONT You - you love my son?
- HENRIETTE There are many forms of love - all roses are not named "La France."
- GRAMMONT The most beautiful shall in future be called "Henriette".
- HENRIETTE A pretty compliment, Marechal.
- GRAMMONT Let it pass. You promise me - to save my son's honour?
- HENRIETTE I promise, Marechal. I am in full command of this affair. I issue my orders. They are to be obeyed.
- GRAMMONT They shall be obeyed. I await my orders.
- HENRIETTE Seek out the King. Pour out your gratitude for his trust in your son. Sing your son's praises - boast of his wounds - of his power to lead men. Let there be no suspicions of mistrust, of disfavour. We must fight with prepared weapons. It is a risky game. The issue hangs in the balance. You understand?
- GRAMMONT I understand and obey.
- HENRIETTE You will find me in the Queen's circle. Follow me - but not at once.
- GRAMMONT Were I but younger, Madame, I would seek to bask in the sunshine of your smiles.
- HENRIETTE At this Court there can be but one sun - le Roi Soleil. Come with me, Julie.

(Exit HENRIETTE with MONTALIS)

A (A sound of music off; one of two couples dance across back of stage. Enter GUICHE and LORRAINE)

- GUICHE Father, you have heard the news?
- GRAMMONT Your Majesty does you great honour.
- GUICHE Banishment.
- GRAMMONT You will show your King's confidence is not misplaced. You will prove you are a worthy son of the house of Grammont. It shelters no cowards.
- GUICHE But, father, I am no soldier.
- (Enter VARDES, MONTALIS AND PIEMMES)
- LORRAINE Marechal, 'tis hard not to have one's ambitions satisfied. Mine is to command the troops at Nancy. I already sicken at the vapid pleasures of the Court. I long for arms - war - the clash of horses' hoofs, the rough shouts of soldiers' songs, the long day's march, the nights on the battlefield praying for victory on the morrow. That is the life for me - not the sickly sentimental existence of court sycophants - men who love fashion plates, soft-tongues, soft-bellied - ready for a woman's smile, afraid of the point of a sword.
- VARDES A vastly fine speech, Chevalier, yet methinks a lady's lips are not so distasteful to a soldier like yourself.
- LORRAINE I would be no soldier, monsieur, if I held no woman's portrait close to my heart.
- VARDES Who is the fortunate lady?



- LORRAINE            Among such beauty it would be invidious to mention names.
- VARDES              May be your lady fair ranks too high for a mere soldier's ambition.
- LORRAINE            My father bears a proud name even beyond the realms of France.
- VARDES              'Tis well to hide the identity of your lady behind fair words. You are afraid - so like a soldier - bluff words - bluff - bluff.
- LORRAINE            Eh! (LOOKS ROUND COURT) I see one lady whose beauty is praised in many sonnets - Mlle. de Piennes!
- VARDES              Maid of honour to Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans. You go close to the lady of your heart. As a soldier I wonder you had not the courage to address your vows to your mistress.
- LORRAINE            (DRAWS SWORD) This is an insult I will not forgive.
- VARDES              A soldier's bluff.
- LORRAINE            A woman's honour is no bluff. Draw your sword if you are no coward.
- VARDES              Take care!
- (Enter QUEEN and HENRIETTE back of stage.)
- LORRAINE            A soldier listens to no insult to a lady.
- VARDES              (LAUGHS) 'Twas a jest.
- LORRAINE            Needing reparation. Draw your sword.
- VARDES              Not in the Queen's salon.
- LORRAINE            Instantly! (THROWS GLOVE IN HIS FACE) Coward!
- VARDES              I am no coward.
- (Draws his sword - they fight.  
Enter KING with LA VALLIERE and Court.)
- KING                Gentlemen! Gentlemen! This is too much. In the Queen's presence. (FIGHT CEASES) The cause of the quarrel?
- LORRAINE            A lady, Sire.
- KING                No lady can excuse such rashness.
- (Enter DE SOISSONS and more of COURT.)
- KING                (TO VARDES) You, monsieur, are silent as to the cause of this quarrel.
- VARDES              I beg your indulgence, Sire.
- KING                You overstep yourself. I have noticed and have heard whispers of your confidence in your friendship with a King. It is a little overdone, Monsieur le Marquis des Vardes.
- VARDES              Sire!
- KING                (TO LORRAINE) 'Tis well your hot blood is not to command my troops. You are under arrest. And you, Monsieur des Vardes, take care you do not pay an extended visit to the Fortress of Pignerolle.
- HENRIETTE           Sire, it is my duty to such a gallant officer as the Chevalier de Lorraine to inform you he fought for my honour. It was Monsieur des Vardes who slandered me.
- KING                (TO VARDES) Is this true? You are silent. (TO LORRAINE) Speak. Your words are blunt, but they are usually to be trusted. Speak. Your King commands you. Speak!

- LORRAINE Your Majesty must forgive my silence.
- KING We shall see.
- HENRIETTE Sire, Monsieur de Guiche, to whom you have shown such favour, tells me Monsieur le Marquis des Vardes had the effrontery to call me the mistress of the Chevalier de Lorraine.
- KING Insult you? (TO VARDES) By my oath, you take great liberties with your friendship with a king. The Bastille would cool such an ardent friendship.
- VARDES Sire, I had reason for my words.
- KING I may have reasons - strong reasons - for sending you from Court.
- SOISSONS The Bastille, Sire, is an indignity to one who has served you as faithfully as Monsieur des Vardes.
- KING We shall see. You plead for him?
- SOISSONS Sire, I plead for justice.
- KING In which case you will join him.
- SOISSONS Sire, 'tis an ill-timed jest.
- KING 'Tis no jest.
- SOISSONS Then 'tis done at the instigation of one whose smile is tender - yet her heart works evil plots against you Majesty.
- KING I like not riddles. Of whom do you speak?
- SOISSONS Madame the Duchesse d'Orleans.
- KING (TO HENRIETTE) You hear these accusations! By my oath, it seems these dancing rooms are to be turned into Courts of Injustice to settle jealous women's quarrels.
- HENRIETTE 'Tis not my wish, Sire. Since Madame de Soissons has accused me, I have the right to ask for the justice of a defence. I am not surprised to find myself the victim of her malice when those most dear to you, Sire, cannot escape.
- KING Parbleu! Will you women always talk in riddles?
- HENRIETTE I will be bolder. There was an occasion when Mlle. de la Valliere unwittingly took precedence over the wife of Monsieur le President.
- KING. You make scandal out of a trivial incident.
- HENRIETTE Not I, Sire. Madame de Soissons remarked at the time to the Duchesse de Vantadour, and afterwards to me. She begins to repeat herself. Age, Sire. We must be lenient.
- KING Keep closer to your story.
- HENRIETTE Madame de Soissons, Sire --
- KING Well, what did she say?
- HENRIETTE She was aware Mlle. de la Valliere was slightly lame but she never before knew she was also blind.
- KING By my oath, I swear I'll have no more of this. Mlle. de la Valliere's name seems on every lip.
- HENRIETTE Aye, Sire, that is just what chokes Madame de Soissons' parched throat.

- KING I'll cure it. You, Madame de Soissons, will journey to some country villa - and remain till your throat is less parched.
- SOISSONS Sire, it is an unjust sentence. It is Madame who should go. She traffics in intrigue against you. She would secretly marry Mademoiselle de Montalis to Monsieur de Guiche - to trick you, Sire.
- KING Enough. You are beside yourself. I have tasted of your jealous anger. Take care you do not go to the Bastille.
- SOISSONS I demand the right to speak. Then send me to Pignerolle or the Bastille. You, Sire, have sacrificed me more than once - and this time for a mere nobody - a country girl - Louise de la Valliere.
- KING Stop!
- SOISSONS When I have finished, Sire. Two queens who ought to have interceded for me have been silent. But my words are specially against Madame d'Orleans. She has openly declared she would wreck me - have vengeance for some jealous spite - I know not what. I have a word against the Chevalier de Lorraine, and Monsieur de Guiche, whose insults I have long suffered in silence. The Duchesse de Navailles I have a word against, and Mlle. de Montalis, spreading discord by her evil tongue. Your Majesty does not escape - Mlle. de Piennes and Senora Molina --
- KING Silence!
- SOISSONS There is one more word, Sire. I will speak.
- KING Not one. Go! Leave this Court. You are beside yourself. Am I, King of France, to be taunted by a mad woman?
- (LOUIS moves up stage)
- SOISSONS I would speak about a letter, Sire - a Spanish letter.
- KING Eh! (STOPS) You have found the writer?
- SOISSONS Sire, the Comte de Guiche.
- KING Your proof?
- HENRIETTE She has none.
- SOISSONS Madame cannot deny I speak the truth.
- KING You will yet go too far.
- SOISSONS So far that Madame may share my exile.
- KING 'Twould be a good jest to send you both to the same chateau.
- HENRIETTE Aye, Sire, 'twould please Madame de Soissons vastly.
- KING And you?
- HENRIETTE Madame de Soissons' wit is so famous, it would wile away the hours. I should become well primed in the scandals of her friends.
- KING The letter - it was written by Monsieur de Guiche?
- HENRIETTE Copied, Sire, from one written by Madame de Soissons. Monsieur de Guiche, Sire, like myself, was captured by evil words, unjust accusations. He, Sire, is in love. I, Sire, was jealous of Mlle. de la Valliere. I admit it. It was not for her favour with your Majesty, I was poisoned against her by lies.
- KING We will leave Mlle. de la Valliere out of this matter.

- HENRIETTE Impossible. She made it. Sire, Madame de Soissons deceived me. I am alone responsible for Monsieur de Guiche consenting to write the letter. I alone will bear the punishment.
- SOISSONS Your Majesty hears confession.
- HENRIETTE His Majesty is a just judge.
- KING And delivers sentence. You will join Madame de Soissons in the country.
- HENRIETTE Sire --
- KING No more.
- HENRIETTE This letter, Sire (SHOW LETTER) You know the writing. 'Tis, by my faith, a dainty fly scratch.
- KING (TAKES LETTER, LOOKS AT IT) By my oath, 'tis stronger than the letter that fell into my hands. The Bastille --
- HENRIETTE For Madame de Soissons?
- KING For you both.
- HENRIETTE Sire, I have served France. I have placed trusted servants at the Court of my brother Charles of England. I have aided your Majesty in diplomatic relations between two powerful countries. To insult an English princess will not be overlooked at a time when it wants but a match to set a flame to the already strained relationships with the Court of St. James. I do not plead your indulgence. I merely state facts, Sire, that cannot, dare not be overlooked. The risk is too great.
- KING 'Tis I who am judge of the risk.
- HENRIETTE Madame de Soissons' plot was against me. I was blind in my foolishness. I see clearly now. She and Monsieur des Vardes told me it was Mlle. de la Valliere who forced you to give the hand of Mlle. de Montalis to Monsieur de la Taine. I bore my own insults, Sire, but to break the happiness of a sweet and merry girl, and make bitter the life of an honourable man was beyond my endurance. They told me if we removed Mlle. de la Valliere from Court you would consent to the marriage of Mlle. de Montalis to the man she loves. Monsieur le Marquis des Vardes boasted you were but wax in his hands. I was a foolish woman, Sire. I believed their words. I have such love for Mlle. de Montalis. We are such of an age. It was a chance I overheard Mlle. de la Valliere has no hand in the plot. And from her own lips I later heard she wishes her friend Mlle. de Montalis to marry Monsieur de Guiche.
- KING (IN ANGER) Plots against me -- against me!
- SOISSONS Sire --
- KING (TO LOUISE) Since these plotters are your enemies, you will be their judge.
- LOUISE Sire, I have no bitterness towards anyone.
- KING Mon Dieu! Hasn't the Court taught you the sweetness of revenge?
- LOUISE My heart, Sire, is too full of happiness to wish sorrow to anyone.
- KING You would let these scandal-mongers go free?

- LOUISE                   Sire —
- KING                    Shall it be the Bastille for all three?
- LOUISE                   I would crave your Majesty's indulgence. Madame d'Orleans has been a friend to me.
- KING                    You refuse to send Madame to Pignerolle?
- LOUISE                   Sire, it is true Madame has served France — for her services to my country, the country I love, I would ask for your indulgence.
- KING                    I warrant she has made it hot for you.
- LOUISE                   I was unskilful in many ways, Sire.
- KING                    You forgive her?
- LOUISE                   I have nothing to forgive. Indeed I owe Madame my thanks for all my present happiness. It would show ingratitude not to intercede for her.
- KING                    You wish her to remain in Paris?
- LOUISE                   Yes, Sire.
- KING                    Your wishes are my commands. (MURMURS FROM COURT)  
Hush! There are two other culprits — Madame de Soissons and Monsieur le Marquis des Vardes — what of them?
- LOUISE                   You, Sire, have granted me one favour.
- HENRIETTE               It would be ungrateful for Mademoiselle immediately to ask another.
- KING                    Shall it be the Bastille?
- LOUISE                   Be merciful, Sire. One must not forget old friendships.
- KING                    Friendships that are abused?
- LOUISE                   Sire, one cannot forget kind deeds.
- KING                    This time I shall be merciful — for a merciful judge. Let the traitors show you their gratitude. We shall see. They will take a little country air beyond fifty leagues of Paris.
- MAZARIN                 Sire!
- KING                    You would plead for your cousin against my sister-in-law? More visions, Monsieur le duc de Mazarin?
- MAZARIN                 Sire, St. Guinevere appeared to me last night.
- KING                    Eh!
- MAZARIN                 She is much offended by your Majesty's conduct and has informed me if you do not reform your morals the greatest misfortune will befall France.
- KING                    And I, Monsieur le duc, have been warned that the late Cardinal, your uncle, plundered my people and that it is time to make his heirs disgorge their booty. Remember that, and be persuaded, next time you permit yourself to offer me unsolicited advice, I shall act on the mysterious information I have received.

(MONSIEUR DE LA TAINÉ is in a drunken sleep in a corner.)

- HENRIETTE               The command of the troops at Nancy?

- KING It is in the hands of the Chevalier de Lorraine.
- HENRIETTE There is one other matter, Sire, which waits your sentence.
- (HENRIETTE takes hand of MONTALIS and leads her to KING.)
- HENRIETTE Mlle. de Montalis has sung a merry song at Court. Lately that song has changed to tears. Sire, you have the power once more to cause the song to return.
- KING Eh! Mademoiselle, one lover is asleep. Faith! 'Tis a pretty way to court an heiress.
- HENRIETTE The other lover, Sire, is too busy listening to a beating heart to allow sleep to interfere - save when it brings dreams of a beloved face.
- KING 'Tis well said. Monsieur de Guiche, what say you? The hour grows late.
- GUICHE Should I give freedom to my tongue, Sire, the hour would grow later.
- D. QUEEN Louis, youth and age are ill mates.
- KING 'Tis well said. Monsieur de la Taine is cousin to Mademoiselle de la Valliere. It is for her to decide.
- LOUISE I would see my friend happy.
- KING Good, It will be a brilliant wedding. I will see to that. The hour grows on to midnight. (TO VARDES AND SOISSONS) There is time to pass the gates of Paris. Should they be closed, the doors of the Bastille are still open.
- (LOUIS takes QUEEN'S hand, Exit with COURT.)
- (HENRIETTE, DE GUICHE, VARDES AND SOISSONS left on stage.)
- HENRIETTE I trust, Madam, the country will bring the bloom of youth to your cheeks.
- SOISSONS Traitor!
- HENRIETTE Solitary walks, Madam, will give you time to remember I am a princess who plays her cards honestly. Good-night. You have just time to be out of Paris by midnight.
- (SOISSONS swoons in DES VARDES' arms/  
HENRIETTE leads MONTALIS to DE GUICHE)
- I have kept my promise.
- (GUICHE and MONTALIS steal off stage.)
- HENRIETTE (TO SOISSONS) Goodnight. A pleasant journey. I am told it is raining hard.

CURTAIN.